

Florence Mae Risser Funk (1871-1923) was one of McLean County’s most renowned suffragists and society women. Politically well-connected, Funk not only lobbied for women’s universal right to vote, but also worked to elect political candidates who favored the cause. In the 1916 presidential race, she actively campaigned for Charles Evans Hughes, a progressive Republican and expressed supporter of suffrage for women. She also rallied women to aid in the war effort during the First World War, and championed other important civic projects through her various affiliations at local, state, and national levels. Due in part to her leadership, Illinois became one of the first states to ratify the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which stated that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”¹ By the end of her brief life, Funk’s list of accomplishments was formidable.

Florence Mae Risser was born in Bloomington, Illinois on October 28, 1871. She was one of three children born to Abraham Frank and Mary Francis (Holmes) Risser. According to family history, Florence was a descendent, on her mother’s side, of William Bradford, who immigrated to North America on the Mayflower and served as governor of the Plymouth Colony intermittently between 1621 and 1657.²

Florence’s father, Abraham (by some accounts, Absalom; others, Abram) was a self-made man, a German immigrant who rose from humble beginnings to build one of the most successfully saddlery businesses in the United States.³ His example evidently instilled in Florence the fortitude to doggedly seek social change.

Abraham Frank Risser was born in the state of Hesse, Germany on September 9, 1831 and immigrated to the United States with his parents, Jacob and Mary Schnider Risser, in 1854, lighting eventually in Ashland County, Ohio.⁴ Abraham ventured farther West, establishing himself in the saddlery hardware trade in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois. His business plans were interrupted in 1862 when he enlisted in the Union Army’s 106th Illinois Infantry Regiment in Lincoln, Illinois.⁵ After the war, Abraham made his way to Bloomington, Illinois, to re-enter the saddlery trade, this time as a wholesaler. It was in Bloomington that he met and married Mary Frances Holmes, the daughter of prominent local attorney William Henry (W.H.) Holmes, on January 18, 1871.⁶

In 1877, Abraham moved his family to Chicago, hoping the larger city setting would connect his budding business to more competitive sales and distribution. The Risser family took up residence at 3251 South Park Avenue. Once settled, he formed the partnership of Risser & Reitz, a wholesale saddlery. Eventually, he assumed sole proprietorship of the company, renaming it A.F. Risser & Co. According to his obituary in the Chicago *Inter Ocean*, the company became “the largest of its kind in this country.” Seventeen years later, Abraham died suddenly of heart failure on September 23, 1894, leaving a widow, Mary; daughter, Florence; and sons Willis, Louis, and Frank.⁷

¹ “19th Amendment to the United States Constitution,” <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xix> (August 24, 2020).

² “Mrs. Frank Funk Active in Many Lines,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), January 10, 1914.

³ A Saddler makes saddles, harnesses, and other equipment for horses. “Saddler,” *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (14 July 2020).

⁴ “Abraham Risser,” New York, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957, *Metropolis*, 1854.

⁵ “Obituary Record for A. F. Risser,” *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago, IL), November 26, 1894.

⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

In 1890, following her formative years and education at both public and private schools in Chicago, Florence enrolled in Vassar College where she studied painting (drawing). She received a diploma in 1893.⁸ Florence and her classmates were termed “special, preparatory, and art students.”⁹ According to Dean Rogers, a library specialist at Vassar’s Archives and Special Collections Library, the School of Art and Music “was a separate division within the College.”¹⁰ Upon graduation, Florence returned to Chicago.

On December 11, 1895, Florence married Frank Hamilton Funk, whom she had known from her childhood in Bloomington. The wedding took place at 8 o’clock in the evening in her mother’s home in Chicago.¹¹ It was reported that the bridal party was comprised of the couple’s friends from Vassar and Yale.¹² The newlyweds took up residence at 907 N. McLean St., Bloomington, on the Franklin Park square, where they would remain for the rest of Florence’s life.¹³

With her marriage to Frank, Florence joined one of the most prominent and politically active families in McLean County. Frank was born to Benjamin Franklin and Sarah Jane (Hamilton) Funk on April 5, 1869. “Ben” was an agronomist and statesman, serving as mayor of Bloomington (1871-76, 1884-86) and as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1893-95).¹⁴ Frank was educated in local schools, including Illinois State Normal University in Normal, Illinois and Lawrenceville Academy in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He then attended and graduated from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, one of six Funk men to matriculate the Ivy League school. Upon his graduation in 1891, he returned to Bloomington.¹⁵

Florence and Frank were the parents to three children: Mary Cassandra (1899-1943), Benjamin Franklin II (1902-1969), and Florence Risser (1903-1981).¹⁶

Frank, like his father, was an agronomist by trade, managing 2,200 of his family’s 22,000-acre farm in Funk’s Grove, 20 miles southwest of Bloomington. Also like his father, Frank was interested in public service. In 1908 he was elected a Republican state senator in Illinois, serving until 1913. He made unsuccessful runs for governor of Illinois in 1912, and for the U.S. Senate in 1913.¹⁷ Undiscouraged, he was elected to the U.S. Congress from the 17th District and served three terms, from 1921 to 1927.¹⁸

Florence spent her early married life in Bloomington being a wife and mother, and dabbling in social circles. Having studied the visual arts at Vassar in her youth, and recognizing her need for life-long learning, she soon became interested in local organizations such as the History and

⁸ “Mrs. Frank Funk Active in Many Lines;” “Alumnae Biographical Issue” *Bulletin of Vassar College* (1939), Vol. 29, No. 2.

