They Remembered the Ladies and did Much More Than That

The 1912 mission statement of the National Men's League for Woman Suffrage is a primer for any ally.

June 7, 2017 by Brooke Kroeger Leave a Comment

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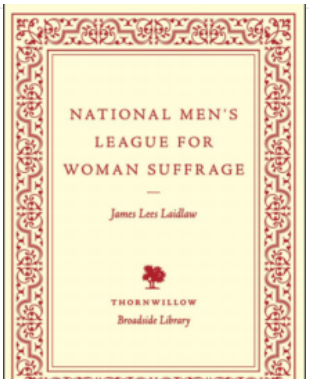

The sumptuously printed Broadside Library of Thornwillow Makers now includes the mission statement of the National Men's League for Woman Suffrage as presented in 1912 by James Lees Laidlaw, the president of this organization of thousands of prominent men across thirty-five states. The league is the subject of my new book, *The Suffragents: How Women Used Men to Get the Vote.* Laidlaw was a financier, scion of Laidlaw & Company, and a member of the board of directors of what became Standard & Poor's. He was, not coincidentally, the husband of the great New York suffragist, Harriet Burton Laidlaw, and one of many

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creative force. I happened on the statement in a suffrage scrapbook, attributed to the *St. John Daily Evening Globe* of New Brunswick, Canada, dated May 17, 1912. It was included as part of a column, which you can read below, signed by the playwright, George Middleton, another great Men's Leaguer, whose wife and muse was the actress and suffragist Fola La Follette. I haven't seen the mission statement anywhere else. Here is Middleton's column and Laidlaw's text once again:

There are many men who inwardly feel the justice of equal suffrage, but who are not ready to acknowledge it publicly, unless backed by numbers. There are other men who are not even ready to give the subject consideration until they see that a large number of men are willing to be counted in favor of it. The man who is so prejudice that he will not consider it at all will pass away with this generation if not sooner.

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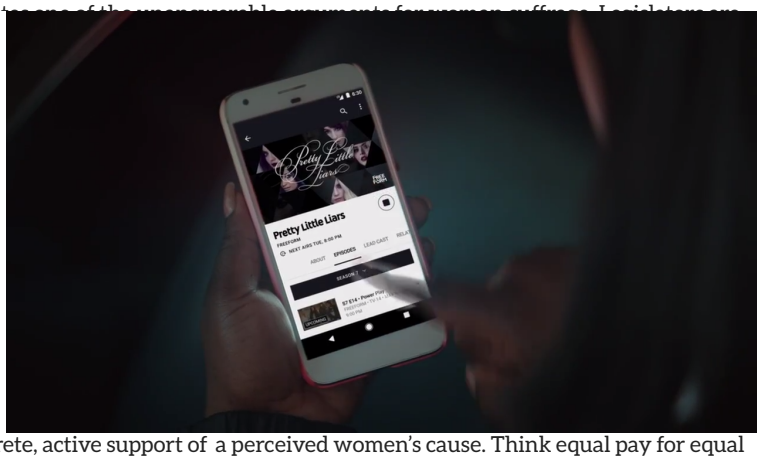
THE STARS' BEST KEPT SECRETS: AMBER HEARD

The usefulness of the Men's Leagues politically to women cons[illegible] mainly responsible to voters, and voters only. In the majority o Legislatures, endeavoring to bring about the submission of a w effort on the part of non-voters, everyone knows. If a well-orga Legislatures they will get it. After that, it is only a question of p support.



The great educational work in the woman's movement has bee odds. There is still work to be done and hard work. We men ca too many men have done, leaving the women to toil and strug

As statements of purpose go, I would submit that the Men's Lea want to support a cause not readily considered their own. Just their own volition once again, now, a hundred years later, in concrete, active support of a perceived women's cause. Think equal pay for equal work or family leave or against sexual trafficking and violence against women.

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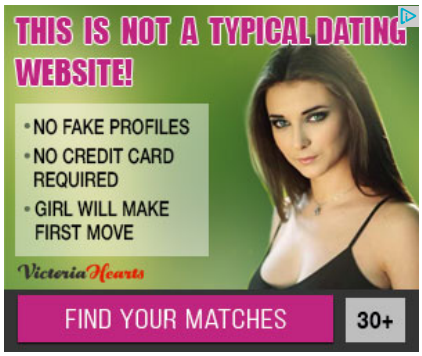

The photograph just below is of the bronze plaque that hangs in the State Street Side lobby of the state capital building in Albany, New York, a tribute to the eighty-three most important women of the state's seventy-year-long suffrage campaign and one man, James Lees Laidlaw, honored among the ten suffragists listed on the plaque's "National Honor Roll." The others in the national grouping with him are Gertrude Foster Brown , Mary Garrett Hay, Florence Kelley, Mrs. Frank Leslie, Harriet May Mills, Anna Garlin Spencer, Katrina Ely Tiffany, and Vira Boarman Whitehouse, whose husband, James Norman de Rapelye Whitehouse, was active in the Men's League, as were the husbands of two on the plaque's "State Honor Roll," Narcissa Cox Vanderlip, wife of Frank Vanderlip, and Maud Nathan Nathan, married to Frederick Nathan.

