

MINNIE FISHER CUNNINGHAM

by

Glenn K. Polan

A THESIS

Approved:

Committee

Approved: _____

Dean of the Graduate School

308822

MINNIE FISHER CUNNINGHAM

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
Sam Houston State College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by

Glenn K. Polan

Huntsville, Texas

August, 1968

ABSTRACT

Polan, Glenn K., Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Master of Arts (History), August, 1968, Sam Houston State College, Huntsville, Texas. 102 pp.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the life and work of Minnie Fisher Cunningham of New Waverly, Texas. Special consideration was given to a brief biography of her life, her activities in the woman suffrage movement, and her senatorial and gubernatorial races.

Methods

The methods used to obtain data in this study were interviews and conversations with Mrs. Cunningham's family and friends, the examination of books and papers in various libraries to determine what information had been published on Mrs. Cunningham, and the careful inspection and use of the Cunningham Papers.

Findings

The evidence presented in this work indicates the following conclusions:

1. The work of Mrs. Cunningham in the woman suffrage movement, both on the state and national levels, was invaluable in gaining voting rights for women.

2. She was a pioneer in women's participation in state and national politics.

3. As a political activist, Mrs. Cunningham gave direction to the progressives and determined opposition to the conservatives.

4. For Mrs. Cunningham, long-range social and political progress was more important than winning immediate victories in those areas.

Approved:


 Supervising Professor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	9
III. WOMAN SUFFRAGE	28
IV. THE 1920'S AND THE SENATE CAMPAIGN	53
V. THE GOVERNOR'S RACE: 1944	76
VI. CONCLUSION	96
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	99
VITA	102

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent political battles, particularly among the Democrats in Texas, have lacked the zest and the intense desire to raise up real and meaningful issues and to pursue them to their ultimate goals. One has reason to believe that this loss of enthusiasm has been engendered by the lack of personal dedication to the point of personal sacrifice by those persons who are involved in politics.

Causes, issues, and dreams seem to have fallen prey to the pragmatist approach which demands, perhaps rightly so, that today's politician must be perceptive to voter concerns, to political machines, and to financial support without which no political campaign can succeed. Perhaps there are exceptions, but the number is infinitesimal.

This assessment is too simplistic and too harsh, for this writer knows that there have always been political opportunists in the past who have used any means possible to gain personal or collective ends. He also knows that there have been persons who have championed just causes and who have sought to improve society without counting the personal cost to themselves.

It is more difficult, however, to be perceptive enough to make a choice and even to make judgments about

those persons who do make personal sacrifices while they live in and make history. The Now is simply too close. One must have the correct distance of perspective, and this is possible only when the ingredient of time is added. That is why the human race can look backward through time and events and discover that the retrospective view provides the clearest focus even with its astigmatism of faulty reporting, subjective interpretation, and unconscious nostalgia.

This thesis is a study of the life and work of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham of New Waverly, Texas, and will include a biographical sketch of her life and an examination of her efforts at social reform and some of her political involvements.

The life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham reached into the lives of thousands of people, for who she was and what she contributed to society in general are still being measured. The irony of her life is that only a relatively small number of persons remember her or realize her effectiveness in changing social and political patterns both on the state and national level.

A student of Texas history or one of her co-workers who still lives would never minimize the wealth of spirit and the vitality of character which Mrs. Cunningham brought to our country. Yet the general public knows little about

Minnie Fisher Cunningham. This is unfortunate, for all of us are heirs of this heroic woman who, for over fifty years, helped to shape the destiny of a state and of a nation.

She had the admirable quality of sensing human need and then dedicating herself to alleviating that need. She was decisive in choosing an ideal which she believed to be right and just and then relentlessly pursuing it. Mrs. Cunningham knew both Presidents and field hands and held them with equal respect---if they so warranted her respect. She was humble, proud, witty, sarcastic if necessary. She never faltered in her desire to render service even in her old age and in poor health. This is borne out in a letter written by the late President John F. Kennedy to Mrs. Cunningham, who was then in her seventy-ninth year:

Dear Mrs. Cunningham:

Now that our campaign has been brought to a successful conclusion, I want to thank you for your good work with the Citizens for Kennedy and Johnson.

I am grateful for your contribution to our victory. We now have the opportunity of continuing to work together for our country's welfare during the next four years. Please accept my personal gratitude for your help.

Sincerely yours,
/s/John F. Kennedy¹

¹John F. Kennedy to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, January 19, 1961.

The life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, who was known to her friends as Minnie Fish, was too full and too rich for an exhaustive study or even a description of her most meaningful work. It is necessary, therefore, to limit this thesis to those events, issues, and ideals which seem to best represent her life.

The reader must have some sense of an overview of the life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham in order to understand the depth of her character. There seems to have been an impelling force in her personality makeup which gave her direction and motivation. One senses that Mrs. Cunningham, who was of a somewhat timid nature early in her public career, acquired the art of knowing where the important political and social issues lay waiting to be cultivated. She set about to get those issues before the eye of the public, particularly the common man. She once wrote:

I believe in the dignity of man--the common man. Just as the old Negro spiritual shouted, "All God's chillun got shoes," in the days when shoes were scarce so I would shout, "All God's chillun got dignity," the arrogant lords of General Motors notwithstanding.²

² Memorial Tribute to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham:
A Great American, A Report Prepared by the Texas Democratic
Women's State Committee, no date of publication or page
number listed.

Therefore a biographical sketch of the life of this woman is necessary to show with some clarity the dynamics of a person who had the vision and the insight to believe that political, social and civic progress was more than human luxury; it was obligatory.

The reader has often heard the statement that a man was born before his time. By this, of course, is meant that a man is sensitive enough to recognize in the present the needs of men that have little opportunity of being fulfilled until later in history. Minnie Fisher Cunningham was a woman born before her time, and in the most unlikely place. The date of her birth, 1882, and the place of her birth, New Waverly, located in deep East Texas, would not normally be so juxtaposed to produce a person with ideas and convictions which have been characterized by many as radical or even revolutionary. In fact, her ideas and convictions should be defined as progressive rather than radical.

As one examines the background of Mrs. Cunningham--her family, her education, her marriage--reasons why she was the person she was came to the surface. Chapter II, therefore, will contain a biographical statement about Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

Women suffrage became the overriding issue in Mrs. Cunningham's life, and it eventually catapulted her into

state and national prominence. For her, woman suffrage meant more than the right to vote. It was symbolic of the need to achieve equal women's rights in every area of life. Chapter III will be devoted to Mrs. Cunningham's involvement in woman suffrage.

The 1920's were an especially exciting period in Minnie Fish's life. She moved to Washington, D. C. to help the nation's women to utilize their new franchise to the best advantage. While there, Mrs. Cunningham became a prominent member of several national organizations, which led her to enter the U. S. Senate race in Texas in 1928. Chapter IV will describe the work of Mrs. Cunningham in the 1920's, with particular attention to her senate campaign.

Minnie Fisher Cunningham returned to Texas in 1943, after being out of the state for five years. A short time later she was embroiled in Texas politics, and in 1944 she became a candidate for governor, running against the incumbent, Coke R. Stevenson. Chapter V will be concerned with the ramifications of her candidacy for the governorship.

The concluding chapter, Chapter VI, will be the attempt by this writer to draw together his interpretations of the impact the life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham has made in our society in the twentieth century.

Little has been done in a literary way to deal with the multifaceted life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham. At her death in December of 1964, the wire services and newspapers gave brief statements about the more publicized events in her life. The Texas Observer, in articles written by Ronnie Dugger and Franklin Jones, supplied highlights and reminiscences of her career. A memorial tribute to Mrs. Cunningham was published by the Texas Democratic Women's State Committee.

Most of the materials this writer has used in his investigation were extant papers supplied by a member of Mrs. Cunningham's family, the McCallum Family papers, newspaper and magazine clippings, two volumes of History of Woman Suffrage edited by Ida Usted Harper, and a master's thesis on woman suffrage submitted to the University of Texas. Included in his research were taped interviews with three persons who intimately knew Mrs. Cunningham, and who were actively engaged in social and political events with her. He also had numerous conversations with other persons who were acquainted with her.

Although search for material and related studies has not been exhaustive, the libraries and archives at the University of Texas at Austin, Rice University, and Sam Houston State College were carefully inspected.

Apart from the Cunningham papers, however, he found that the McCallum Family papers, located in the archives at the Austin Public Library, provided the best source of information, particularly in the area of woman suffrage. The association of Mrs. Cunningham with Mrs. Jane Y. McCallum, which began with the fight for obtaining suffrage for the women of Texas, continued for over a generation and a half.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born on March 19, 1882, Minnie Fisher was the seventh child of Horatio White and Sallie Abercrombie Fisher. The place of her birth was the plantation house on Fisher Farms, located near New Waverly.

While on furlough from the Confederate Army in 1862, Captain Fisher, a widower with an eleven-year-old daughter, had married Sallie Abercrombie only one month after her brother, Len, had been killed at Bull Run. The Fishers and Abercrombies, both large landholders in pre-Civil War days, were neighbors. It was Sallie's father, John Abercrombie, who had helped to recruit and equip a company of cavalry troops, under the immediate command of Captain H. W. Fisher, in 1861. Abercrombie and General Sam Houston were close friends, and Houston often visited in the Abercrombie home. With the advent of the Civil War, however, John Abercrombie was reluctant to support Houston's opposition to Texas secession from the Union and its entry into the war.¹

¹Minnie Fisher Cunningham, Crossing Over (unpublished biography of Sallie Abercrombie Fisher. Original in possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, New Waverly, Texas, no date given), p. 32.

Sallie was seventeen when she married Captain Fisher, who was then thirty-five. Fisher was a man of means, a landowner who was building a fine house when the war began. After the war, he mortgaged his property to buy more land, only to be caught in a deflationary period. In order not to lose all of their property, Captain and Mrs. Fisher moved to his deceased father's plantation, Fisher Farms. There Captain Fisher operated a large farming interest, with its attendant problems of the influx of carpetbaggers into Texas and the radical change from a slave to a free system of labor.

During the 1870's Captain Fisher donated right-of-way property to the Houston and Great Northern Railroad in order that he have use of the rail line. The construction engineers made their camp near the Fisher house and stayed for several months. As a favor to the Fishers, they suggested that they build a railroad station on the farm and call it "Fisher." Mrs. Fisher was indignant, saying that she would not raise her children in a little railroad town and "send them to school with the riff-raff of such a place."²

Captain Fisher was always generous with people who needed help. He gave much financial aid to former slaves,

²Cunningham, Crossing Over, p. 77.

itinerant workers, and anyone else who needed it. When he died of pneumonia at the age of seventy-nine, a tramp in town was heard to say, "Cap'n Fisher dead! There went a good man. I didn't know him, but he took me into a store and bought me these shoes I have on my feet because he saw my feet on the ground."³ Because of his unpredictable generosity, Sallie Fisher had her own account which she used to take care of the needs of her children, particularly their education. Minnie Fish recalled that her mother sold vegetables, butter, and even cotton to keep money in her account.

The education of the Fisher children was handled primarily by their mother. As a girl, Sallie Abercrombie became an avid reader of books. To keep her from reading all night, her parents rationed her supply of candles. It was not surprising, then, that the Fisher children could read at the age of five, having been taught by Sallie Fisher or one of the older children. Each of the children had to read aloud the entire Bible, and their father, who had little formal education, helped them with spelling practice and rote memorization.⁴ Minnie spent one year of her formal schooling in Houston but, since she was unhappy

³Cunningham, Crossing Over, p. 99.

⁴Ibid., p. 78.

there, her mother consented for her to return to New Waverly. When she graduated from the little school there, she and a friend decided that an appropriate celebration should be held. They sent notes to everyone in town, telling them of their graduation party and inviting them to bring a basket lunch. "This was my first initiative," recalled Minnie Fish.⁵ At sixteen she went to Huntsville and obtained a teacher's certificate by examination and later secured a job at the Gourd Creek School. Frightened by the prospect of actually teaching children, she gave up the job and went to Galveston to stay with her sister. Once there, and with the help of her sister, Minnie Fish made the decision to take the entrance examination to the School of Pharmacy of the University of Texas Medical Branch. She was accepted and, after three years of study, was graduated in 1901, as the second woman in Texas to receive a degree in pharmacy.⁶

While in school at Galveston, Minnie Fisher showed a desire to do social work. Just before 1900, Clara Barton was collecting used clothing, and Minnie Fish persuaded her mother to give a tea at her home for the purpose of getting their neighbors to bring some used clothes.