⁹ “Alumnae Biographical Issue” *Bulletin of Vassar College* (1939), Vol. 29, No. 2.

¹⁰ Dean Rogers, June 15, 2018, email message to Carol Straka.

¹¹ “Funk-Risser,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 12, 1895.

¹² “Wedding Fixed For Wednesday,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1895.

¹³ “Mrs. Frank Funk Claimed by Death,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), September 7, 1923; “Frank Funks Open Home for Summer,” *The Pantagraph*, June 8, 1923, 8.

¹⁴ “Former Mayor B. F. Funk is Dead,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), February 15, 1909.

¹⁵ “Frank Hamilton Funk,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails?memIndex=F000428> (15 July 2020); “Frank H. Funk Dies; Served in Congress,” *Daily Pantagraph*, November 25, 1940.

¹⁶ “Bloomington Precinct 2, McLean, Illinois,” *United States Federal Census Year: 1920*.

¹⁷ “Funk, in a Walk, Wins State Honor.” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), August 5, 1912; “Sherman and Lewis Elected to Senate,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), March 28, 1913.

¹⁸ “Frank Hamilton Funk,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

Art Club (a women's literary club organized in 1879) and the Amateur Musical Club (a women's music organization that promoted increasing opportunities for citizens of Bloomington-Normal to experience music); and educational societies such as the Margaret Fuller Club (a social and literary club for women organized in 1893).¹⁹ Florence's calling it seems, though, was community betterment; thus, she became actively involved in such local civic groups as the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A) and the Women's Club.²⁰ In particular, her joining the local Women's Club was apparently a turning point in her life. Women's Clubs were formed throughout the nation under the core belief that women had a moral duty and responsibility to transform public policy.²³ The Bloomington Women's Club was founded in 1897 with the goal of making "it easier for the sentiments and convictions of the women to find expression," as well as increase the political influence of Bloomington's women.²¹

Sometime in 1914, Florence Funk began to develop a keen interest in the women's suffrage movement, which was gaining traction around the country.²² Her commitment to the cause was probably an outgrowth of her involvement in the Women's Club at the local, state (Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs), and national (National Federation of Women's Clubs) levels.

Funk was a member of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association (IESA).²³ And under the able direction of its president, Grace Wilber Trout, aggressively pressed the Illinois General Assembly into passing the Presidential and Municipal Voting Act, first in the Senate, and then in the more reluctant House of Representatives. The "phone brigade" was the preferred strategy, followed by letters and telegrams, in lobbying key lawmakers.²⁴ When Governor Edward Dunne signed the bill into law on June 26, 1913, women could vote for president, select presidential electors, and fill municipal and township offices. While this was a big step forward for the cause of women's suffrage in the United States, there were stipulations to this right for Illinois women. Women had to use separate ballots and ballot boxes. Moreover, because of how the Illinois State Constitution was written, women could not vote for governor, state senators and representatives, or members of Congress. That being said, Illinois was the first state east of the Mississippi to give women limited voting rights.²⁵ Illinois women "lived to fight another day."

The intermediate victory was celebrated with a 150-automobile caravan down Michigan Avenue in Chicago, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.²⁶ Five of the automobiles carried African American suffragists from the Alpha Suffrage Club, newly-formed by Ida B. Wells-

¹⁹ "Mrs. Frank Funk Claimed by Death;" "History and Art Club," *The Pantagraph*, July 5, 1902; "Margaret Fuller Club," *The Pantagraph*, July 3, 1902.

²⁰ Ibid, 3; Joyce Appleby, Eileen Chang, and Neva Goodwin, *Encyclopedia of Women in American History* (Routledge, 2015), 455.

²¹ Mrs. Frank W. Disbrow, "Woman's Club of Bloomington," in *Home Town in the Corn Belt: A Source History of Bloomington, Illinois, 1900-1950 in Five Volumes vol. 5*, compiled by Clara Louise Kessler (Bloomington: 1950), 107.

²² The term "suffrage" is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as the "right or privilege of voting" and "the exercise of such a right;" "Suffrage." *American Heritage Dictionary*. <https://www.ahdictionary.com> (July 15, 2020).

