

Biographical Database of Militant Women Suffragists, 1913-1920

Biography of Eliza Frissell Messenger, 1835-1911

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Eliza Frissell was born in Peru, Massachusetts to Captain Augustus Frissell and Laura Mack Frissell on September 20th, 1835. She attended Mount Holyoke College for seminary school, and graduated in 1846.

She married Henry Alvin Messenger and had three children with him. Her daughter named Jennie Eliza was born in 1864 and died in 1865. Eliza's two sons, Henry Burdette, born in 1863, and Robert, born in 1870, lived well into the 20th century.

Eliza and her family moved to Caroline County in June of 1881. While in Caroline county, she was an active member of the community. Her connection to Christianity and advocacy, bolstered in seminary school from her Massachusetts home, was furthered with her membership to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU advocated for various political causes, including women's suffrage, equal pay for equal work, and the protection of women and children in the private and public spheres of life. The organization also advocated for the prohibition of alcohol, as it was part of the temperance movement. Eliza was elected president of her chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Caroline County in 1892, and served in other roles in later years for the organization, such as treasurer and vice president. She attended annual conventions, and organized events for the WCTU in her community. She was in contact with the WCTU state organizer, Annie R. Stuart, in 1893, indicating that she played an active role in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, both locally and on a larger scale.

Her husband, Henry, died January 21st, 1888. After her husband died, she worked as a seamstress to support herself and her family. Eliza went on to represent Caroline County at a Suffragist convention, as she was listed as a state representative in the Maryland section of the History of Women Suffrage. The convention she attended was most likely the 1906 suffrage convention held in honor of Susan B. Anthony's eighty-sixth birthday in Baltimore. Over 150 women from this convention lobbied Congress members for suffrage.

Eliza Messenger died of pneumonia in her home on April 25th, 1911. The funeral was held in the Methodist Protestant Church in Caroline County.



(Dee, H.)

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Newspaper Collection.

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Searching for Eliza: A Series of Considerations and Reconsiderations

My research process for this project involved intense consideration and reconsideration. The initial dearth of digitized information on my suffragist resulted from a misunderstanding of her life and impact in the suffrage movement. Due to her death in 1911, I disregarded the records and information on Eliza Frissell Messenger, and searched for a woman who would have lived to participate in the suffrage movement of the 1910s and 1920s. This fantasy of my suffragist acted as a red herring for my research, and led me astray from the actual information. In order to conduct good research, it's important to keep an open mind and understand that initial assumptions may be proven incorrect in the face of new information; conversely, research tools and digital archives can provide different ways to address information, leading to revelations in research and diverse ways in which research can be developed.

I began my research by searching for "Eliza Messenger" in the *Women and Social Movements US 1600-2000* database, in which I found an excerpt from the History of Women Suffrage, vol. 6 1900-1920. She is mentioned as a representative of Caroline County for suffrage, having attended a convention in Maryland during 1900 to 1920. My next lead was a census record for Eliza from 1910. From there, I found an earlier census record from 1900 which had less information, but confirmed that she was born sometime between 1836 and 1840.

Her gravestone, which I found through a google search, and her obituary both listed her birth year as 1835, and because of that continuity, I listed 1835 as her birth year in her biography.

A major hurdle for me to address was my suffragist's death date - she died in 1911, of what I later found to be pneumonia. Due to this, I thought Elizabeth Frissell Messenger of Caroline County was not the woman I was looking for. The woman I wanted to find shared her name, but was younger, unmarried, and alive to see the passage of the 19th amendment. I believed this because we were tasked to find and research suffragists and potential silent sentinels, yet the pickets on the White House didn't begin until 1917. A woman who died in 1911 would not have participated, and thus, was most likely not my suffragist. I was also looking for a young woman because she was listed as a "Miss" in the *Women and Social Movements US 1600-2000* database, indicating that she was unmarried and most likely younger. This woman was a fantasy, however. As Scott discusses in "Fantasy Echo," "Fantasy is more or less synonymous with imagination, and it is taken to be subject to rational, intentional control; one directs one's imagination purposively to achieve a coherent aim, that of writing oneself or one's group into history, writing the history of individuals or groups" (287). I misunderstood her involvement in the suffrage movement and, as a result, decided to search for a person who I imagined would have been more involved in suffrage: an obscure and young suffragist, with a different last name due to marriage. I may have imagined her as young because her involvement in the suffrage movement is reminiscent to current feminist activism, and many feminists participating are younger women. I may have been projecting a bit of my own personality onto her as well, as she and I have similar names and grew up in similar places. However, that subjectivity led my research astray.