⁵Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

⁶Personal papers of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

The tea was successful, and a large amount of clothing was sent to Clara Barton. Minnie Fish later said, ". . . it was unusual to do, because nobody else was doing anything. It was sort of symptomatic of a meddlesome character, don't you think?"⁷

After leaving Galveston, Minnie Fish went to Huntsville to work as a prescription clerk in a drug store. There she met a promising young lawyer, B. J. Cunningham, formerly of St. Louis and Indiana. She married him at twenty, and she said that her husband was the most handsome man she ever saw. And of her, he once said, "Honey, I don't mind if you are red-headed. I married you for your brains."⁸ The political career of Mrs. Cunningham was set in motion when her husband ran for county attorney as a reform candidate. He told her, "As a city man to a country girl, if you hold up your end of the campaign I'll hold up mine."⁹ She brought in a majority of the country vote and thus her interest in politics began.

The Cunninghams moved to Houston in 1905 and lived there for two years. While there, Minnie Fish persuaded her husband to buy a country place on Dickinson Bayou

⁷Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

⁸Personal papers of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

⁹Austin American, May 24, 1946.

where she boated, fished, and hunted. In 1907, she and her husband moved to Galveston, and Mrs. Cunningham became interested in several civic, music, literary, and suffrage clubs. Having no children of her own, she cared for two adopted children for a time. In later years, she talked very little about her marriage. Once to a friend, she remarked, ". . . you know I can't talk very much about him."¹⁰ Because of Mrs. Cunningham's involvement in various social and political activities which took her away from Galveston, it can be assumed that her marriage was not always a happy one. Her husband died in 1928.

From 1916 to 1920, Minnie Fish spent much of her time in Austin at the state headquarters of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association. During this period, she worked in Austin, Washington, D. C., and several states promoting the suffrage movement. Of her appointment as chairman of the Liberty Loan for the state of Texas in 1918, Minnie Fish said, "And boy did I turn in the Liberty Loans."¹¹

Her executive abilities became most prominent in the 1920's, when she held offices in such national organizations as the National League of Women Voters, the Woman's National Democratic Club, the National Federated Women's

¹⁰Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

¹¹Ibid.

Clubs, and the National Democratic Committee. She was honored in 1920, when she went to San Francisco as a delegate from Texas to the National Democratic Convention. Her defeat in the race for the U. S. Senate in 1928 only contributed to her desire to continue in the mainstream of national politics, and she returned to Washington, where she was associated with the Woman's National Democratic Club. She first became acquainted with the Franklin Delano Roosevelts at that time. It was a relationship with the Roosevelts that developed through the ensuing years, especially with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and Minnie Fish gave her enthusiastic support to Roosevelt's New Deal program. After a decade of national Republican administrations, Mrs. Cunningham, always an eager Democrat, was pleased that the political picture had changed. As a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Houston in 1928, Minnie Fish supported Senator Frank Walsh of Montana. She could not get excited about the candidacy of Governor Al Smith, although she did not oppose his nomination.¹²

From 1932 to 1938, Mrs. Cunningham was an employee of the Texas Extension Service at Texas A & M College. Her titles included associate editor and then editor of the Texas Extension Service News. Her work also involved

¹²Austin American, June 28, 1928.

the conducting of reporters' schools, the radio broadcasting of farm news, and the initiation of a campaign designed to use up surplus cotton by making mattresses during the depression years.¹³

From 1938 to 1943, Minnie Fish was an information specialist for the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington. In one year, she arranged for 1,100 round-table discussions among women on the New Deal's agricultural policies. She left Washington, protesting that the information program for the food production effort was being seriously damaged.¹⁴ Commenting on Mrs. Cunningham's resignation, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote: "I grieve that the Department of Agriculture has lost you, but I know Texas will gain."¹⁵

Disgusted with Governor Coke R. Stevenson and his policies, Minnie Fish opposed him in the governor's race of July, 1944. Although defeated, she scored heavily against the conservative Democratic bloc in Texas.

Only weeks later she became involved in another of the great issues of her life, the fight for academic

¹³ Personal papers of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

¹⁴ Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

¹⁵ Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, October 11, 1943.

freedom. It must be noted that Mrs. Cunningham had long advocated the right of any educator to pursue the freedom inherent in the position of the academician. Her keen interest in this human right came into sharp focus with the firing of Dr. Homer Price Rainey, president of the University of Texas, on November 1, 1944. Rainey drew the ire of the Board of Regents when, on October 12, he called his faculty together and read to them sixteen violations of academic freedom by the Board.¹⁶ The members of the Board were appointed during the administrations of former Governor O'Daniel and current Governor Stevenson, which explains the conservative nature of the group.

It was a common practice for Minnie Fish to organize a committee to deal with a particular problem. In the case of Dr. Rainey's dismissal, the Women's Committee for Education Freedom was formed, with Mrs. Jane Y. McCallum as chairman. Mrs. McCallum was able to serve only a few months, and she was succeeded by Mrs. Lillian Collier. It was Minnie Fish, however, who gave direction to this organization. Mrs. Collier pointed out that Minnie Fisher Cunningham was the "brains" behind most of the women's

¹⁶ Frank Goodwyn, Lone Star Land, pp. 298-299.

committees formed to deal with crisis situations or problems.¹⁷

It is uncertain that Mrs. Cunningham personally knew Dr. Rainey prior to his dismissal, but she was well acquainted with the maneuverings in Texas politics which were precipitating this kind of action in the academic world. It was apparent that the action of the Board of Regents, in dismissing Dr. Rainey, grew out of political motivations. The Austin American editorialized:

The forces of big money and reaction have control now. Temporarily they have won a victory just as, temporarily, they won a victory in the convention last May but lost it when the people had an opportunity to speak in September and November.

The University has been put into politics by those who wish to control teaching, to control thinking, to administer education and define truth according to their own particular ideologies and economic beliefs.¹⁸

In an open letter to Mr. Dudley K. Woodward, Jr., chairman of the Board of Regents, Dr. Rainey accused Woodward of political chicanery and a breach of ethics of the legal profession when he brought false charges against the former president out of the fear that the Texas Senate

¹⁷Statement by Mrs. Lillian Collier, personal interview, February 6, 1968.

¹⁸Editorial in the Austin American, February 8, 1945.

would not ratify his appointment to the Board. Furthermore, Rainey demanded to know why Woodward refused to give him at least a private hearing prior to his firing and why professional tenure, which is a corollary to academic freedom, was also denied him.¹⁹

As early as April 20, 1945, Mrs. Cunningham wrote a letter to Mrs. Mary Ellis, wife of Dr. A. Caswell Ellis of the University of Texas, in which she said that she was promoting Rainey as a candidate for governor, Charles Metcalfe for lieutenant governor, Ralph Yarborough for attorney general, and Wright Patman for U. S. senator. Parenthetically, Mrs. Cunningham stated that if Rainey refused to run for governor, then she would run for this high office again.²⁰

When Minnie Fish organized the Women's Committee for Educational Freedom, she pledged that she would seek to increase committee membership to one thousand, with four representatives in each county. In explaining the new organization to the Campus League of Women Voters in Austin, she stated that the Committee "should be broad enough to take in all educational problems over the state,

¹⁹An open letter from Dr. Homer P. Rainey to Mr. Dudley K. Woodward, Jr., April 4, 1945.

²⁰Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Mary Ellis, April 20, 1945.

so it would not be limited. It ought to be political, because this thing is in the field of politics."²¹

Mrs. Cunningham was following this philosophy when she directed the Women's Committee for Educational Freedom to take a public opinion poll in Texas which was designed to determine what Texans believed about freedom of thought and freedom of speech in their school system. One obvious hoped-for result of this poll was to help the people of the state to examine the candidates in the upcoming elections with the question: "Will you free our educational institutions?"²²

Dr. Rainey consented to run for governor, and Mrs. Cunningham supervised the secretarial and stenographic workers in his campaign.²³ Even before Rainey announced his candidacy, Mrs. Cunningham referred to him as Governor Rainey, saying, "Sounds good, doesn't it?"²⁴ During the campaign, she and Mrs. Lillian Collier visited Washington after receiving a personal invitation to attend a tea at the White House.²⁵

²¹Daily Texan, November 1, 1945.

²²Press Release by Women's Committee for Educational Freedom, October 10, 1945.

²³Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

²⁴Austin American, May 24, 1946.

²⁵Ibid.

Although Rainey's gubernatorial attempt was unsuccessful, Mrs. Cunningham's interest and concern for educational freedom did not diminish. In 1957, she wrote a letter to Mr. Jim Lindsay, vice-chairman of the Board of Directors of Texas Tech, denouncing the action of this Board in summarily dismissing Drs. Byran Abernethy and Herbert Greenberg without giving them the benefit of their professional rights. Commenting on the educational system of the state of Virginia in 1958, she said:

I get so mad about the school situation I'm incoherent. Even if I wasn't for desegregation, which I am, I would still be against the closing of the public schools. The schools belong to all the people. The rich people had better support the school system. Thomas Jefferson said it's only three generations from shirt-tail to shirt-tail. The grandchildren of these rich men now will depend on the rich men then for an education.²⁶

After the governor's race was over in 1946, Minnie Fish went back to Fisher Farms. It was still home for her, but many things had changed. Some of her property had been sold to finance her involvement in politics. Her house had burned, and she was faced with the prospect of having to rebuild. With the help of her relatives and many friends, Minnie Fish built the little house she occupied until she

²⁶Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

died. It was without many of the conveniences of a comfortable house, but it was home for her.

Living again on her farm, Minnie Fish refused to allow herself to become isolated from the world, and her friends did not stop seeking her counsel. In 1952, she actively engaged in campaigning for Adlai Stevenson for president and Ralph Yarborough for governor. She was pleased that Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, specifically requested her to handle Stevenson's campaign for women's votes.²⁷ The defeat of both Stevenson and Yarborough and the control of Texas politics by Republicans and conservative Democrats vexed Minnie Fish. Concluding that something had to be done to counter this situation, she and Mrs. Collier organized the Texas Democratic Women's Committee to give leadership to the liberal wing of the Democratic party in Texas. Through this organization, Minnie Fish worked actively in Democratic campaigns at the local, state, and national level. Mrs. Collier said that the last thing Mrs. Cunningham told the other leaders of the group was: "Divest yourselves of outside interests and concentrate on your Democratic Party and your women's committee."²⁸

²⁷Statement by Mrs. Lillian Collier, personal interview, February 6, 1968.

²⁸Texas Observer, January 22, 1965.

When Paul Holcomb, owner and editor of the State Observer, decided to sell his newspaper in 1954, Minnie Fish feared the paper would fall into the wrong hands. Unaware of what Mrs. Cunningham intended, Franklin Jones of Marshall joined her and Mrs. Collier in a meeting with Mr. Holcomb. Reflecting on this occasion, Mr. Jones wrote:

Minnie Fish talked of many things, as only she could do, but in the end, and to my utter surprise, she turned to Paul and remarked, 'Paul, Mr. Jones is interested in buying your State Observer and combining it with his East Texas Democrat, would you be interested?' Up to that time I had always considered the law too jealous a mistress to permit of philandering in capitalistic ventures. Nevertheless, I rapidly closed the gaping astonishment evidenced by my open mouth, and under the spell of Minnie Fish, I did my best to adopt a bankerish attitude . . . this writer, within months after his high resolve to leave journalism to the journalists and politics to the politicians, found himself somehow in the midst of every meeting of the various 'committees,' 'boards,' and 'advisory councils' that served to chart the original course of the Texas Observer.²⁹

Soon after this, Mrs. Frankie Randolph of Houston bought the paper, and it continued as a liberal political organ in Texas. It was to Minnie Fish's credit, however, that the paper remained in control of the liberals. She and Mrs. Mary Weinzerl, of Huntsville, carried on an extensive subscription campaign at the next State Democratic

²⁹Texas Observer, January 22, 1965.

Convention, and this helped to insure the success of the Observer.³⁰

Through the Women's Committee for Economic Policy, Mrs. Cunningham supported Lyndon Johnson in his successful bid for the United States Senate in 1948. Ten years later, she remarked:

Rayburn was a great man but Lyndon operates Rayburn now, and Lyndon was never a great man and he never will be. He doesn't have the capacity for greatness. I think Eleanor Roosevelt put her finger on it when she said he's a great maneuverer. Of course that's all he is. But he's a ruthless maneuverer. He had no principles--none of that stuff I call integrity.³¹

Time and circumstances had eroded the relationship between Mrs. Cunningham and Lyndon Johnson and, by 1956, she bitterly opposed him and his fight to control the Texas delegation at the National Democratic Convention. Claiming that Johnson and Governor Allan Shivers had made a deal to give the State Democratic Convention over to Johnson, Minnie Fish announced that she would seek the chairmanship of the Texas delegation. In the same announcement, she set forth her candidacy as Favorite Daughter.³² Mrs.

³⁰Statement by Mrs. Mary Weinzerl, personal interview, February 6, 1968.

³¹Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

³²Unpublished article by Laura Perea, April 30, 1956.