²³ "To Chicago," *The Pantagraph*, March 23, 1917, 6

²⁴ Ellen Dubois, *Suffrage: Women's Long Battle for the Vote* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 185.

²⁵ Mark Sorensen, "Ahead of their Time: A brief history of woman suffrage in Illinois,"

<http://www.lib.niu.edu/2004/ih110604half.html>, 9 (April 21, 2018); Ron Grossman, "Illinois Women Win the Right to Vote," *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 2013.

²⁶ "Banners Great Suffrage Parade," *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1913.

Barnett. This Club would play a major role in “transforming the right to vote into genuine political power for African American women in Chicago.”²⁷

Catherine Waugh McCulloch, co-strategist in the Illinois campaign, called the suffrage victory in Illinois the “biggest thing to happen east of the Mississippi since the Civil War.”²⁸ But, the Act was not without its opponents. Attorney General Patrick Lucey openly expressed doubts about its constitutionality, even as the Governor affixed his signature to it; the General Assembly was pressed to repeal it; and advocacy groups such as the liquor interests, fearing the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (a staunch friend of women’s suffrage) and other societies with similar leanings, challenged it in court, ultimately, the Supreme Court.²⁹

To the chagrin of challengers, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the Act as written in 1914, and again in 1917.³⁰ Suffragists pushed then for full voting privileges in Illinois, which at that time would only have been realized with an amendment to the 1870 Constitution. Funk spoke at a meeting during which a new state constitution was discussed and said as much, even adding that full suffrage would be “impossible” in Illinois without a new constitution (which Illinois would not adopt until 1970).³¹

Meanwhile, the National Federation of Women’s Clubs, a considerable lobby in its own right, held its biennial convention in Chicago, June 9-19, 1914. Florence Funk attended that convention, and, with her fellow delegates, endorsed full women’s suffrage.³²

Funk was also a delegate to the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association convention held at the Congress Hotel in Chicago, October 28-30, 1914. The convention elected a slate of officers, including Grace Wilbur Trout as president for a second term. The delegates also selected 52 of their own to attend the national convention.³³ The question of whether or not to endorse the national resolution on suffrage, though, was a bone of contention. The convention saw factions form, one behind Trout and another behind Ruth Hanna McCormick, chair of the congressional committee for the National American Woman Suffrage Association. McCormick contended that Trout had suppressed information heading into the convention, leading to a less-than-fully informed decision on endorsement. While admitting she did not always distribute to the membership what she believed were protracted circulars, Trout contended that, with the suffrage bill the subject of court challenges and movements to repeal, nothing should be done to allow opponents either material or time to gain footing. In spite of the “bolters,” who were supported by renowned activist Jane Addams, Grace Wilbur Trout and her followers prevailed, and suffragists would eventually reunite behind the ultimate purpose of bringing full suffrage to women in Illinois.³⁴

Funk remained locally active in the cause, connecting her Bloomington colleagues to state and national platforms. On March 11, 1915, she held a reception and luncheon in the Green Room at the Women’s Exchange (located inside the Bloomington Club at 208-210 E.

²⁷ Ellen Dubois, *Suffrage: Women’s Long Battle for the Vote*, 186.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 185.

²⁹ “Suffrage Act Held Valid by Highest Court,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1914; “Suffrage Bill Signed,” *Dispatch* (Moline, IL), June 26, 1913.

³⁰ Grace Wilbur Trout, “Side Lights on Illinois Suffrage History,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (Vol 13, No 2, July 1920), 169 and 174.

³¹ “Citizens Talk of Law at Meeting,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), December 9, 1914.

³² “Club Women are Arriving,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), June 9, 1914.

³³ “Bolters Plan to Form New Suffrage Body,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1914.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

Washington Street), for Ruth Hannah McCormick and Antoinette Funk.³⁵ The ladies spoke of the role “street speaking” could play in winning support for equal suffrage at the national level.³⁶

Even before her involvement in suffrage, it became obvious that Florence had a penchant for being involved in politics. In 1912, she supported her husband’s run for governor of Illinois. Frank entered the race as a Progressive (“Bull Moose”) Republican. The Progressive Party was a populist movement started by Theodore Roosevelt that year as he endeavored to unseat William Howard Taft, his handpicked successor to the U.S. presidency in 1908.³⁷ Frank made a strong showing in the race, but at the end of the day, he ran a close third to former Chicago mayor, Democrat Edward Dunne (the winner), and Republican incumbent Charles Deneen.³⁸ The defeat did not work to the disadvantage of the suffrage movement in Illinois, though; Gov. Dunne signed the Voting Act in 1913, only a few months after his inauguration.³⁹

In 1916, Frank and Florence campaigned once again, this time for Charles Evans Hughes as he pursued the presidency in 1916. Hughes had been governor of New York (1907-1910) and, more recently, an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Now he would run for president representing a Republican party comprised of an older guard and Progressives.⁴⁰ His opponent would be Democratic incumbent Woodrow Wilson. But party affiliations took a back seat to views on suffrage. Hughes was “nailed to a suffrage plank,” while Wilson was ambivalent, believing suffrage to be solely a matter of states’ rights.⁴¹ Hughes was, therefore, the candidate of choice for the cause.

