



## **The GFWC Florida Campaign Continues**

**It is time for May Mann Jennings to be in the  
Florida Women's Hall of Fame!**

**“One hundred years ago, the 19th Amendment was ratified, granting women the right to vote. This historic occasion celebrates more than 100 years of women’s suffrage. It also celebrates the decades of work before the amendment’s ratification, as several generations of women fought for what was seen by many as a radical change. Women organized, petitioned, wrote, marched, lobbied and picketed for the passage of the amendment. Florida, too, had its women’s-rights activists; one of the most influential was ]May Mann Jennings.”**



## *May Mann Jennings*

*Top 10 Florida Women's Hall of Fame*



*Write emails, cards and letters to:*

### **Governor DeSantis**

Appointments Office  
[Appointments@eog.myflorida.com](mailto:Appointments@eog.myflorida.com)  
Governor's Appointments Office  
The Capitol Building  
Lower Level, Suite LL-10  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001



“May Mann Jennings was surrounded by men in the political arena. Her father, Austin Mann, was a Florida state senator instrumental in the formation and development of Citrus County. Her husband, William Sherman Jennings, served as the 18th governor of Florida.

As a young woman, she traveled with her father to Tallahassee as his aide. Although women at the time could not vote or hold office, women like Jennings found a way to wield political influence, especially through women’s clubs and organizations.”

“To understand how women became a constituency to be reckoned with, even without the vote, one must examine the proliferation of women’s clubs at the turn of the century. Although women’s clubs had been around for many decades, it wasn’t until the Progressive Era, from the 1890s to the 1920s, that they began to be viewed as essential to the public good. Women’s organizations during this time saw it as their duty and moral obligation to transform public policy. Although unable to vote, women banded together in these organizations to lobby for their causes at all levels of government.

May Mann Jennings had been active in Florida women’s organizations for decades, but in 1914 she was elected Madame President of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs (FFWC). As president, she fought for a diverse number of causes. Her pet project was the creation of Florida’s first state park, Royal Palm State Park.

During her tenure as president, the issue of suffrage went to vote, and the organization officially endorsed suffrage. In 1917, two bills were submitted to Tallahassee, both of which were penned by Jennings’ husband, former Gov. William Sherman Jennings. One was a bill allowing women to vote in primary elections in the state of Florida and the other was a state constitutional amendment that would grant them equal suffrage and would be voted on by the people in the state. After days of debate, the Constitution amendment lost by only five votes. The primary voting bill couldn’t make it out of committee, and Jennings asked for it to be withdrawn.

She received much criticism over the decision to withdraw the primary voting bill. However, she felt if it had passed, the movement would lose urgency. She felt it was best to continue the campaign for full women’s suffrage. She did not want to settle for half measures. Her commitment to the ideals of women’s suffrage can be seen in her reaction to another failed bill for the creation of the Royal Palm State Park. Her disappointment over the loss of the two bills she cared so deeply about can be illustrated in this quote from a letter Jennings wrote to a colleague, “I am brokenhearted, after all our work and the promises made us. I know now more than ever that women must have the vote if they are to accomplish anything. I am beginning to think that women are fools to work as they do for the good of the world ... the men make promises one minute and vote the other way the next.”

Her tenure as president of the FFWC ended later that year but she continued to work tirelessly for women’s suffrage, conservation, and education. Along with other activists, she pressured Florida’s Congressional delegates to vote on behalf of the Anthony Amendment which would later become the 19th Amendment. It required ratification by a minimum of 36 states and passed into law on Aug. 18, 1920.

After the passage of the amendment, Jennings became a major figure in many of the newly developing women’s political organizations. She was frequently urged to run for office, but she always declined, saying she had no trouble staying busy. This was certainly true as she was a cofounder of the Florida League of Women Voters, a leader of the National Democratic Committee for Florida, and continuing champion of conservation and progressive causes throughout the state for the rest of her life.”

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