Cunningham was well aware that very few would take seriously the intentions of a seventy-five-year-old woman, but she was impudent enough to insist that the State Convention would be turned over neither to Johnson nor Shivers without a fight. Although she and Johnson were never reconciled, in 1960, Minnie Fish set up a Kennedy-Johnson campaign headquarters in New Waverly. She worked there every day, bringing in speakers from over the state. To her genuine satisfaction, her home county voted Democratic, after supporting the Republican presidential nominee in the two previous elections.³³

October 18, 1958, was a day of high tribute to Mrs. Cunningham, for she was honored as the outstanding woman Democrat of Texas. Her selection by Mrs. Frankie Randolph, national committeewoman from Texas, coincided with plans made to celebrate Democratic Woman's Day, observed annually in memory of the first woman member of the Democratic National Committee. Because of Mrs. Cunningham's long background of leadership in the Democratic party, both state and national, the occasion went far beyond the

³³Memorial Tribute to Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Great American, A Report Prepared and Published by the Texas Democratic Women's State Committee, no date of publication or page number listed.

boundaries of Texas. Over 1,000 celebrations, in five states and Guatemala, were held in her honor.³⁴

Minnie Fish was in frail health during the last years of her life, but she refused to completely put aside those things which she deemed so important. In the spring of the year that she died, she went to Houston to help form the Texas Organization of Liberal Democrats. This was in keeping with her determination to improve the political conditions of Texas.

Minnie Fisher Cunningham died on December 9, 1964, in a Conroe hospital, at the age of eighty-two. Burial was in the little cemetery at New Waverly. "Mrs. Democrat of Texas" was gone.³⁵ Found among her possessions was a scrap of paper on which the following statement was scrawled:

There will be no political harmony in Texas until:

(1) There is an accepted standard of political integrity

(2) Demagogues cease to exploit racial and economic differences to advance their own interests

(3) Texas accepts, finances and establishes a school system which will put this rich state in Class A from kindergarten to graduat [sic] and

³⁴Memorial Tribute to Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

³⁵Dallas Times Herald, December 10, 1964.

general education free in both an academic and financial sense.³⁶

³⁶Papers of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

CHAPTER III

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Minnie Fisher Cunningham once laughingly said that she became a suffragette for practical reasons. As a prescription clerk at a drug store in Huntsville she was paid \$75 per month and everybody else was paid \$150. According to Minnie Fish, it was a matter of pride rather than one of desiring equal pay for equal work, for she was competent in her field because of her degree in pharmacy.¹

The woman suffrage movement in Texas began in earnest in the early part of this century. The initial impetus was given by the formation of the Equal Suffrage League by Miss Annette Finnigan and her sisters, Elizabeth and Katharine, in 1903. Houston was the headquarters for the League, and several chapters were formed in Texas. With the exception of the Austin society, the League was disbanded when the Finnigan sisters left the state. The work was renewed in 1912, when Miss M. Eleanor Brackenridge of San Antonio, Miss Anna Maxwell Jones, formerly of Texas and a New York resident at that time, and Miss Annette

¹Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

Finnigan, recently returned to Texas from New York, organized the Texas Woman Suffrage Association.²

Some years after Mrs. Cunningham and her husband had moved from Huntsville to Galveston, she became active in the suffrage movement. Miss Finnigan, who continued to organize clubs throughout the state, got Mrs. Cunningham into state suffrage activities. As Minnie Fish stated it, "She called on me to do some work in Galveston, and I became President of the Galveston Association."³

Mrs. Cunningham became ill in 1913, and she was advised by her doctor to go to West Texas to a higher altitude. When she left Galveston, she wrote Miss Finnigan and asked her to give her some responsibilities in the western part of the state. Miss Finnigan's reply was delayed, but Minnie Fish was shocked when it did arrive. Her letter included a state-wide speaking itinerary which she wanted Mrs. Cunningham to fill. The die was cast, and Minnie Fish became president of the Texas Woman Suffrage Association in May of 1915.⁴

²Ida Husted Harper (ed.), The History of Woman Suffrage, VI, pp. 630 ff.

³Statement of Minnie Fisher Cunningham at suffrage anniversary luncheon, Austin, March 26, 1930.

⁴Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 632.

On April 7, 1916, Mrs. Cunningham wrote one of the important national leaders in the suffrage movement, Miss Lutie Stearns, and invited her to attend the state convention. The seriousness with which she viewed the situation is obvious from her letter:

. . . . You know Texas is in a very critical situation from a Suffrage point of view now. The Legislature is being elected that we will have to put our bill up to. We are organizing very rapidly and successfully, and our prospects for getting through are beautiful, if we can get ourselves through the convention without wrecking on the rocks of the Southern Conference on one hand and the Congressional Union on the other, or splitting from stem to stern on "Preparedness". So we are bending all of our efforts toward a convention where "Suffrage First" will be the real sense of the meeting. . . .⁵

At this state convention in May of 1916 the delegates, under the leadership of Mrs. Cunningham, instructed the executive committee to ask for suffrage planks in the State and National Democratic platforms. Minnie Fish then sent a form letter to all of the congressmen from Texas and urged them to endorse the suffrage section of the Democratic platform.⁶

Governor James E. Ferguson defeated Mrs. Cunningham and the suffrage forces at the State Democratic convention,

⁵Mrs. Willie D. Bowles, "The History of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas," pp. 67-68.

⁶Ibid., p. 70.

but he was only able to bring a minority report that urged the rejection of a suffrage plank to the National Democratic Convention at St. Louis.

Because Governor Ferguson was the implacable foe of the suffrage movement, he discovered an unyielding enemy opposing him when the campaign to impeach him was mounted in 1917. In fact the Texas Equal Suffrage Association abandoned most of its regular work in order to concentrate on gathering data necessary to impeach Ferguson. Mr. D. K. Woodward, Jr., secretary of the Central Committee in charge of the impeachment campaign, wrote:

The impeachment of former Governor Ferguson could not have been brought about without the cooperation of the women of the State . . . Their work was under the direction of Mrs. Cunningham, president of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, who came at once to Austin and established headquarters. The women were asked to reach the remote sections, to eradicate prejudice and leave understanding in its stead . . . They did all that was asked of them and more. The most confirmed skeptic on the question of women's participation in public life must have been converted had he witnessed the unselfish, tireless, efficient work of these hundreds of devoted women and the striking ability of their leader, whose genius for organization, knowledge of public affairs and public men of Texas and sound judgment in all questions of policy were of untold value. . . .⁷

Mrs. Cunningham and her suffragettes had established themselves as a potent force in Texas.

⁷Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 635.

With the advent of the United States participation in World War I, the energies of Texas women that were directed toward the question of equal suffrage were somewhat dissipated. The women were soon engaged in the effort to help with Red Cross activities, Liberty Loan campaigns, and work to eliminate saloons and other sources of vice near training camps. Mrs. Cunningham became chairman of the Liberty Loan campaign in Texas, and she established the Women's Anti-Vice Committee.⁸ The goal for equal suffrage was not completely shunted aside, however, and in 1918 a drive was made by the Texas suffragists to give full support to the passage of a federal amendment granting equal suffrage.

Minnie Fish kept the pressure on Texas congressmen and senators in 1917 by sending form letters and by writing to them individually. On June 12, 1917, she wrote Congressman Tom Blanton of Abilene, and requested that he form a Woman Suffrage Committee in the House of Representatives. She also sought to persuade other congressmen of the worthiness of the suffrage cause by enlisting the aid of her co-workers. An example of this technique was demonstrated in a letter to Mrs. Callicut of Corsicana, a resident in Congressman Rufus Hardy's district:

⁸Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 636.

. . . Please will you undertake to keep Mr. Rufus Hardy in touch with the suffrage question. The method is by clipping all items, editorials and articles in favor of our Cause from all of the papers that you can get hold of, and send to him with personal letters from different people calling his attention to the items enclosed. Getting these letters will require some tack and diplomacy, but not nearly so much as I am sure that you are possessed of. . . .⁹

Minnie Fish used this kind of expertise then and later in her career. Another technique she employed was illustrated in a letter to Mrs. R. A. Tsanoff of Houston when she asked Mrs. Tsanoff to arrange to have a delegation of good suffragists to call on the editors of the various Houston newspapers and request that good press coverage be given to the suffragists, particularly news from Washington.¹⁰

The year 1918 brought a denouement in the battle for suffrage rights in Texas. Early in the year Mrs. Cunningham and her staff established their headquarters at the Driskill Hotel in Austin in anticipation of a called session of the Legislature. Although this special session had been called to consider some measures proposed by the Secretary of War, Minnie Fish viewed it as the appropriate time to push for a primary suffrage bill.¹¹ The Texas

⁹Bowles, "Woman Suffrage in Texas," p. 78.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 79.

¹¹Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 636.

Equal Suffrage Association sought support from Governor William P. Hobby, but he gave scant attention to it. Mrs. Cunningham then turned to the state newspapers for help when she wrote to Mr. Tom Finty, editor of the Dallas Evening Journal:

. . . We called on Mr. Hobby in Austin, and told him gently but firmly withal, that we want that Primary Suffrage Bill submitted to the Special Session of the Legislature, and we would like it with a strong recommendation for passage from him. He is considering it. We found him somewhat exercised over Mr. Ferguson's activity, and we left him more so. We had nothing cheerful to tell him along this line. Personally, I am deeply concerned over it and the apparent ignorance or lack of interest in the subject that people are displaying. And that is one reason why we want that vote in the next primary so badly.¹²

Governor Hobby continued to be reluctant, but the suffragettes relentlessly brought pressures against him through the use of petitions and "lobbying." He relented when he was presented with a petition, signed by the majority of the members of the House and the Senate, calling for a primary suffrage bill. The bill passed the House on March 16 and the Senate on March 21. On March 26, 1918, Governor Hobby signed the bill into law, and among those persons present for the signing was Mrs. Cunningham. Mr. C. E. Metcalfe, a member of the House of

¹²Bowles, "Woman Suffrage in Texas," pp. 81-82.

Representatives from San Angelo, had purchased the fountain pen used for the signing and gave it to Mrs. Cunningham as a token of appreciation.¹³

Because the suffrage law did not go into effect until June 26 and the primary election was scheduled for July 27, Mrs. Cunningham called for the organization of non-partisan Women Voters' Leagues to help register and educate the women in order that they would be enabled to vote and to vote intelligently. Registration had to be completed fifteen days before the primary election, and this forced the suffragettes to work quickly and efficiently. On July 15 Minnie Fish reported to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt that over 360,000 women were registered. Later a court battle ensued because the opponents of the law questioned its legality. The Texas Supreme Court ruled, in Hamilton versus Davis, that the Primary Suffrage Law was constitutional.¹⁴

The women of Texas now held a position of prestige never before known in the history of the state. They were welcomed to the political conventions in August, and many were given committee assignments. The acceptance of the women's strength by the political establishment caused

¹³Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 637.

¹⁴Bowles, "Woman Suffrage in Texas," p. 88 ff.

some fear among the more knowledgeable suffrage leaders. Mrs. Cunningham and others knew that a call for a state referendum to enable all persons to have the right of equal suffrage would be ill-timed, if not disastrous. Since many of the qualified, and perhaps sympathetic, voters had been disenfranchised by their current service in the armed forces, the suffragists viewed a state referendum as too much of a risk at that time.

In November, Mrs. Cunningham went to Washington for the fourth time to assist the National Congressional Committee in its effort to get a Federal Suffrage Amendment. Previously, in 1918, Minnie Fish had been in Washington lobbying for the federal amendment. At that time she was designated as the chairman of a committee from the National Association to approach President Woodrow Wilson about the immediate submission of a suffrage amendment to Congress. Recalling the event, Mrs. Cunningham said that the national president of the suffragettes had coached her to say that the Democratic Party ought to get credit for giving the women the vote and that the women were not supporting the war as enthusiastically as they might. President Wilson replied that all patriotic citizens were doing all that they could possibly do. The President's statement completely disarmed Mrs. Cunningham, and their conversation faltered. However, Wilson did

submit the amendment as a war measure, and it missed adoption by one vote.¹⁵

Minnie Fish had been in Washington less than two months when she wrote Mrs. Catt about her need to make a decision concerning the state referendum issue. She was cognizant of the forces which were urging the Texas Equal Suffrage Association to engage in a state campaign to seek a state referendum on equal suffrage. She believed that the men in the higher echelon of politics were urging a referendum for selfish reasons. The power of the women's vote was obvious to them. However, Minnie Fish felt the pressure most acutely from within her own group. The Dallas Equal Suffrage Association believed that to fail to engage in a state campaign meant the rejection of the men who had supported the primary suffrage bill. Furthermore, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was calling for the immediate submission of the suffrage amendment in Texas, and this was causing a division within the ranks of the equal suffrage supporters. The dilemma which faced Minnie Fish was to accede to the demands to seek a state referendum or to remain loyal to the National American Woman Suffrage Association which prohibited a campaign of this kind without prior consultation and approval. With her

¹⁵Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

usual candor, Mrs. Cunningham wrote Mrs. Catt that the majority of the women of Texas trusted her (Mrs. Cunningham's) honesty of purpose and that they would stand with her whatever the decision.¹⁶

It is uncertain what Mrs. Catt's reply was, but it was soon apparent to Minnie Fish what course of action she would follow. She was called to Texas to manage one of the most intense suffrage campaigns up until that time. On February 5, 1919, Governor Hobby signed the resolution calling for a woman suffrage amendment before several witnesses, one of whom was Mrs. Cunningham.¹⁷

The influence of the executive and legislative offices was behind a move to bring the suffrage referendum to a vote on May 24, 1919. This allowed Mrs. Cunningham and the Texas Equal Suffrage Association less than three months to organize and carry through a strategy that would confirm the right of equal suffrage for Texas citizens.