The Funks were named to a local branch of the statewide Hughes Alliance, formed to promote Hughes’s “fearless independent leadership” to the Highest Office.⁴² Florence became state organizer for the women’s branch of the Alliance and, in that capacity, was invited to speak at Republican Headquarters in Springfield on October 15, 1916.⁴³ In spite of a “throat infection,” she invoked both women and men to do their part in sending Hughes to the White House. An excerpt from that speech appeared in the next day’s *Pantagraph*:

Women of Illinois will have their first opportunity to vote for presidential electors in November. We have been given that right by the legislature. In explaining this I always say that legislative bodies have finished what was forgotten when the constitution was framed. We want every man in the state to do his share in inducing women to register and vote for Charles Evans Hughes. There are

³⁵ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1917*, 618; The Women’s Exchange was launched by the Day Nursery and Settlement Association as a place for women in the community to sell their wares, be it needlework or coffeecake. The goal of the exchange was to benefit the women of the city, with a small percentage of the sales going back to the Association; Anthony Bowman, “Biography of Jennie Thompson,” 2016, 3.

³⁶ Antoinette Funk was also a prominent figure in the National American Woman Suffrage Association with local ties; “Mrs. Medill M’Cormick Speaks to Women Here,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), March 11, 1915.

³⁷ Benjamin DeWitt, *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan, Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (New York: McMillan, 1915), 81-83.

³⁸ Gubernatorial Election, Illinois, *U.S. Election Atlas*, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state> (July 15, 2020).

³⁹ “Suffrage Bill Signed,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), June 26, 1913.

⁴⁰ “Republican Nominees Felicitate Each Other,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1916.

⁴¹ “To Organize Women Here,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), September 6, 1916.

⁴² “Hughes Alliance Formed,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), August 8, 1916.

⁴³ “Mrs. Funk Talks to Women,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 16, 1916.

*1,000,000 women in the state and they are in a position to determine the result of the coming election.*⁴⁴

Florence went on to extol Hughes's virtues, such as his dignity as a judge and businessman, and his willingness (when he served as governor of New York) to address that state's challenges. She politely suggested also that Hughes had neither the personality nor the natural campaigning skills of former president Theodore Roosevelt, a charismatic man and stirring orator for whom audiences would "shout for an hour at a time." Hughes, she asserted, "will not be able in this campaign to pat every man and woman on the back and ask them to vote for him." He would need the help of supporters at the local level. She then reminded the partisan gathering that, "50,000 club workers in Illinois were instrumental in bringing about the suffrage law. It takes no longer for a woman to register to vote than it does to buy a loaf of bread. It is their duty to register and vote in the interest in the Republican Party."⁴⁵

Prominent, educated women, like Florence, from across the nation supported Hughes. One such woman was Frances Kellor, a progressive activist who helped insert suffrage into national party politics. One way she did this was by organizing the Women's Special Campaign train, which was a way that talented women, who were sometimes referred to as "Hughettes," could get involved in politics. The Hughes Women's Campaign Train crisscrossed the country through twenty-eight states and the women who participated gave over 1,800 speeches under circus tents, inside coliseums, movie houses, and on street corners. When the Hughes Train arrived in Chicago in early October 1916, Kellor served on the reception committee to welcome the women on the train.⁴⁶

Florence Funk also helped organize women's Republican groups, including local Hughes Clubs, throughout Central Illinois. She spoke at several of these organizing meetings during the month of October 1916, including in Lincoln (October 12), Mason City (October 15), McLean (October 18), Atlanta (October 22), Washburn and Eureka (October 26), and finally in Pontiac and Chenoa (October 31).⁴⁷

The Funks and their fellow Alliance members organized a barbecue to rally votes for Justice Hughes, scheduled for October 20, 1916 at Funk's Grove. The October 9 *Pantagraph* predicted a crowd of 30,000 would descend upon the feast and hear the slate of distinguished speakers.⁴⁸ But, despite "best laid plans," which included no fewer than 12 cattle ("beeves") for barbecue, an early snowstorm struck McLean County the day of the event, making the about 12-mile passage to Funk's Grove difficult at best.⁴⁹ Undaunted, the Alliance committee moved the speakers (many of whom had arrived by train) to the Coliseum at 400 W. Front Street in Bloomington. The rally had to share the space with the second annual Corn & Grain Show,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁶ "Representative Women," *The Pantagraph*, October 7, 1916, 16.