As I searched for the wrong person, I encountered many dead ends. And so, I turned to local sources in Caroline County. I called the county government, and was forwarded to the public library in Federalsburg. After a productive phone call and an inquiry email, I had the aid of the Caroline county librarians. Within several hours, they unearthed many references of an E. F. Messenger and an Eliza F. Messenger in the *Denton Journal* from the 1880s up until an obituary in 1911. There was an article that also discussed a suffrage convention in 1906 in honor of Susan B. Anthony's eighty-sixth birthday which was most likely the convention my suffragist attended in order to be listed in the initial source which placed her on the list for research. Thus, Eliza Frissell Messenger was an option again, and my research was refocused on the older working woman in Federalsburg.

A strategy that worked very well for me was to search through the newspaperarchive.org for my suffragist (using Eliza Messenger, E. F. Messenger, etc) in the *Denton Journal*. The pages contain word-searchable transcript and would pull up specific pages and dates when searched with a name and location. I couldn't read the paper, though, because it was a paid feature. I navigated this setback by then going to the Maryland State Archive. By using the MSA newspaper database to pull up the specific pages to read which I found via newspaperarchive.org, I was able to find the full pages and limit the amount of reading I would have had to do for the same information. This situation reminds me of an aspect of researching with digital tools which Solberg discusses, "Digital tools and digitized resources extend, remediate, and transform our research environments; these transformations, in turn, open up possibilities for new kinds of interaction with, and new movements through, the archive" (54-55). I found that, by cross-referencing these two websites together, I was able to move more

fluidly within a dense database. Hence, certain tools used together can lighten the load of research, and “transform” the database experience.

In trying to “find” Eliza Messenger, I had to address my own feelings and assumptions toward the research. It involved considering and reconsidering my preconceptions, embracing flexibility, and using research tools creatively to find the information I needed. Overall, I learned about the subjective nature of research; I must address my ideas towards the research and keep an open mind to new information, and diverse ways to gather that information.

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W.C.T.U. Meeting.
The annual meeting of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Caroline county was held in the M. E. Church, Ringley, on September 29th. The president, Mrs. J. W. Esaley, having removed from the county, the vice president, Mrs. Messenger, presided. The afternoon session was devoted to business. The opening prayer was made by Rev. Mr. Brindle. After the reports of the corresponding and recording secretaries, treasurer, and superintendents of departments had been read and accepted, the following named persons were elected officers for the ensuing year:
President, Mrs. E. F. Messenger, of Federalsburg.
Corresponding secretary, Mrs. Olie Todd Davis, of Federalsburg.
Recording secretary, Mrs. Lela Moore, of Maryland.
Treasurer, Miss Mary Wilson, of Ridgely.
Superintendent of Work, Miss Alice Wilson, of Ridgely.

Transcription:

W.C.T.U Meeting

The annual meeting of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Caroline County was held in the M.E. Church, Ringley, on September 29th. The President, Mrs. J. W. Esaley, having removed from the county, the vice president, Mrs. Messenger, presided...the following named persons were elected officers for the coming year: President, Mrs. E. F. Messenger, of Federalsburg...

Denton Journal October 8th, 1892. Maryland State Archives Digital Newspaper Collection.

This article from the October 8th, 1892 edition of *The Denton Journal* shows Eliza Messenger's involvement in the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Women's activism in the early stages of suffrage activism and first wave feminism commonly took form in religious groups such as the W.C.T.U., who fought for women's suffrage so they could have the vote to push an agenda for prohibition, amongst over causes for women's rights.

Addressing Preconceptions in Research

Due to my initial source referring to my suffragist as a "Miss", I was under the assumption that she was unmarried, and, based on the time period, fairly young during her participation in the suffrage movement.

I also was under the impression that she participated with late suffrage protests, like the silent sentinels.