In a letter pleading for funds, Mrs. Cunningham wrote Mr. Charles Fowler of Galveston that the Legislature had given her group a miracle to perform, for they had "to carry the largest and in some respects the hardest state

¹⁶Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, December 22, 1918.

¹⁷Austin American-Statesman, February 5, 1919.

to campaign in the shortest length of time which had ever been accorded a Suffrage campaign."¹⁸ The State Association did not have the financial resources necessary to conduct a campaign of this enormous size. Although the National Association did not approve of the referendum, it gave the State Association about \$17,000.¹⁹

None of the circumstances surrounding this campaign seemed to dim the hopes of Minnie Fish and her organization, for they saw they had a good chance to win. In fact, only two days after Governor Hobby signed the resolution, the suffragettes met at the Community House Cafe in San Antonio to celebrate the progress of equal suffrage in Texas. Honored at this meeting were Miss Brackenridge and Mrs. Cunningham for their contributions to the suffrage movement in Texas. The tenor of the meeting was one of jubilation, hope and caution:

. . . With the women of Texas already in possession of partial suffrage, and standing within view of their Mecca--the day that shall bring full suffrage for women to the Lone Star State--the luncheon was a particularly jubilant affair and the women congratulated each other and their revered leaders with deep feeling, as they rejoiced over the success of the "cause" in the whole world, in the United States and in Texas, that State which

¹⁸Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mr. Charles Fowler, February 18, 1919.

¹⁹Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 640.

was once so backward that the anti-suffragettes and the anti-suffragists pointed to it as the last one that would "stoop to woman suffrage". . . .²⁰

In her speech to this meeting, Mrs. Cunningham warned:

. . . . There is still much to be accomplished and there are many disgruntled politicians in the State who were surprised at the results of the elections in the fall, when you women of Texas accomplished everything you went after, from Constable to Governor. These men will oppose you bitterly on May 24. It is to prevent this that your hardest work must be done. Do not let them snatch the fruits of your labor from you, just when the goal is in sight, for May 24 will mean either bondage and servitude or freedom for the women of Texas. . . .²¹

Minnie Fish knew the kind of battle in which the suffrage forces were engaged, and she was determined to effect a strategy that was capable of winning. She called the state campaign, "Make Texas Safe for Democracy." An integral part of this campaign was the desire to secure full suffrage for women and, at the same time, to make American citizenship a qualification for voting for both men and women. During World War I it seemed ironic that aliens in this country were allowed to vote if they had their first papers, while large groups of American citizens did not have this right. A "rider" had been attached to

²⁰ San Antonio Express, February 7, 1919.

²¹ ibid.

the proposed constitutional amendment which required full naturalization by every alien before he could vote. This was a threat to the suffrage forces since it was certain to bring negative votes from the bloc of aliens. Mrs. Cunningham appealed to many organizations to take careful notice of the Citizenship Clause. She wrote to Mrs. Myrtle Berry, First Vice-President of the Texas Federation of Labor:

. . . At present Texas is one of the few states in the Union which permits aliens to vote on taking out their first papers. This was found during the war, to be a serious menace when the alien enemy was exempt from military service but could vote, while Americans went into the Army and were therefore disfranchised. It is no less serious, [in] these construction days. . . .²²

Minnie Fish was convinced that this gross inequity had to be corrected by passing the amendment with the Citizenship Clause.

In order to gather as much support as possible Mrs. Cunningham utilized a technique that is still used. She set up an advisory committee which acted as a working committee, but its main contribution was to include in its membership prominent persons who could draw the support of the larger society. Minnie Fish wrote a very persuasive

²² Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Myrtle Berry, February 25, 1919.

letter to Senator Morris Sheppard, senior United States Senator from Texas, and asked him to serve as chairman. Senator Sheppard had long been sympathetic with the fight for equal suffrage, and his prestige in Texas was unquestioned. Four days after Mrs. Cunningham wrote the Senator, she received a telegram of acceptance from him. On February 27, Minnie Fish wrote him a letter of appreciation not only for accepting the chairmanship of the Advisory Committee but for helping to locate her brother, with whom she had lost contact and who was a patient in a military hospital in France.²³ The building of the Advisory Committee was well underway, and she moved to get other prominent persons from all over the state to accept a committee position.

By the beginning of March, Mrs. Cunningham had arranged for the State Association to hold a training school in Austin on March 20, 21, and 22. Both state and national officers were assigned to instruct the suffrage workers in all of the areas of work for the campaign. Minnie Fish used the senatorial district plan of organization to facilitate the running of the campaign. This plan divided the state into senatorial districts, counties,

²³Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Senator Morris Sheppard, February 27, 1919.

commissioner's precincts, and election precincts. Each of these units had a campaign committee comprised of men and women who brought into the work every faction and class that were interested in the suffrage movement. The depth of her planning was obvious when she called for a campaign committee to represent every city block:

. . . the Campaign Committee of a city block might well be composed of the Chairman and the residents on the four corners. This Committee will canvass, circularize, and generally educate the block until on election day the Committee will know to a man who is going to vote for Suffrage, and will arrange to call the night before to remind the favorable ones to go to the polls, and again at noon on election day, to ask if they have been. . . .²⁴

Mrs. Cunningham's genius for organization was evident throughout the campaign, for she kept in touch with the state-wide organization at every level. Some 400 women served as district, county, and city chairmen. Pamphlets, educational leaflets, and sample ballots were distributed. Newspapers throughout Texas were solicited to give favorable press coverage. The newspapers, with one exception, in the four largest cities in Texas gave full editorial support to the proposed amendment. Dr. A. Caswell Ellis, faculty member at the University of Texas, published a

²⁴Written statement by the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, no date.

pro-suffrage newspaper called the Texas Democrat. Over 200,000 copies of this paper were circulated before the May 24 election.²⁵ Minnie Fish later recalled that she was amazed at the vitality and zest of Dr. Ellis as he labored for the suffrage cause, remembering him as he worked on the lay-out of his paper on his living room floor during the early morning hours.

Although the Texas Equal Suffrage Association worked diligently to win public support of the Amendment, opposing forces were equally diligent. Many out-of-state groups moved in to consolidate the opposition. The Women's National Anti-Suffrage Association sent Miss Charlotte Rowe of New York to Texas for the purpose of working against the Amendment. Later Mrs. James W. Wadsworth, Jr., president of the association, came to the state to speak for the opposition. All kinds of vicious literature was mailed into the state. Several mailings came from the Man's Organization Opposed to Woman Suffrage, located in Selma, Alabama. Many Texas groups and individuals opposed the suffragists, notably the liquor interests which believed that women's votes would threaten them.²⁶

²⁵Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, pp. 640-641.

²⁶Ibid., p. 641.

On May 8, Mrs. Cunningham put out a general letter to the clergy in Texas, calling for their personal, as well as their congregations', support. She appealed to the ministers to remember that democracy is a government by the people and that women are people.²⁷ This was not her last appeal for backing, but the lines had already been drawn for the decisive battle on May 24.

When the vote returns began to come in, it first appeared that the anti-suffragists had been defeated. However, as a larger cross-section of the vote came, it was apparent that the suffrage amendment had failed. Several days elapsed before the tally was completed, but the suffragists had already conceded defeat---defeat by fraud, not by fair election procedures.

Because the suffrage amendment had passed the Legislature as the second of four proposed constitutional amendments, Mrs. Cunningham and the State Association believed that the Amendment would appear on the official ballot from the Secretary of State's office in second place. Newspapers throughout the state had published a sample ballot listing the suffrage amendment as second. Therefore, much of the campaigning by the suffragists had

²⁷ Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Texas clergy, May 8, 1919.

been on the basis of asking the people to vote for the second amendment on the ballot. They discovered, to their consternation, that the ballot had been changed and the land plank amendment, originally number four, had been given second place, and the suffrage amendment had been relegated to fourth position.

Election officials blamed this change on the printers of the official ballot, but Mrs. Cunningham was convinced that a fraud had been committed against the citizens of Texas by the anti-suffrage forces. To give credence to her argument, she cited the discrepancy between the official ballot and the tally sheets used by the election officers.²⁸ The suffrage amendment had been listed fourth on the ballot but second on the tally sheet. She contended that the election officials at the precinct level had actually counted the votes on the assumption that the suffrage amendment was second. Mrs. Cunningham's contention of fraud was credible because both the land plank and prohibition amendments passed.

In a letter to Speaker R. E. Thomason of El Paso, Mrs. Cunningham asked him to advise her as to the feasibility of contesting the election, since a contest would

²⁸ Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mr. R. E. Thomason, May 28, 1919.

be expensive and perhaps detrimental to further suffrage activity.²⁹ Three days later Mr. Thomason wired her, stating:

Your letter has just reached me. I will make full investigations here and advise you. I am sure that fraud of the worst kind was practiced, but unless you can get positive proof I would be slow to advise a contest. I have no fear about repeal of present primary law nor failure to ratify national amendment if submitted.³⁰

It later developed that Mr. Thomason's counsel to Mrs. Cunningham was wise, for it was confirmed that the incorrect ballot was used in twenty-nine counties supplied by one printing firm. The margin of error, even if it could be proved, was not sufficient to overcome the vote deficit. The final vote tabulation was 141,733 for and 166,893 votes against the suffrage amendment.³¹ Minnie Fish was further distressed by the defeat of the Amendment in the counties she considered home, Walker and Galveston.³²

On June 2, Mrs. Cunningham telegraphed Mrs. Maud Wood Park, in Washington, D. C., to apologize for causing

²⁹Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mr. R. E. Thomason, May 28, 1919.

³⁰R. E. Thomason to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, June 1, 1919.

³¹Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 642.

³²Houston Chronicle, June 1, 1919.

the national suffrage movement a setback. It was evident that Mrs. Cunningham felt a personal sense of responsibility to the suffrage cause, and believed that the defeat in Texas would drastically reduce the momentum of the national organization.³³

This same pessimism is evident in a letter to Miss Brackenridge the next day. In this communication Mrs. Cunningham called for an indefinite postponement of the annual convention of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, but she asked for a meeting of the executive committee in Austin on June 12. At the end of the letter she expressed a degree of hope:

. . . May God, to whom all things are possible, uphold your spirit and faith and give you courage to continue to believe in and serve right and justice, regardless of temporary failures and postponements--and the apparent triumphs of wrong and injustice.³⁴

On the following day, June 4, Minnie Fish's hope was realized when the Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment was submitted by Congress for ratification by the respective state legislatures. The suffrage amendment defeat of May 24 was not without compensation, because the women

³³ Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Maud Wood Park, June 2, 1919.

³⁴ Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Miss M. Eleanor Brackenridge, June 3, 1919.

still had a powerful organization intact and ready to apply the necessary force to achieve ratification of the Federal Amendment in Texas.

Governor Hobby was unyielding on the proposal that the special session include on its agenda a consideration of the Federal Amendment. Dr. Ellis reminded the suffrage leaders that legally the handling of the ratification of a federal amendment was not the responsibility nor the prerogative of the governor. Mrs. Cunningham and the other suffrage leaders immediately turned for help to the members of the House and Senate who had pro-suffrage records. When the special session convened on June 23 to reconsider other matters, it faced a direct proposal that a ratification resolution be adopted. The Speaker of the House, R. E. Thomason, was determined that the resolution be given top priority. While the anti-suffragists were caucusing at the Driskill Hotel to devise a strategy to stop their opposition, Resolution Number One was read to the House and referred to the committee. The committee brought a favorable report in a few minutes. The anti-suffrage group arrived at the House just in time to learn that the resolution was scheduled as a special order of business the next morning at eleven o'clock. The "antis" were stunned, but they were determined to stop the resolution.