⁴⁷ "Lincoln Women Organize," *The Pantagraph*, October 13, 1916, 17; "Will Organize Hughes Club," *The Pantagraph*, October 16, 1916, 2; "McLean Women Organize," *The Pantagraph*, October 20, 1916, 6; "Two Meetings in Woodford," *The Pantagraph*, October 26, 1916, 3; "Women in Many Towns," *The Pantagraph*, November 1, 1916, 11; "Chenoa," *The Pantagraph*, November 2, 1916, 9.

⁴⁸ "To Roast Twelve Beeves for Republican Barbecue October 20," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 9, 1916.

⁴⁹ "A Day of Sound Republican Doctrine," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 21, 1916.

which was taking place simultaneously at the Coliseum. However, due to inclement weather, neither event achieved the attendance they had expected.⁵⁰

An impressive line-up accepted invitations to speak at the Republican rally: Charles Fairbanks of Indiana, Gov. Hughes's running mate; and several prominent Illinois politicians, including former governor Charles Deneen, congressional candidate Medill McCormick, gubernatorial candidate Col. Frank Lowden, lieutenant gubernatorial candidate Col. John Oglesby, former U.S. senator William Mason, and sitting U.S. senator Lawrence Sherman.⁵¹

The topics, predictably, included the war raging in Europe and the possibility of American involvement, the cost of living, the Underwood Tariff, President Wilson's leadership, and, of course, the desperate need for Justice Hughes's ascension to the presidency.⁵²

On November 7, 1916, thanks to the efforts of the Funks and the Alliance, Mr. Hughes carried Illinois. But, he was defeated by President Wilson in a "nip and tuck" national election. The electoral tally was 277-154; the popular vote—9,126,868 to 8,548,728.⁵³ Hughes would return to the Supreme Court bench a few years later, this time as chief justice.

Although Wilson's campaign slogan was "He kept us out of War," on April 6, 1917, a little more than a month after his inauguration, Wilson signed a declaration to commit the United States to The Great War, later known as World War I. Germany's practice of unrestricted submarine warfare and its conspiracy with Mexico to reclaim U.S. lands in the Southwest were significant factors in the decision to go to war.⁵⁴ Problematic was the United States' lack of footing for war. Upon the decision to go to war, the nation's standing army was only 100,000 men. But mobilization occurred quickly, and, at the height of its fighting strength, the army burgeoned to more than 4.7 million men, under the able command of General John J. Pershing.⁵⁵

Women, too, mobilized. As the country turned its attention to war, some women's organizations took time off from their own fight for equal suffrage and other endeavors to join the war effort. Various women's organizations, such as the Illinois Women's Suffrage Association and the Women's Club (both in which Florence was deeply involved) kept their identities and original tenets, but joined forces to engage in such activities that enlisted women for a variety of hands on roles. These included encouraging liberty bond sales, supporting service men and their families, conserving supplies (not the least of which was food), and aiding European victims of the war's devastation, principally women and children. They would bring the "whole woman power of the nation" to bear in the war effort.⁵⁶

A challenge that arose for the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association in these trying times was public relations. While it endeavored to support the "fight" in Europe, it did not want to lose momentum in its own fight for full suffrage in Illinois. As American leaders were shipping supplies to France and readying a fighting force for war, some of the more radical Illinois

⁵⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁵¹ "To Roast Twelve Beeves for Republican Barbecue October 20."

⁵² "A Day of Sound Republican Doctrine."

⁵³ "United States Presidential Election of 1916," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1916> (15 July 2020).

⁵⁴ Lee, Roger. "Zimmerman Telegram: What Was The Zimmerman Telegram, and How Did It Affect World War One?" *The History Guy*, https://historyguy.com/zimmerman_telegram.htm (19 July 2020).

⁵⁵ George C. Herring, "James Hay and the Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1916," *Journal of Southern History* (Vol. 30.4, 1964), 383.

⁵⁶ "Women of Illinois Enlist for Service Behind Uncle Sam," *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1917.

suffragist factions picketed in Washington D.C. in late summer and early fall 1917. IESA president Grace Wilbur Trout distanced the Association from these well-intentioned, but overzealous groups, and formed the Women's Emergency League. The WEL had the dual purpose to "raise funds and carry on a campaign of information to pass the constitutional convention resolution in 1918" and at the same time ". . . demonstrate patriotism in state as well as national affairs in this hour of world peril."⁵⁷

Florence Funk accepted a commission in the WEL as "field adjutant of fifth corps," consisting of women forming "three divisions of McLean, Livingston, Logan, and adjoining counties."⁵⁸ In this capacity she showed her considerable organizational skills in conducting meetings and doing the purposed work of the League.⁵⁹

Even as Allied and Central Powers fought a battle of attrition on a grand scale in France, sans the United States, President Wilson created the Council of National Defense (C.N.D) in August 1916. Wilson's vision for the Council was that it would engage the Nation, down to the grass roots level, in providing the war's victims, combatants and noncombatants alike, with the sustenance for survival; restore their lives when peace returned; and boost morale in these difficult times. Starting in May 1917, individual states were asked by the "Section on Cooperation between the States" to create State Councils of National Defense to assist in carrying out the work of the national C.N.D. The Illinois State Council of National Defense was formed on May 2, 1917.⁶⁰

In February 1917, prominent women gathered in Washington D.C. and formed the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense. The Women's Committee made it their mission to assist with the "problems of food, morals, health, education, recreation, the quality of citizenship, and the securing of a greater measure of social and industrial democracy for women and children workers."⁶¹ Shortly after that, women's committees were formed in individual states. Their job was to call local women's groups together to form a more cohesive organization. Once that was completed, permanent leadership was elected.