Thus, my research was facilitated under these false assumptions. It was only after finding an article from *The Denton Journal*, which reported on a statewide suffrage convention held in honor of Susan B. Anthony's 86th birthday in 1906, that I realized my suffragist could be an older widowed woman, who simply attended a single convention.

Research Process

Throughout my research, I used the Women and Social Movements (US 1600-2000) database, and the Maryland State Archives Newspaper guide for online newspaper scans.

I contacted the librarians from the Denton Public Library for research help. They directed me to *The Denton Journal*, where I found various articles mentioning Eliza Messenger.

I found census records by using FamilySearch.org and the HeritageQuest database.

From this experience, I became familiar with digital and physical based research, learned how to create research inquiries for libraries and archives, and discovered how to use research tools together to more easily navigate archival information.

Finding Eliza Messenger

Remembering Women in History

Elizabeth Patterson

Introduction

Women who participated in protests and social movements such as the suffrage movement are rarely well preserved in history or in public memory.

Historical records usually focus on male relatives to keep track of families. Therefore, uncovering information about a woman is generally more difficult.

My task was to find information on one of these lost women of the suffrage movement, given only a name and a county.

Miss Eliza Messenger, Caroline County

My initial information, her name and county, was from Ida Hustead Harper's *Chapter XIX: Maryland, Part I. In History of Woman Suffrage, vol.6: 1900-1920.*

Based on this information, my suffragist attended a suffrage convention sometime from 1900 to 1920 as a county representative.

Though the honorific listed with Eliza's name was "Miss", thus implying that she was unmarried and younger, this misnomer was most likely a typo or written out of misunderstanding. As a widow, Eliza Messenger would have been referred to as a "Mrs."

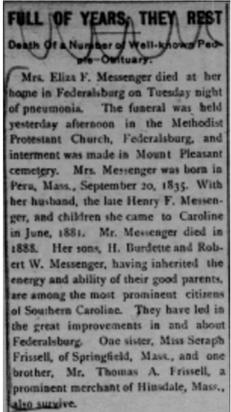
This typo influenced my research, as I initially focused on looking for an unmarried, younger woman whose maiden name was Messenger.



Dee, H. Brenda Massey. "Eliza Frissell Messenger". FindAGrave.com.

Labels as Vehicles of Memory

Eliza F. Messenger has no text on her gravestone aside from the word "mother" and her life span. Because her husband died so soon after they moved to Caroline County, her role in the community was defined moreso by her motherhood than by her marriage. She was involed in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and worked as a seamstress to support herself and her two sons. Thus, her gravestone reflects how she related to her community, and how it in turned defined her life based on her domestic involvement.



Denton Journal, April 29th, 1911. Maryland State Archives Digital Newspaper Collection.

From the April 29th edition of *The Denton Journal*, this image shows Mrs. Messenger's obituary. She is the first person listed in the weekly obituary, indicating that she held a relatively high social status in the Caroline county community. Because her husband died soon after they moved to Maryland, Eliza forged her place in her community as an individual, instead of an extension of her husband. Thus, she is referred to as "Mrs. Eliza Messenger" throughout her obituary instead of "Mrs. Henry F. Messenger". Also, her sons and their wellbeing are emphasized in her obituary to indicate that she was a good mother, hence continuing the mindset that a woman's legacy is determined by the good will of her children. Her funeral was held in a Methodist Protestant Church because she was a religious woman, as reflected in her activism through the W.C.T.U. Though she is not remembered as a suffragist, her association with the W.C.T.U subtly highlights her wishes for women's suffrage.

Conclusions

Eliza Messenger was referred to as a "Miss" instead of a "Mrs" either out of error or misunderstanding. Widowed women during that time period should be referred to as "Mrs."

Eliza could have claimed that she was unmarried as well, a move to separate herself from the insitution of marriage. Many women during this time kept their maiden name to retain individuality. Eliza kept hers as an middle initial.

It was difficult to find records of Eliza Messenger because, after her husband died, she was listed as a dependent of her sons when they came of age. It was only when she was living by herself in old age that she was listed legally as an individual.

Though the overarching activism in her life was religously based, we recovered Eliza based on her work in the suffrage movement. As time has passed, the suffrage movement has been remembered favorably in history, while other agenda's, like the W.C.T.U.'s goal of prohibition are not talked about or considered in the context of women's activism.