On June 24, Speaker Thomason brought up the resolution at the designated hour, and the anti-suffrage supporters began to speak against the resolution. Mrs. Cunningham, Dr. Ellis, and others had quietly canvassed the House membership and knew that the pro-suffrage legislators would carry the vote by a large margin. Therefore the suffragists chose not to speak in favor of the resolution since there was no need to do so. The resolution passed the House with 96 votes for and 20 against.³⁵

The resolution moved to the Senate committee in the late afternoon of the same day. The opposition seemed to be firmly entrenched here, but the pro-suffrage group was confident that any opposition could be overcome. The anti-suffragists called for a joint session of the House and Senate for that night, and they continued to keep the pressure on by use of oratory, threats, and heckling. On June 27, with the situation critical, word circulated in the Senate that some of the opposing senators planned to resign their seats, go home, and run for the vacancy in order to get a vote of confidence in their districts. "The women assured them that they would never get back in

³⁵Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 642.

the Senate again if they resigned."³⁶ This squelched this tactic. However, many of the senators decided to break the quorum by leaving on the next train. It has been said that Mrs. Cunningham and Mrs. McCallum went to the station, boarded the train, and brought some of the senators back. Minnie Fish gave credit to Dr. Ellis and Senator Dudley of El Paso for keeping the senators in Austin.³⁷ The next day the Senate passed the Amendment and Texas became the ninth state to ratify the Federal Suffrage Amendment.³⁸

The fight for woman suffrage was far from finished, and Mrs. Cunningham began to campaign in the Western states. There she urged the governors and their respective legislative bodies to support the Federal Amendment. She was one of four women who toured the Western states under the auspices of the National Association. They completed their tour at the National Conference of Governors in Salt Lake City, Utah.³⁹ As Minnie Fish expressed it: "We pursued governors all over the West."⁴⁰

³⁶An unpublished essay by Minnie Fisher Cunningham about Dr. A. Caswell Ellis, no date given.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 643.

³⁹Ida Husted Harper (ed.), The History of Woman Suffrage, V, p. 650.

⁴⁰Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

In September of 1919, Mrs. Cunningham called for the ninth annual meeting of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association to convene at San Antonio on October 9. This city was chosen as the site of the convention because it was there that the Association had been reorganized in 1912. The meeting was a victory celebration, for Mrs. Cunningham and her associates had realized a triumph long awaited by the women of Texas. At this time the Texas Equal Suffrage Association took steps to merge into the State League of Women Voters, with Mrs. Jessie Daniel Ames as chairman.⁴¹

Minnie Fish was back home in New Waverly when she received word that, with the ratification of the Federal Amendment by the thirty-sixth state on August 26, 1920, woman suffrage had been won. A sixteen-year-old nephew remarked that he hoped that she would now stay home and behave herself.⁴² To remain at home, when the battle for equal women's rights had only begun, was unthinkable for Mrs. Cunningham.

⁴¹Harper, Woman Suffrage, VI, p. 643.

⁴²Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1920'S AND THE SENATE CAMPAIGN

The next most urgent need facing the nation's women, as Mrs. Cunningham viewed it, was to activate the newly enfranchised women in such a way that they would become a powerful force in social and political movements. It was in 1920, then, that Minnie Fisher Cunningham began to focus her energies on this task through the League of Women Voters. The League was actually one of the standing committees of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Mrs. Cunningham had utilized the services of the League of Women Voters when she invited its chairman, Mrs. Jane M. Brooks, with Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and others, to attend the state meeting of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association in October of 1919.¹ Out of this convention came the State League of Women Voters.

From the inception of the National League of Women Voters, Mrs. Cunningham gave loyal support to the organization, which was primarily dedicated to the task of training for citizenship. A pledge taken by its members illustrated

¹ Mrs. Jane M. Brooks to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, September 17, 1919.

the seriousness the organization gave to the process of responsible citizenship:

Believing in government, by the people, for the people, I will do my best--

First: To inform myself about public questions, the principles and policies of political parties, and the qualifications of candidates for public offices.

Second: To vote according to my conscience in every election, primary or final, at which I am entitled to vote.

Third: To obey the law even when I am not in sympathy with all its provisions.

Fourth: To support by all fair means the principles of which I approve.

Fifth: To respect the right of others to uphold convictions that may differ from my own.

Sixth: To regard my citizenship as a public trust.²

Because this group understood citizenship in its broadest definition, it was devoted to many diverse issues and concerns. For example, in 1920, committees were appointed on child welfare, women in industry, legislation affecting the legal status of women, social hygiene, food supply and demand, and election laws and methods. Special emphasis was given to the promotion of a nation-wide Get-Out-the-

² A Record of Four Years in the National League of Women Voters: 1920-1924, A Report Prepared by the National League of Women Voters, p. 1.

Vote-Campaign in order that a greater number of voters would vote in the next presidential election.³

Mrs. Cunningham was in agreement with the policies and programs of the National League, and launched into its work with great fervor. By 1921, Minnie Fish had become the executive secretary of the organization. She also served on the general program committee with Mrs. Richard Edwards of Indiana and Mrs. Maud Wood Park, who was chairman of the committee as well as president of the National League.⁴ As the executive secretary, Mrs. Cunningham was one of the four officers who called on President Warren Harding at the White House in 1921. They pointedly asked him to appoint women to an impending armaments conference and to do something about world peace. The press was quite surprised when the delegation reported that the president had told them that they would not be disappointed.⁵ Minnie Fish's presence in Washington was beginning to be felt at many levels.

In 1922, she was chairman of the Pan American Conference Committee of the National League which staged, in

³National League of Women Voters: 1920-1924, p. 14 ff.

⁴National League of Women Voters: Third Annual Convention, A Report Prepared by the National League of Women Voters, p. 13.

⁵Los Angeles Evening Express, November 8, 1921.

Baltimore, the first general Pan-American conference of women ever held. It proved to be one which was considered particularly stimulating to the progress of women in the Latin American nations. Official delegates from twenty-two out of the twenty-five Latin American countries were present at the conference. By 1924, Mrs. Cunningham had become second vice-president of the League and chairman of the League's Get-Out-the-Vote-Campaign. Minnie Fish engaged an advertising agency, Underwood and Underwood, to cover the country with vote posters, urging the women to vote.

Because the League was non-partisan, its officers generally did not give overt support to any political candidate. It came as a surprise to some when Minnie Fish, long an ardent Democrat, came out in support of Dr. George C. Butte, Republican candidate for Texas governor. Butte was opposing Mrs. James E. "Ma" Ferguson, the Democratic nominee. Mrs. Cunningham did not consider her act as one that violated the trust of the National League, but rather one that gave her conscience a place of primacy. In a newspaper interview, she said:

It has always been a cardinal belief of mine that in those political campaigns which we face from time to time, where the lines are clearly drawn between right and wrong, every courageous citizen is under a moral obligation to stand up and be counted on the side of right as each one sees

it, or pay the penalty of forfeiting their faith in their own moral courage. . . . In addressing this communication to the women voters of Texas I do it with no intent to try to exert an influence on how you cast your own ballots. But I address you because we are near together to this obligation of citizenship. . . . With all my heart I believe now that any use of a citizen's vote to put into office candidates who will not recognize public office as a public trust, is truly a betrayal of one's State and Nation as any form of treason which can be devised. . . .⁶

This was an example of a type of moral precepts in which Mrs. Cunningham believed throughout her career. She loved and respected her political party, but she refused to put party over conscience.

The Democratic Party was Minnie Fish's political home, however. She nurtured it, and was nurtured by it. Perhaps no other woman in the history of Texas contributed so much to the Democratic Party as did Mrs. Cunningham. After the landslide victory of Republican President Warren G. Harding in 1920, the Democratic Party was in the doldrums of despair. It had been defeated by over seven million votes, and it was floundering. A group of six women met in the garden of Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, of Washington, D. C., to organize the Woman's National Democratic Club. Although Mrs. Cunningham was not present at that initial meeting, she soon became an active participant

⁶San Antonio Express, October 26, 1924.

in its functions, and later was made its executive director. From its inception the Club was strictly political. In fact, when Mrs. Harriman approached former President Woodrow Wilson for his endorsement, he said, "You will have my blessing if its purpose is political, but not if it is merely social."⁷

The Club leased an old house as its first headquarters, but, in 1924, the size of its membership forced it to search for new quarters. Minnie Fish was instrumental in securing a new location and getting the funds from Mrs. Edward B. Meigs of Washington, D. C. to purchase the new clubhouse. Mrs. Meigs later made loans to Minnie Fish so that she could carry out her political ventures. While Mrs. Cunningham served as the Club's executive director, she lived at its residence headquarters in Washington.

During this period Minnie Fish continued to cut a wide swath on the national scene when she was installed as president of the National Federated Women's Clubs and as chairman of woman's work in the Democratic National Committee.

She served with the Democratic National Committee in Washington from 1925 to 1928, conducting schools of

⁷Washington Post, June, 1952.

politics for women.⁸ In 1926, she was appointed to act as personal representative of Emily Newell Blair, Vice-Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who was unable to be in Washington. Minnie Fish's ability as a speaker was demonstrated when she was chosen by the Democratic National Committee to make a major political address for the Democratic Party over Station WRC, Radio Corporation of America, in Washington. In her speech she differentiated between the philosophies of the Democratic and Republican Parties and how they had been applied in practice. At one place in the speech she said:

. . . there is still a material difference between the Republican theory of a centralized form of government administered by a chosen, privileged class and the Democratic theory that "All governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . ."⁹

Minnie Fish's disdain for the Republican Party was further increased soon after her radio speech. The Woman's National Democratic Club had sponsored a nationwide slogan contest which offered prizes for the best entries. As chairman of the Slogan Committee, she was

⁸Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

⁹Release of the Radio Address of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham by the Bureau of Publicity of the Democratic National Committee, October 3, 1926.

warned by the Post Office Department that the Club had violated existing lottery laws. She was plainly offended by the allegation, as she said in an interview, using sarcasm very effectively:

. . . . The Administration should be congratulated on the zeal and enthusiasm with which the lottery laws are being enforced. Laws in connection with enforcement of prohibition, the leasing of oil reserves, or the letting of contracts for Government hospitals, might not receive such serious consideration; but so earnestly and effectively does the Post Office Department do its duty in the matter of postal regulations concerning lotteries, that it might be recommended to the Administration as an issue upon which to appeal to the people in 1928.¹⁰

It was evident to those persons who had followed Mrs. Cunningham's career that she was an extremely capable person. Her intellect, wit, ideals, perseverance, and wide range of experiences--all equipped her to seek another plateau. It was not too surprising, then, when the Galveston Tribune of August 30, 1927, published a front-page story about her future political plans.¹¹ She had returned to Texas, after an extended stay in Washington, D. C., for the purpose of becoming a candidate for the United States Senate. Her candidacy set a

¹⁰Release from the Woman's National Democratic Club, October, 1927.

¹¹Galveston Tribune, August 30, 1927.

precedent, since she was the first Texas woman in the history of the state to aspire to this high office. It also attracted national and international publicity. The Paris Times of Paris, France, called her "one of the shrewest women who have come to the fore in politics in America since the suffrage amendment was adopted." A Honolulu newspaper ran her picture with the caption, "She Would a Senator Be."¹²

It was clear from the beginning that she was in a political race that had many more complications than the fact that a woman was running as a candidate. A woman's candidacy was not to be discounted, however, because the ill-fated gubernatorial term of Mrs. James E. "Ma" Ferguson had cast some doubts on a woman's ability to hold public office in Texas. Yet the very nature of the campaign caused no little consternation among the candidates and general public alike.

Nine candidates filed--the incumbent, Senator Earle B. Mayfield, and eight aspirants including Don Biggers, W. A. Rowe, Jeff McLemore, former Governor O. B. Colquitt, Alvin W. Owsley, Mrs. Cunningham, and Congressmen Thomas L. Blanton and Tom Connally. These office seekers represented a broad spectrum of political ideologies.

¹²Quoted in Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

Senator Mayfield had not been particularly popular. Many of the voters resented his election in 1922, although they voted for him in order to deny the seat to former Governor James E. Ferguson. Mayfield had not been very effective as a senator. He failed to carry out his campaign promises, according to his opposition, and the two bills which he proposed were defeated without ever getting through the Senate. One of these dealt with the limitation of railroad expansion across interstate lines. Mayfield's opponents charged him with favoring the railroad companies in Texas. These companies could expand rapidly without obtaining a permit from the Interstate Commerce Commission. Any out-of-state competition, or even a newly established company in Texas, was forced to apply for a construction permit, which was a slow process. This allegation was credible since Mayfield was a former member of the Texas Railroad Commission.

The most ominous threat posed by the reelection of Senator Mayfield was the overt support given to him by the Ku Klux Klan. Mayfield denied this backing, saying that he had once been a member of the Klan, but had resigned. Yet his denial could not put away the fact that Shelby Cox, elected district attorney of Dallas County in the same primaries in which Senator Mayfield went to the United States Senate, was the head of a reorganized Ku Klux Klan.