Florence Funk, again, answered the call of duty. She represented the 17th congressional district on the state committee of the Women's Council of National Defense; and, was selected to be one of 20 members of the Women's Executive Committee of the Illinois Division of the Women's Council of National Defense.⁶² Following the November 11, 1918 armistice, as the Doughboys headed for home, she accepted an appointment as secretary of the state committee for the promotion of community Councils of Defense.⁶³ As late as October 1919, Funk addressed the topic of the "relation of Women's Clubs to community Councils [of National Defense]" in a speech at the Better Community conference in Urbana, Illinois.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ "Women of State Preparing Drive," *Rock Island Argus*, September 11, 1917, 35.

⁵⁸ "Emergency League in Chain of Conferences," *Dispatch* (Moline, IL), July 26, 1917.

⁵⁹ "Emergency League Rallies in State," *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1917.

⁶⁰ "Council of National Defense and State Defense Councils,"

<https://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~wgreen/ECDnatdefcounl.html>, Date Accessed, September 14, 2017

⁶¹ "Final Report: Woman's Committee State Council of Defense of Illinois and Woman's Committee Council of National Defense Illinois Division, April 1917-July 1919," page 7-8,

<http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/ref/collection/isl8/id/2837>, Date Accessed September 14, 2017.

⁶² "Women to Register for Nation's Service," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), May 25, 1917; E.E. Pierson and J.L. Hasbrouck, ed. *McLean County Illinois in the World War 1917-1918* (Bloomington, McLean County War Publishing Company, 1921) 269.

⁶³ "Mrs. Frank H. Funk is State Secretary," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), March 13, 1919.

⁶⁴ "Home from Conference," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), October 6, 1919.

Funk and her various affiliations took to fighting the war with every bit the tenacity of the Allied Expeditionary Force, even adopting a military metaphor with such monikers as “field adjutant” for a leader, “divisions” for groups of women supporters, and “recruitment” for attracting women to supportive roles.

An important task of the Women’s Committee of the C.N.D. was to register women for war service, whether it was as volunteers or paid positions. Starting in September 1917, the Woman’s Committee of the C.N.D. Illinois began the laborious task of registering women aged 16 and older throughout the state. The state Women’s Committee proclaimed that the federal government wanted to register all women to determine how much it could depend on women for assistance in the war effort and find out what each woman in the state was capable of doing. The types of “facts” that the government were interested in knowing would help them determine what type of work or service the women could provide. The lines of work were divided into agricultural, clerical, domestic, industrial, professional, public service, social service, Red Cross, allied relief work, and miscellaneous.⁶⁵ They also substituted in jobs servicemen held before the war; and they would help the families of the servicemen in a variety of ways. Officials also wanted to know about women’s resources, such as if they had an automobile that could be donated for certain services or a typewriter they could be called upon for use.⁶⁶ It was also emphasized by state officials that “the fact that a woman registers does not mean she will be taken away from her home.”⁶⁷ If, for some reason, a woman was not able to offer service on the home front because of a dependent family, illness, age, or any reason that would keep her from doing war work, the government wanted to know that too. It was just as important to the “government to know that you are unable to assist as to know that you are able to do so.”⁶⁸ Statewide registration began on September 17, 1917 and continued throughout the war. “The woman,” declared the women’s committee of the Council of National Defense, “holds the jobs, fills the breadbaskets, and dresses the wounds of the boy at the front, at the same time nourishing his family at home . . .”⁶⁹

As part of her work, Florence organized many of the units of the Council of Defense throughout the state and was the speaker on numerous occasions for the promotion of War work. She was also instrumental in organizing the work of the Liberty Loan campaigns undertaken by the Women’s Committee of the C.N.D. And, her leadership helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars in funds that went towards the Belgian Relief, enlist 700,000 Illinois women that engaged in various types of war service, distribute 81,000 patriotic song books throughout Illinois, establish a Training Farm for women in Libertyville, promote War Gardens, and raise funds to send women overseas to help with the war effort as well. She continued serving on the Women’s Committee of the C.N.D. until it disbanded in October 1919.⁷⁰

Florence Funk was, in the parlance of our times, a “multi-tasker.” She tirelessly supported the war effort, but far-from-abandoned her work with both the Illinois Women’s Suffrage Association and the Women’s Club. It appears she immersed herself in Club activities at the local, state, and national levels. On June 10, 1918, Florence and other members of the

⁶⁵ “Women to Meet to Discuss Registration,” *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), September 1, 1917.