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About Brooke Kroeger

Brooke Kroeger, author and journalism professor at NYU. Her latest book is THE SUFFRAGENTS: How Women Used Men to Get the Vote. It launches Sept. 1 as New York celebrates the centennial of the change in the state constitution—the referendum passed Nov. 6, 1917—that gave the women of the state the vote. For a 90-second version of the book, see the trailer. To get a sense of how advanced was the thinking of the thousands of members of the National Men's League for Woman Suffrage, read its national mission statement, first issued in 1912 and republished now as part of the thornwillow.com Broadside Library. The league included prominent, powerful men of every profession and every walk of life.

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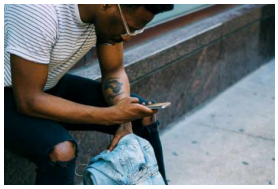

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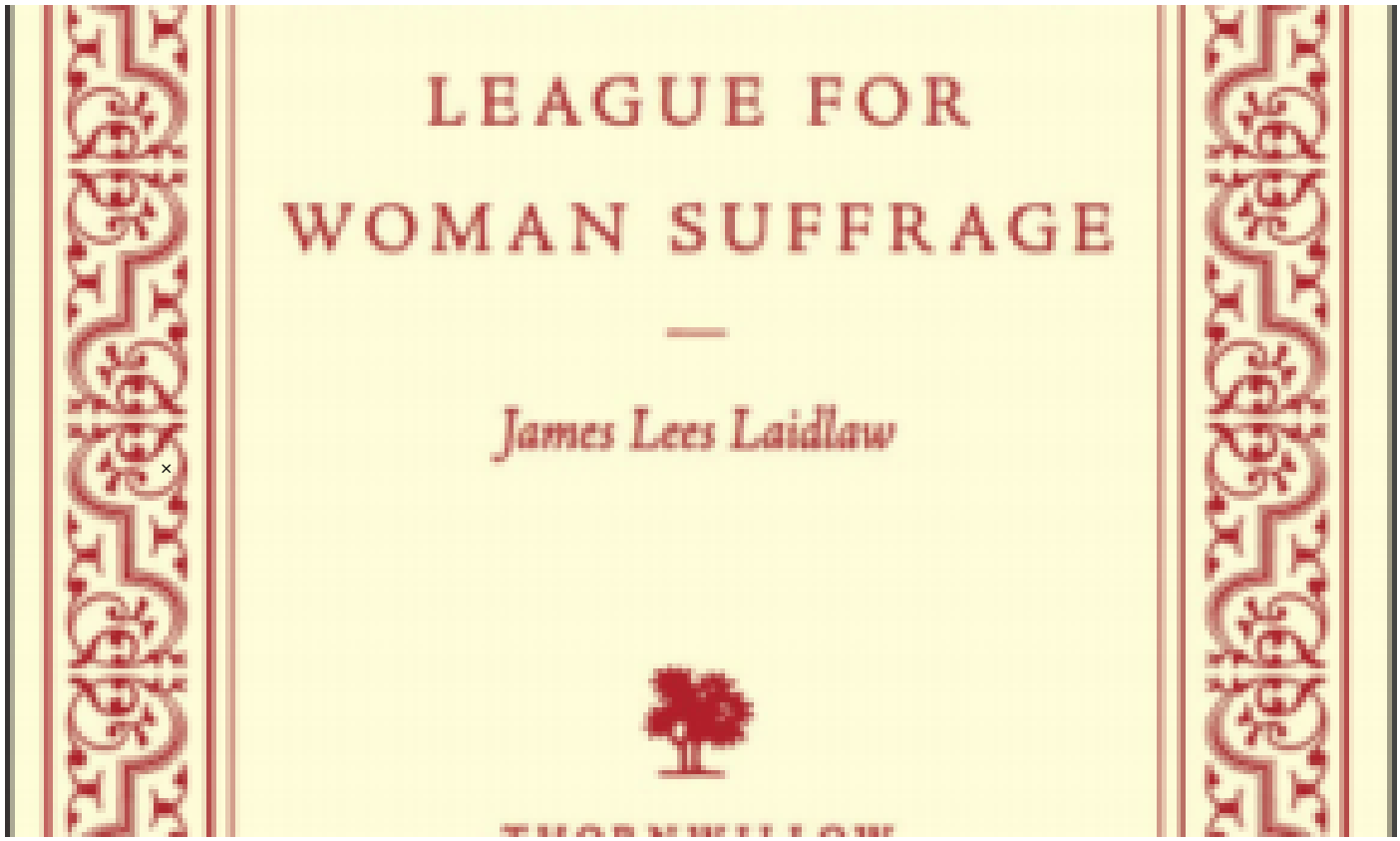

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