None of Mayfield's opponents underestimated his strength, for he held a strong grip on Texas politics, and was capable of using this to his own advantage.¹³

Don Biggers, W. A. Rowe, and former Governor O. B. Colquitt dropped from the race before election day. Biggers, a Fredericksburg editor, withdrew from contention the last part of May, saying that he had announced primarily because of his opposition to "grain and cotton exchanges that traffic in futures."¹⁴ Rowe quit the race very early. Colquitt continued somewhat longer. He had been weakened politically when he was defeated by former Senator Charles A. Culberson in an earlier senate race. However, in 1926, his political fortunes were strengthened when he supported Dan Moody for governor. Long an advocate of the liquor interests, Colquitt, to the surprise of almost everyone, came out for prohibition when he began campaigning.

Jeff McLemore was one of the most colorful candidates. Born in Tennessee, he came to Texas as a young man in 1878. He had a multifaceted career which included work as a cowboy, gold prospector, newspaperman, and

¹³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 16, 1927.

¹⁴Seth Shepard McKay, Texas Politics, 1906-1944, p. 168.

congressman to the Texas House of Representatives.

McLemore was the only candidate who openly opposed prohibition.¹⁵

Owsley was the youngest of the candidates and a brilliant orator. His oratory, however, was described as being rather sophomoric. He was a member of the House of Representatives from Denton County, but was convinced that his real strength for the senate race was derived from his former position as national commander of the American Legion. The Texas Legion delegates had been reluctant to give him their support when he was elected to this office, but this measurement of his popularity with the ex-servicemen went unheeded by him.¹⁶

Congressman Blanton was considered unbeatable as the Representative from his home district. A man of a more conservative orientation, Blanton had alienated union labor some years before when he led a fight against the practices of some professional labor leaders. As an extremely competent politician and orator, Blanton was chiefly feared because of his ability to attack his opponents methodically. He and Congressman Tom Connally

¹⁵ McKay, Texas Politics, pp. 165-166.

¹⁶ Fort Worth Star Telegram, May 16, 1927.

risked their positions in the House to run for the Senate.¹⁷

Connally was the late entry into the race. During the summer and autumn months of 1927, pressure was exerted by his friends to get him to announce his candidacy at that time, but he refused. Mayfield taunted him, saying that Connally would not "run unless he had a cinch."¹⁸ Connally was exceptionally popular in his home district, but he did not have the same state-wide appeal. He always made a good platform appearance, however, and his affable personality drew many supporters to him. Owsley had been a staff officer in World War I, while Connally had served as a line captain after resigning his House seat. Of the men who opposed Mrs. Cunningham, Connally, in many ways, seemed to be the most redoubtable.¹⁹

The senate race was described as one woman competing with "several large, leather-lunged men in Texas for the Democratic nomination which so surely means election."²⁰ This kind of political race certainly did not frighten Minnie Fish. She had already faced far greater

¹⁷Fort Worth Star Telegram, May 16, 1927.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Washington Post, July 25, 1928.

challenges, and no one said that she did not have a chance of becoming the first woman senator. Texas' unusual election system, which provided for all the candidates to be voted on in the first primary on July 28, offered a good possibility that almost any one of the candidates would be in the runoff primary on August 25.²¹ Minnie Fish's major concern was to enable the citizens of Texas to know the political milieu of both Texas and Washington. She was sure that the average citizen in Texas was either ignorant of, or apathetic toward, what actually took place in national and state politics. Her experience, particularly in Washington, qualified her to speak with authority on this subject.

When she first announced her candidacy, Mrs. Cunningham deplored the growing tendency for centralization of power in Washington and the lessening of states rights as promulgated by Thomas Jefferson. On this, she said:

The federal government is assuming more and more power in governing the states of the union, and not enough emphasis is brought to bear on states rights which Jefferson devised as a protective method of insuring for the people the right for local self-government.²²

²¹Washington Post, July 25, 1928.

²²Galveston Tribune, August 30, 1927.

Minnie Fish's concern about this was no doubt enhanced by her feeling of contempt for the Republican Administration then in office. Asked why she was in the race, she replied:

Because nature abhors a vacuum and there is a vacuum at Washington. Recent races in Texas have been settled on side issues. I believe that I can put issues before the people that mean something.²³

She had a remarkable candor about her that enabled her to express an opinion or even to make a dogmatic statement if it were in keeping with how she believed. Referring to her senate campaign, she said, "I hope that I shall never make a speech which will leave the people who hear me in doubt as to where I stand."²⁴

Mrs. Cunningham presented her platform in unequivocal and positive terms. For example, she was for prohibition. A major reason for her support of this measure was her belief that this was the position of women, and she wanted to represent them. As for national prohibition, Minnie Fish was of the opinion that it had not been given a fair opportunity to succeed because the Prohibition Department of the federal government was incompetent.

²³ Milwaukee Journal, February 19, 1928.

²⁴ Press release from the campaign headquarters of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, February 9, 1928.

To dramatize her sentiment, she asked the question: "How can there be a sincere attempt to enforce it when the man at the head of the treasury department, under which prohibition is controlled, is a former distiller?"²⁵

Minnie Fish was for tariff reform, especially as a measure of farm relief and as a means of lowering the cost of living. She was convinced that the tariff commission had been disrupted by undue pressure from the Republican Party when it sought tariff favors for big business. However, her interest in the entire area of tariffs was sharpened when she received an unusual letter in December, 1927. Minnie Fish was still in Washington when a letter arrived from Mr. T. W. Graham of Pella, Iowa. The letter was long, poorly composed, and typed. The gist of it was a complaint about the inequities of the United States tariff system. Some years before, Mr. Graham as manager of an Iowa company which manufactured flour mill machinery, went to Canada to sell patent rights to a Canadian firm. While discussing the transaction, Mr. Graham asked if they bought their steel from England. They replied that they bought their steel from Jones and Laughlin, Pittsburg, because it was more economical. To Mr. Graham's astonishment, he was shown that, although there was a duty of

²⁵Galveston Tribune, August 30, 1927.

30 per cent on steel, Jones and Laughlin paid the duty and the freight. In addition to this, the steel manufacturer allowed the Canadian firm a 33 per cent discount on materials while Mr. Graham's company received no discount at all.²⁶

Because of the discursive, almost incoherent, nature of the letter, Minnie Fish was inclined to dismiss it. However, she wrote to Mr. Edward P. Costigan, Commissioner of the United States Tariff Commission, about the accusations made by Mr. Graham. Mr. Costigan replied:

Instead of mentally deficient, I consider your correspondent unusually sane. He is merely demonstrating in his own way the proven practice of dumping American manufactured articles in Canada at prices lower than those charged American consumers. . . .²⁷

Mrs. Cunningham was disturbed by Graham's complaint and she underscored tariff reform as one of the main planks of her platform.

Her platform also included a call for a reduction of taxes and an adjustment of the tax burden according to the distribution of wealth, for an adequate flood control

²⁶T. W. Graham to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, December 15, 1927.

²⁷Edward P. Costigan to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, January 10, 1928.

program, and for a water power program that would develop the country's natural resources for the public good. On foreign relations, she insisted that the United States maintain a policy which would have in mind the whole citizenship of the country and their genuine friendly feeling toward the peoples of the world. Mrs. Cunningham tried to draw special attention to the kind of treatment being accorded Central and South American countries by the United States. Nicaragua was a case in point. She had been acutely sensitive to the countries to the South since the Pan American Conference she supervised six years earlier, and she was determined to make this an issue. The League of Nations was struggling and had lost much of its public support. Yet Minnie Fish's keen insight into world problems caused her to call for full cooperation with the League, describing it as "the most workable machinery yet devised through which nations may cooperate to adjust their differences and preserve the peace of the world."²⁸ These issues were used not simply as campaign rhetoric. Minnie Fish believed them to be urgent; she articulated them well. Judge Sarah Hughes, of Dallas,

²⁸Press release from the campaign headquarters of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, February 9, 1928.

said in later years that Mrs. Cunningham made a lot more sense than the rest of the candidates.²⁹

Mrs. Cunningham officially opened her speaking campaign on Texas Independence Day, March 2, at Huntsville. Earlier she was quoted as saying:

My father was keenly interested in politics. He used to take me to Huntsville to political meetings. Driving back home he would discuss political affairs with me. They interested me strangely for so young a child and I never lost that interest.³⁰

Minnie Fish chose Ruby Neal Long, also a leader of Texas women, as her campaign manager.³¹ She had enlisted other women, some of national prominence, to aid her with the responsibilities of organization, travel, and speech making. One was Mrs. Dorothy Kirchwey Brown, wife of former Assistant Attorney General La Rue Brown, who campaigned for Mrs. Cunningham during the early part of the summer.³²

The shortage of campaign funds was critical to Minnie Fish. She had a generous offer from Dr. Louise

²⁹Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

³⁰Milwaukee Journal, February 19, 1938.

³¹Nashville Banner, January 8, 1928.

³²Washington Post, July 25, 1928.

Stanley, Chief of the Bureau of Home Economics, to arrange for the Cotton-Textile Institute to supply her with a complete wardrobe made of cotton materials. This wardrobe was to be used during her campaign for promotional purposes of the cotton industry.³³ Mrs. Cunningham liked the idea, as any woman would, but her departure for Texas prevented the plans from being carried out. Money, not dresses, was what Minnie Fish really needed to run her campaign. She turned to Mrs. Margaret Meigs, of Washington, for a loan of \$5,000, offering to mortgage her land as collateral and to take out an insurance policy in her favor. Without hesitating, Mrs. Meigs mailed her a check, but she declined to accept Minnie Fish's land as collateral. She wrote: "I simply will not take any of your land as security. . . . You know what my poor brain would be like if it got involved in land in Texas, and it would only worry me."³⁴ Mrs. Cunningham gave her a promissory note and applied for a life insurance policy in the amount of \$5,000, making Mrs. Meigs the beneficiary. Because the beneficiary was not a relative, Traveler's Insurance Company refused to write the insurance. On April 22,

³³ Dr. Louise Stanley to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, January 25, 1928.

³⁴ Mrs. Margaret Meigs to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, no date. (approximately March 12, 1928).

Minnie Fish added an appendage to her will in which she declared that her note was to be paid out of her estate before the original will was effective.³⁵ No other records are available to indicate whether or not an additional sum of money was borrowed from Mrs. Meigs. Five years later, however, Mrs. Meigs began a letter to Minnie Fish: "Thank you for the check which I am sure went through all right. Some day we shall be all straight I am sure."³⁶

With funds available, Mrs. Cunningham began an exhaustive campaign by car throughout Texas. She went as far west as El Paso, as far south as Brownsville, and as far north as the Panhandle. Toward the end of the campaign she traveled in East Texas, with the idea of ending her tour in Galveston. Traveling from 125 to 200 miles a day for several weeks and speaking whenever she could get a crowd, Minnie Fish demonstrated that a woman had the will and the stamina necessary to be a serious political contender. She was a fierce campaigner, and took every opportunity to score against her opposition. At McKinney, Texas, she described Senator Mayfield as a "political

³⁵Legal instrument of Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

³⁶Mrs. Margaret Meigs to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, April 16, 1933.

accident" and said that Texas had "no effective junior Senator for the past six years."³⁷ Mayfield and Connally both came under sharp attack when she accused Mayfield of a connection with the utilities corporations and Connally of his failure to push for an investigation of these corporations. As for Congressman Blanton, she caricatured his penchant for economy in government. She accused Owsley of trying to dodge the fact that former Governor James Ferguson had endorsed him. She produced circulars printed by Ferguson soliciting support.³⁸

Four days before the election, the Dallas Dispatch released the results of a poll, which professed to be the views of 350,000 voters. Of the six candidates still in the race, Mrs. Cunningham was fifth. The poll was surprisingly accurate, for she did finish in fifth place, polling 28,944 votes as compared with the top runner, Senator Mayfield, who received 200,246 votes. Minnie Fish carried one county--Walker, her home county. Mayfield carried 106 counties, but failed to carry his home county.³⁹

³⁷ McKay, Texas Politics, p. 170.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

One of Mrs. Cunningham's close associates stated that Minnie Fish's campaign was hampered by her loyalty to her husband, who was seriously ill at that time, and this subsequently curtailed her ability to move about the state.⁴⁰ Whatever the reason, Minnie Fish failed in her attempt to become the first woman from Texas to be elected to the United States Senate. She was disappointed, but undaunted. Immediately after her defeat she, with Thomas Blanton, took the stump for Connally, the runner-up. It was probably some consolation to Mrs. Cunningham that Connally defeated Mayfield in the primary run-off, and went on to win the general election.

⁴⁰ Statement by Mrs. Margaret Reading, personal interview, February 9, 1968.