⁶⁶ “Women Organize for War Service,” *The Pantagraph*, October 16, 1917, 15.

⁶⁷ “Urge Women to Activity,” *The Pantagraph*, September 7, 1917, 1.

⁶⁸ “Women Meet Today to Talk Registration,” *The Pantagraph*, September 4, 1917, 7.

⁶⁹ “To the Women of Illinois,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1917.

⁷⁰ Pierson and Hasbrouck, 269.

Republican Women's Association met to discuss the continued stalled suffrage amendment. At this meeting, resolutions were passed urging the passage of the federal suffrage amendment.⁷¹ In May that same year, having returned to Bloomington following a conference of the National Federation of Women's Clubs in Hot Springs, Arkansas, delegate Funk shared with the *Pantagraph* the three-plank platform established by the national organization: suffrage, conservation, and public health.⁷² She served as vice president of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs and, her skills as a society woman never diminishing, hosted a gathering of 150 members of the state organization in Bloomington's "Women's Club rooms" (located inside the Odd Fellows Temple, southwest corner of Jefferson and East streets), followed by an evening reception for IFWC board members and local officers at her home on January 29, 1919.⁷³ She ran for president of the IFWC at the biennial convention in Peoria in June 1919, but could not muster enough support to defeat Mrs. William S. Hart of Benton. While she had resigned as vice president before the election, the state organization was not about to let Funk be without an important job to do.⁷⁴ Over the years, its membership had taken note of her natural skills at oratory, and a week after the convention she was appointed chairman of the IFWC speaker's bureau.⁷⁵

While the war raged on in Europe, the United States continued the battle over suffrage on the home front. Between January 1918 and June 1919, the proposed 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which stated that citizens could not be denied the right to vote on the basis of sex, was considered by Congress five times. Each time it was defeated by the narrowest of margins, with southern Democrats stubbornly holding out. The "battle" was to be waged on two fronts: moral and strategic. Could women whose war effort had been universally praised be denied a vote in the republic they sacrificed to preserve? On strategic grounds, could Democrats—traditionally opposed to women's suffrage, especially in the South—withstand a rallying of votes from states that *had* granted equal suffrage? Rep. James Cantril (D-Ky) may have responded best: "For southern Democrats in Congress to say to patriotic women of the Nation that suffrage shall not be given to them will bring down upon our heads such condemnation from the suffrage states that we will be driven from power."⁷⁶

On the eve of midterms, President Wilson pleaded with Democratic caucuses in the House and Senate to endorse the 19th Amendment.⁷⁷ The President apparently began to see the "writing on the wall," as it were, and encouraged his party to see it too. After all, by this time, even male equal suffrage leagues had emerged to join women in pursuit of the Amendment.⁷⁸

Some contemporary pundits viewed women as being, in effect, a "third party" that could decide issues apart from the traditional Republican and Democrat groupings.⁷⁹ To that end, the National American Woman Suffrage Association confidently decided—at its 50th annual, and final, convention in St. Louis on March 24, 1919—to become the League of Women Voters.

⁷¹ "Club Notes," *The Pantagraph*, June 11, 1918, 11.

⁷² "Women from All Over Nation Meet," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), May 17, 1918.

⁷³ "Women's Club Conference," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), January 29, 1919; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1917*, 465.

⁷⁴ "Mrs. Hart Elected President of Women," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), June 6, 1919.

⁷⁵ "Mrs. Funk Honored," *Paxton Record*, June 12, 1919.

⁷⁶ "Women Wield Big Stick for Equal Suffrage," *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1918.

⁷⁷ "Upholders' of Wilson Hold Up Suffrage Law," *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1918.

⁷⁸ "Equal Suffrage League of Males Rounds Intro Form," *Houston Post*, May 15, 1919.

⁷⁹ "Says Nation Needs Women as Voters," *New York Times*, June 17, 1919.

The League of Women Voters remains a significant non-partisan force in American politics to this day.⁸⁰

White women eventually won the right to vote in all elections through passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. African Americans would not enjoy the same rights to vote until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It would take several subsequent amendments to the Voting Rights Act in the 1970s and 1980s to ensure that all U.S. citizens could exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed right to vote. The 19th Amendment was officially adopted on August 26, 1920 after the necessary 36 states ratified the measure, with Illinois being one of the first states to ratify it, owing in part to Florence Funk's efforts.⁸¹ Florence was part of a suffrage delegation that was in Springfield on June 9 when ratification of the amendment was brought to the General Assembly for the vote.⁸²

Even after the 19th Amendment was ratified, Funk knew there was still work to be done. She spoke on several occasions to various women's groups about "their new responsibility" now that they had achieved the right to vote.⁸³ She encouraged women to exercise that hard-fought for right to vote the rest of her life.

In July, 1920, Florence, again, turned some of her attention to the political aspirations of her husband, Frank, who announced his intention to seek a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 17th congressional district, an office held by his father 25 years earlier. After serving as a state senator and two failed bids for governor and U.S. senator, Frank had accepted an appointment to the Illinois Public Utilities Commission and served that body from 1913 to 1921. But, evidently, his ambitions for office seeking had not waned. He won the Republican nomination over Woodford County judge Arthur C. Fort on September 15, 1920.⁸⁴ On election day, he handily defeated Democrat Frank Gillespie of Bloomington with more than 67 percent of the popular vote.⁸⁵ Frank Funk was sworn in on March 4, 1921 for the first of his three terms in the House.⁸⁶

While in Washington D.C., Florence reveled in the social opportunities afforded a congressman's wife. She became involved in the University Women's Club of Washington (even serving a term as director), the Political Studies Club, and the Congressional Club.⁸⁷ And, she had not forgotten her motherly obligations. She organized a luncheon on December 26, 1922 at Rauscher's, and a dance at the Congressional Club on January 2, 1923, for her daughter Mary Cassandra.⁸⁸ Son Benjamin, a student at Yale, also attended the dance.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ "League of Women Voters," *Wichita Daily Eagle*, June 1, 1919.

⁸¹ Monroe, Judy (1998). *The Nineteenth Amendment: Women's Right to Vote* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Ensloe Publishers, Inc., 1998), 77.

⁸² "Assembly to Vote on Suffrage Today," *The Pantagraph*, June 10, 1919, 1.

⁸³ "Mrs. Frank Funk is Speakers at Delavan," *The Pantagraph*, October 14, 1920, 2.

⁸⁴ "Funk's Plurality in District 2,686," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), September 17, 1920.

⁸⁵ "Incomplete Returns in County Indicate a Big Republican Victory," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), November 3, 1920.

⁸⁶ "Frank Hamilton Funk," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774 - , <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails> (19 July, 2020).

⁸⁷ "Mrs. Frank H. Funk Dies Suddenly in Illinois," *Washington Evening Star*, September 7, 1923; "Mrs. Frank H. Funk Claimed by Death,"³; "Active in Club Life at Capital," *The Pantagraph*, May 10, 1923, 8.

⁸⁸ "Washington Society," *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1922.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

Florence was also involved in the Illinois Parent-Teacher Association, Play for Children, the Women's Relief Corps of the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Trade Union League.⁹⁰

A few months before her death, Florence, Frank, and their children returned from Washington to Bloomington for the summer. They stayed with Frank's mother, Sarah Funk (widow of Ben Funk) who lived at 1008 N. Main Street in Bloomington. It appears that Florence's health began to decline while her family was staying with her mother-in-law.⁹¹ Her condition had not been considered serious until she developed paralysis and passed away on September 6, 1923 at the age of 51. Her death was attributed to two ailments: Bright's Disease (which is an inflammation of the kidneys) and cerebral edema (a build-up of fluid on the brain).⁹²

In an article published the day after her death, the author stated that Florence Funk "was a woman of liberal culture, energetic nature, of comprehensive views on all questions of public interest, and possessed of a large and sympathetic heart."⁹³ Her obituary in the *Pantagraph* published that same day proclaimed, "Thus passed at the zenith of her usefulness one of the best known and most honored and respected women of Bloomington, and one whose work in many good causes had made her known throughout the state of Illinois."⁹⁴

Her funeral was held at her mother-in-law's home at 1008 N. Main Street. It was very largely attended with many friends, relatives, and representatives of the various organizations to which Florence belonged. She was buried in the Funk family plot at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.⁹⁵

It is unfortunate that Florence's opportunity to enjoy the nationally won franchise for women lasted only three years. However, she did live to see the first woman elected to serve in the Illinois House of Representatives—Lottie Holman O'Neill from Downer's Grove—who was elected in 1922.⁹⁶

By: John Capasso, 2020

⁹⁰ "Mrs. Frank Funk Claimed by Death," 3; The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) is a fraternal organization made up of Union Army veterans.

⁹¹ "Frank Funks Open Home For Summer."

⁹² "Standard Certificate of Death: Florence Risser Funk," Filed September 8, 1923, State of Illinois, Department of Public Health-Division of Vital Statistics, Cert. No. 34793, Frank H, Funk [husband] informant; "Mrs. Frank H. Funk Claimed by Death," 3.

⁹³ "Death of Mrs. Funk," *The Pantagraph*, September 7, 1923, 4.

⁹⁴ "Mrs. Frank Funk Claimed by Death," 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ "Lottie O'Neill, Illinois' first female state legislator, decided a woman's place was also in Springfield," *Chicago Tribune*, March 29, 2019.