CHAPTER V

THE GOVERNOR'S RACE: 1944

Sixteen years elapsed before Minnie Fisher Cunningham ran again for a high public office. In 1930, she became a staff member of the Texas A. & M. College Extension Service, joining the organization as an associate editor. In 1934, she was promoted to Texas Extension editor, succeeding Wayne Darrow, who became chief of the AAA Division of Information in Washington, D. C. She held this position until 1938, when she transferred to Washington with the Regional Contact Section of the AAA.¹

After living in Washington until 1943, Mrs. Cunningham returned to Texas, ostensibly to care for a sister who was in failing health. Her primary reason for resigning her position was because of a "gag rule" imposed on Extension Service employees which prevented them from promoting increased food production for the war effort. Her accusation was vigorously denied by Judge Marvin Jones, Administrator of the War Food Administration. Jones contended that Mrs. Cunningham had misinterpreted a directive sent from the office of M. L. Wilson, Director of the Federal Extension Service, and that her charge "that

¹Texas Extension Service News, April, 1938.

Director Wilson had deliberately lent himself to the suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of the press and to the sabotage of the war food production program is entirely unwarranted."² Minnie Fish firmly believed, however, that she had conclusive proof that some agencies of the federal government were subverting the United States war effort by seeking to curtail food production, particularly for the use by the armed forces.³

Mrs. Cunningham had no idea of returning home for the purpose of retirement. Having been active in politics during the decade of the 1930's, she was now free to devote more of her time to the political scene. Before she left Texas in 1938, Minnie Fish had organized the Women's Committee for Economic Policy. This was one of the many ad hoc committees she set up to cope with a variety of political and social needs. The initial purpose of this committee was to work to improve the poor conditions in teacher retirement and pensions for the needy aged.⁴ Later, this group of women fought Governor W. Lee O'Daniel when he attempted to pass a transaction

²Judge Marvin Jones to Representative Fritz. G. Lanham, October 22, 1943.

³Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Representative Sam Rayburn, August 10, 1943.

⁴Texas Observer, November 21, 1958.

tax in order to increase state revenue. With certain exceptions, O'Daniel's proposed measure would have placed a 1.6 per cent tax on all business transactions. It also called for the abolishment of the ad valorem tax.⁵ Had the transaction tax been passed into law, it would have placed a burdensome tax on the average citizen, and it would have been especially disastrous to a large segment of the population engaged in agriculture.⁶ Some of the members of the Women's Committee for Economic Policy formed a nucleus of women who rallied around Minnie Fish when she returned to Texas.

O'Daniel, although elected to a second term as governor, could not get along with the Legislature. The more he demanded, the more obstinate the legislators became. Any success he had with the legislative branch was credited to Lieutenant Governor Coke R. Stevenson, president of the Senate. O'Daniel and the Legislature reached a partial compromise when the Legislature agreed to pass some of O'Daniel's legislative proposals if he, in turn, agreed to run for the United States Senate, turning the governorship over to Stevenson. O'Daniel ran and won.

⁵S. S. McKay, Texas Politics: 1906-1944, p. 326.

⁶Statement by Mrs. Lillian Collier, personal interview, February 6, 1968.

Stevenson assumed leadership of the Texas government in 1941.⁷

During the early years of his office, Stevenson berated the federal government for assuming too much control of the states. He was especially critical of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal practices. He opposed the war-time measure of rationing gasoline and food. Referring specifically to gasoline rationing, Stevenson claimed that rationing would wreck the oil industry. In August, 1943, he told a sheriff's convention in Houston that gasoline rationing had closed 2800 service stations in Texas.⁸ It was obvious to many that Stevenson believed that the system of rationing was symbolic of the federal government's encroachment on the affairs of the states. Definitely a political conservative, he has been described as follows:

If the trend toward what some call 'liberal', others call 'radical' and still others call 'communistic' government continues, Stevenson might well be remembered as the last great voice in Texas calling out for status quo.⁹

⁷Paul Bolton, Governors of Texas, no page number given.

⁸Script of a campaign speech by Mrs. Cunningham, no date given.

⁹Bolton, Governors, no page number.

Stevenson's political posture was enough for Mrs. Cunningham and her colleagues to give serious opposition to him. A close friend of Minnie Fish said, "Well, I tell you, he [Stevenson] was a pretty hard governor on us good liberals, and we were having problem after problem. . . ." ¹⁰

Because Stevenson had decisively beaten all gubernatorial contenders in 1942, and because there was no prominent state figure apparently willing to oppose him in 1944, Mrs. Cunningham's group began to look for a potential candidate. While discussing some prospective opponents of Stevenson, the name of Professor J. Frank Dobie was mentioned. Minnie Fish, Mrs. Margaret Reading, and others in the group were excited as they anticipated the possibility of Dobie's entry into the race. Although it was late at night, Mrs. Cunningham telephoned John Henry Faulk, who was living in Austin, to come to the Driskill Hotel to help them make a decision. After a lengthy conference, the group agreed that Dobie, then an exchange professor in England, be asked to enter his name on the ballot. Shortly before their decision, Dobie had sent a cablegram to their group, expressing his concern about the direction which Texas politics was going. Part of the reason for Professor Dobie's concern was revealed when the

¹⁰Statement by Mrs. Lillian Collier, personal interview, February 6, 1968.

Houston Post, on April 26, 1944, published an article which described a preliminary caucus held by Sam K. Seymour, Colorado County Democratic chairman. Thirty-five persons attended and unanimously adopted a resolution that the Democratic Party in Texas should not participate in the July 19 Democratic National Convention. They also approved two other resolutions which would allow the Texas State Convention to nominate for the offices of President and Vice-President. This would enable the Texas delegates to by-pass President Roosevelt and Vice-President Henry Wallace. The other resolution would give the Texas Democratic Convention the authority to call a National Democratic Convention for those states which refused to participate in the Chicago convention.¹¹ Because of this turn of events, Mrs. Cunningham and Mrs. Reading were convinced that Dobie would not refuse their plea. A campaign headquarters was set up in Austin, and Mrs. Reading initiated a Draft-Dobie-for-Governor movement. Several cablegrams were sent to Dobie, but he declined to answer. Finally, he cabled his refusal to become a candidate. Regarding this, Mrs. Reading said, "Dobie's reply was so

¹¹Press Release by the Draft-Dobie-for-Governor Headquarters, no date given.

ridiculous that we were pretty much put out with him. And that was the end of J. Frank Dobie for governor."¹²

The liberal political element in Austin was in a quandary because of its inability to get a candidate to represent them. On May 19, shortly before the filing deadline, Minnie Fish wrote out a check for \$100 to the State Democratic Executive Committee, and instructed Mrs. Reading to have her name placed on the ballot. Mrs. Cunningham was in Austin at the time because she was chairman of the Walker County delegation to the State Democratic Convention. With her she carried instructions from the Walker County Democratic Convention which expressed much of her own sentiment. In part, the instructions read:

The Delegation is instructed to vote on specific issues as follows:

- A. To approve the National Administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- B. To vote for the renomination of President Roosevelt for a Fourth Term as President.
- C. To condemn the Fifth Column activities within the Democratic Party.
- D. To vote against the restoration of the two-thirds rule in the National Convention.
- E. To vote for submission of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States permitting

¹²Statement by Mrs. Margaret Reading, personal interview, February 9, 1968.

ratification of treaties by majority vote of both Houses of Congress.¹³

Stevenson's attempt to control the convention, coupled with his conservative political posture and anti-Roosevelt feeling, were more than Minnie Fish could tolerate. Although sixty-two years old, she was determined that another view be aired. In a letter to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, Minnie Fish explained why she ran for governor:

. . . So in May a small group of us said that after all we were only responsible to God for what we did ourselves and not for what other people did or did not do. So I announced as a candidate for governor and we made our campaign a straight, hot attack on the governor and his anti-war activities. That had the desired effect of taking his mind off of the presidential election.¹⁴

From the day Mrs. Cunningham announced her candidacy, she mounted a blistering attack against Governor Stevenson. Using the former draft-Dobie organization and Mrs. Reading as her campaign manager, Minnie Fish carried the battle into the camp of the political conservatives. She was well aware that her candidacy was only a token one, but she was determined that the citizens of Texas be

¹³Official Delegate Instructions, Walker County Democratic Executive Committee, May 9, 1944.

¹⁴Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, August 24, 1944.

aware of the issues involved. Public interest in the race increased because of her candidacy, particularly because she stressed the need to support the war effort. In an interview, Mrs. Cunningham said:

In seeking the governor's office, I have but one purpose, and that is to mobilize the strength and resources of the great State of Texas behind the men and women who are doing the fighting of this war.¹⁵

In effect, she had a one-plank platform: Full support of the war.

Mrs. Jane Y. McCallum, former Secretary of State under Governor Dan Moody, arranged for Mrs. Cunningham to open her campaign in the Crystal Ballroom of the Driskill Hotel on June 14.¹⁶ Until that date only one other candidate, Gene Porter of Waco, had made an opening speech.¹⁷ In general, Mrs. Cunningham's opponents represented a lacklustre group of individuals. Porter was a merchant and a self-styled philosopher. Having failed in a gubernatorial attempt in 1942, he promoted the idea that "happiness is the theme of one's life and the greatest key

¹⁵State Observer, May 29, 1944.

¹⁶Austin-American, June 11, 1944.

¹⁷Dallas News, June 11, 1944.

to happiness is kindness in humanity."¹⁸ W. J. Minton, a Sherman editor, campaigned on a minimum old-age pension and statewide prohibition platform. An eighty-two-year-old real estate agent from Houston, E. L. Carey, was perhaps the most eccentric of the candidates. A former railroad conductor and an accomplished ventriloquist, he pledged to initiate a legalized national lottery for the purpose of paying off war bonds. Alex M. Ferguson, of Howe, called for ridding Texas of the invisible government which was supported by financial wizards of the East for the purpose of electing their candidates. Another previous gubernatorial contender, Marvin Jones of Nacogdoches, ran on a platform calling for a graduated tax on real estate over and above the homestead, jury service for women, a law that all teachers be employed on a twelve-month basis at a minimum salary of \$100 a month, and a law placing all alcoholic drinks under the sealed package law. A Dickinson dentist, Herbert E. Mills, advocated reform in the state eleemosynary and penal institutions. William F. Grimes, a Houston attorney, completed the ballot list.¹⁹ For Minnie Fish there was only one opponent in the race--Coke Stevenson. During her address, she accused Stevenson

¹⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 13, 1944.

¹⁹Ibid.

of employing confusion and division to impede the progress of the war. Later she said:

. . . to be fair to Governor Stevenson, I believe if the war between the Axis and the United States were being fought in a vacuum, he would be strong for the United States to win the victory. But wars are not fought in a vacuum.²⁰

Speaking to an audience largely composed of women, Minnie Fish seemed especially agitated by what had happened at the State Democratic Convention on May 23. Only moments after the convention assembled, a split among the delegates was apparent. Two major factions developed primarily over the issue of whether or not the electors from Texas to the National Democratic Convention would be instructed to vote for the nomination of President Roosevelt. After much angry debate, a "rump session" was called by Mrs. Alfred Taylor, a supporter of Roosevelt and former president of the Austin League of Women Voters. The pro-Roosevelt convention left the Senate chamber and met in the Chamber of the House of Representatives. There they passed resolutions which pledged the support of its presidential electors for the nominees of the national convention and pledged its delegates to the Chicago convention to work

²⁰ Austin American, June 15, 1944.

and vote for the nomination of President Roosevelt.²¹ Minnie Fish was one of the delegates who participated in the pro-Roosevelt convention, and she contended that, although Stevenson had not been present at the state convention, he was the person who had led the fight to dump Roosevelt. She told her audience how Stevenson had perpetrated a conspiracy by making a tour through Texas, in April and May, ostensibly for the purpose of promoting good will, but really to influence county delegations to vote against any support of Roosevelt and New Dealism. To support her charge, Minnie Fish said that she had checked the roll call votes of the senate convention, and that the major pockets of opposition to Roosevelt came from those counties visited by Stevenson. She said: "He attacks the administration that has the responsibility for waging the war because it is the same administration against which he was fighting long before the war."²²

Mrs. Cunningham was politically astute and knew that she had to carry the attack to Stevenson whenever time and circumstance allowed. She did not let him forget her displeasure of the way the State Democratic Convention was handled. Early in June, she made a promise:

²¹ McKay, Texas Politics, p. 434 ff.

²² Austin American, June 15, 1944.

This summer our troops are invading the totalitarian-ruled areas of Europe. We will also have an invasion of the totalitarian government of Texas which we found, on May 23, has been dictated by a handful of Republican minded men in the Democratic party and the state executive office.²³

Her personal dislike of Stevenson gave her added zeal to see him defeated. She wrote a long-time friend that "our present governor is worse than Ferguson ever dared to be. . . ." ²⁴ Minnie Fish's tactic of taking the battle to Stevenson served a useful purpose, for she forced him to deny publicly many of her charges. Stevenson had stated earlier that he had no platform and would not campaign. This amused Minnie Fish because she said that she made him campaign and that he did it on her platform.

Mrs. Cunningham used a July Fourth celebration at her home town of New Waverly as the occasion to make her first state-wide radio address of her campaign. With Willie Ellis, a returned war hero, she was honored by the citizens of Walker County in special ceremonies. The event gave impetus to her speech, for she talked of the meaning of the Fourth of July--freedom, responsibility, and human cost. She believed that to be engaged in a war to protect human freedom meant to be totally involved in

²³ Dallas News, June 6, 1944.

²⁴ Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, August 24, 1944.

that war. Then she accused Governor Stevenson of refusing to use his high office "to support our men in the Battle for Freedom."²⁵ According to Minnie Fish, the governor had hidden his anti-war record behind his "no comment" statement. Rather, he had used his power to "separate the 'Home Front' from the 'War Front' and so abandon our boys to fight for Freedom with their Rear Guard thrown into confusion by his continual efforts."²⁶

Stevenson often mentioned that his record as governor was a good one, specifically referring to the financial deficit which had been removed during his tenure of office. O'Daniel had left the state in a financial predicament when he became U. S. Senator, and it was true that by 1944 the state government was operating with a surplus of funds. To the average voter, Stevenson represented a person who had the genius to put the state's finances in good order when no one else was able to do so. Mrs. Cunningham countered this understanding by saying that the war, not Stevenson, had brought prosperity to the state. She cited an editorial in the Dallas News which said that the deficit was wiped out by taxes on oil and

²⁵Script of a radio address by Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, July 4, 1944.

²⁶Ibid.

sulphur, both much used war commodities. Minnie Fish pointed out the irony of this because Stevenson, as a member of the House of Representatives, had "voted against every proposal to tax oil and sulphur that came up in his time."²⁷ In closing, Minnie Fish solemnly charged:

. . . Coke Stevenson has obstructed the War Effort and by so doing has given aid and comfort to our enemies . . . that he had offended our friendly neighbor Mexico to the point where that country has felt it wise to prohibit the importation of Mexican labor into Texas . . . that he has defrauded the Old People of Texas and made them pay millions of dollars which the citizens of Texas never meant for them to lose . . . that he has deprived our Texas soldiers of their chance to vote in the coming election . . . that he has harried and attacked the War Administration of our country . . . that he has deceived, betrayed and undermined the morale of Texans at work in the War Production Factories of our state . . . that he has injured our School System . . . that he has concealed his purposes, opinions, and political associates from the citizens of Texas . . . that he has conspired to²⁸ destroy our Party System of Government. . . .

Many persons did not take Mrs. Cunningham seriously about the charges she made during her Fourth of July address. However, her repeated verbal assaults against Stevenson proved to be a major source of embarrassment to him.

²⁷Script of a radio address by Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, July 4, 1944.

²⁸Ibid.

On July 12, Mrs. Cunningham's campaign was enhanced when President Roosevelt announced his decision to accept a fourth term nomination. The pro-Roosevelt people in Texas were not surprised at his decision, but many feared that his failing health would prevent him from continuing in office. Asked by an Austin American reporter to make a statement about Roosevelt's announcement, Mrs. Cunningham first observed that Governor Stevenson had no comment to make. Then she said:

I rejoice with all the mothers and fathers of the nation that the commander in chief has agreed to see our boys through this world crisis. I know at what sacrifice he made this decision. . . . I am profoundly grateful to him for his willingness to make that sacrifice.²⁹

On the day Minnie Fish heard the news, she wrote Mrs. Roosevelt a long letter, indicating her gratitude for the President's decision and giving information about the battle in which she was engaged. Speaking about the governor's race and the state convention, she wrote:

The fight has gone well. It now appears that Mr. Jesse Jones has rescinded the State Convention in which his nephew's hired hoodlums, booed the war effort, the men who are fighting the war and the Commander in Chief, himself. It also appears that some of the defiant support which has made Coke

²⁹Austin American, July 13, 1944.

Stevenson the objectionable character which he is has gone out from behind him in this hour of his greatest need. Therefore my opportunity for being actually elected as governor has risen from practically nothing to at least a good fighting chance.³⁰

Mrs. Cunningham was completely wrong about her own possibility of being governor. However, the pro-Roosevelt voting record of the Texas delegation at the National Democratic Convention proved her correct in believing that some of Stevenson's strength was waning at this level.

Minnie Fish, accompanied by Mrs. Reading, made two tours of the state in her race for governor. She had the overt support of many farmers and labor union leaders. Both the Harris County Industrial Union Council³¹ and the Jefferson County Political Action Committee³² gave her their full endorsement. As the campaign entered its closing days, it was obvious that Mrs. Cunningham did not have widespread voter support. Early in the campaign, she had written Dudley K. Woodward, Jr., of Dallas, soliciting his help. Woodward had served on her suffrage advisory

³⁰Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, July 12, 1944.

³¹General letter from Rocky L. Davis, President, Harris County Industrial Union Council, July 15, 1944.

³²Letter of endorsement from William Squire Taylor, Chairman, Jefferson County Political Action Committee, no date given.

committee and later supported her in her attempt to be elected to the United States Senate. Through the intervening years a split had developed between Woodward and Mrs. Cunningham, primarily because of the Roosevelt administration. After chastising Mrs. Cunningham for aligning herself with a group dedicated to injuring the institution of free government, Woodward wrote:

Incidentally, I can't find anyone, man or woman, who thinks there is a race for the governorship. I've talked to various groups here [in Dallas] and at Austin and I don't find anyone against Stevenson. Unless a revolution in sentiment should occur it looks like your campaign this time will fare even worse than your attempt at the Senate. . . .³³

Neither Woodward, nor anyone else, was able to keep her from finishing her campaign.

The week prior to the election, Mrs. Cunningham made three major addresses over a state-wide network. On July 19, she spoke to the women of Texas; on July 20, to Texas soldiers; and on July 21, to the voters of Texas. In her address to the women, Minnie Fish appealed to them to exercise their right to vote and not allow Stevenson to be re-elected because they had defaulted their

³³Dudley K. Woodward, Jr., to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, June 19, 1944.

responsibility.³⁴ Of the soldiers, Mrs. Cunningham asked a rhetorical question: Has Texas changed since you went away to war? She answered the question by citing the poor effort by Stevenson to support the war, the governor's refusal to call a special session of the Legislature to make provision for servicemen to vote, and Stevenson's feeble offer to hire returning servicemen for work only in the Texas Highway Department. By Minnie Fish's figures some 600,000 Texas men and women were disenfranchised because they were in the armed forces.³⁵ She began her message to the voters by reviewing the struggle she and others made to gain equal suffrage for the citizens of Texas. She contrasted the election of July, 1918, with the election of July, 1944. In 1918, the issues had been discussed because men on both sides of the question were willing to share their opinions and convictions. She stated that this was not true in 1944. Stevenson, the chief candidate, refused to speak on the issues, claiming that he was not campaigning because of the war. By not informing the people of Texas about governmental activities,

³⁴Script of radio address by Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, July 19, 1944.

³⁵Script of radio address by Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, July 20, 1944.

Stevenson, she charged, was not responsible to his office.³⁶

Governor Stevenson won a landslide victory in the Democratic primary, and went on to sweep the election from his Republican opponent, B. J. Peasley, in November. Of 823,460 votes cast in the July primary, Stevenson received 696,585. Mrs. Cunningham ran second, with 48,039 votes, and no other opponent of the governor was given one-half as many.³⁷

³⁶Script of radio address by Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham, July 21, 1944.

³⁷Official Vote Tabulation Certificate of the State Democratic Executive Committee, August 7, 1944.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

History has not had time to judge what kind of impact the life of Minnie Fisher Cunningham had upon it. The forces of human action, which she started and engaged in herself, are still operating. Few conclusions have been reached, and those only partially. History will never be able to draw all the conclusions. Yet, from a short-range view, a general conclusion can be reached: Mrs. Cunningham did not overturn the course of history, but she did bend history. What she believed, said, did, and reflected upon--all have vitally affected our small segment of time.

Her life was symbolized by her indomitable spirit, always resolute in demonstrating the difference between victory and progress. She won few victories, but she was utterly convinced that that movement in history called progress was invaluable. Progress meant, for her, any activity which improved the lot of human kind. Her only major victory which can be considered reasonably conclusive was suffrage. She believed in it and fought for it, not merely because women were not allowed to vote but because it was a basic human right. This was reflected in

her desire to work for equal suffrage for all and not exclusively woman suffrage.

She wanted victory for all of the causes she supported. Had she pursued only those human issues which promised her victory, however, she would have been lost in a maze of mediocrity. What quality of character drove her to engage in the battle for right? What quality was it that at times made her appear to be engaged in a futile effort? Or what was it that required Mrs. Cunningham to drive relentlessly a project through to its conclusion and required those who worked with her to do the same? Satisfactory answers to these questions will not be easily found.

Mrs. Cunningham can be characterized as a simple but, paradoxically, highly complex person. The simple, uncomplicated side of her nature was represented by the keen enjoyment she got from tramping across the pastures at Fisher Farms or from visiting with her intimate friends. Her complex nature is not as easily demonstrated. Perhaps it can best be understood by the times when often alone and for the sake of an ideal, she moved against an opponent or any opposing force. It is this side of her personality which is so perplexing. There are many psychological reasons why she developed into the person she was. No doubt her parents, marriage, environment, and emotional makeup

radically shaped her personality. Coupled with this were the circumstances of time and place which allowed her personality to mesh with certain critical human events. What is clear, however, is that she was a woman confronted with making a choice about what style of life she would lead. She chose to be in the mainstream of events, social and political, without regretting her decision or counting the cost. Her zest for life was always sharpened when the odds against her were the greatest. It was as though she was sustained by the realization that some positive results might come out of her labors. Whether it was suffrage, her political races, or one of the other causes she espoused, Minnie Fisher Cunningham gave herself unreservedly. Mrs. Democrat of Texas is gone. Her ideals are still with many of us.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Because the writer was unable to locate much material in published form, he had to rely upon many types of data to get the necessary information for his thesis. The personal interviews and conversations which he had with Mrs. Cunningham's family and friends were exceptionally helpful in obtaining background information. Mrs. Mary Weinzerl, of Riverside, Texas, helped to set up the interviews and to get permission from Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, of New Waverly, Texas, to use the Cunningham Papers. Included in the Papers were personal and general letters, press releases, radio scripts, manuscripts of speeches, news clippings, periodicals, pamphlets, legal instruments, written personal reflections, and a biographical manuscript. The McCallum Family Papers, in the Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas, provided much information. Dr. Llerena Friend, Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin, gave general direction to the writer with his research in Austin.

Books

- Bolton, Paul. Governors of Texas. Corpus Christi: The Corpus Christi Caller-Times, 1947.
- Goodwyn, Frank. Lone Star Land. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- Harper, Ida Husted, (ed.). The History of Woman Suffrage. Vols. V and VI. New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1922.
- McKay, Seth Shepard. Texas Politics, 1906-1944. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1952.

Unpublished Materials

- Bowles, Willie D. "The History of the Woman Suffrage in Texas." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1939.

Cunningham, Minnie Fisher. Crossing Over. Unpublished biography of Sallie Abercrombie Fisher. Original in possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, New Waverly, Texas. No date given.

----- . Unpublished essay about Dr. A. Caswell Ellis. Original in possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, New Waverly, Texas. No date given.

Perea, Laura. Unpublished article about Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Typed copy in possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, New Waverly, Texas. April 30, 1956.

Pamphlets

National League of Women Voters. National League of Women Voters: Third Annual Convention. Washington, D. C., 1922.

----- . A Record of Four Years in the National League of Women Voters: 1920-1924. Washington, D. C. 1924.

Texas Democratic Women's State Committee. Memorial Tribute to Mrs. Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Great American. No place of publication or date given.

Newspapers

The Austin American-Statesman. February 5, 1919.

The Austin American. June 28, 1928; June 11, 1944; June 15, 1944; July 13, 1944; February 8, 1945; May 24, 1946; November 24, 1946.

The Dallas News. June 11, 1944.

The Dallas Times Herald. December 10, 1964.

The Daily Texan. November 1, 1945.

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram. May 16, 1927.

The Galveston Tribune. August 30, 1967.

The Houston Chronicle. June 1, 1919.

The Los Angeles Evening Express. November 8, 1921.

The Milwaukee Journal. February 19, 1928.

The Nashville Banner. January 8, 1928.

The San Antonio Express. February 7, 1919; October 26,
1924.

The State Observer. May 29, 1944.

The Texas Extension Service News. April, 1938.

The Texas Observer. November 21, 1958; January 22, 1965.

The Washington Post. July 25, 1928; June, 1952.

Vita was removed during scanning