

May 2003

An Ideal Unionist: The Political Career of Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry, 1911-1919

Rachel E. Finley-Bowman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Finley-Bowman, Rachel E. (2003). An Ideal Unionist: The Political Career of Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry, 1911-1919. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 4(3), 15-29.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss3/2>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

An Ideal Unionist: The Political Career of Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry, 1911-1919

By Rachel E. Finley-Bowman, Ph.D.

The 1800 Act of Union formalized Britain's control in Ireland. It provided a framework for integration between the two nations, pledging that each would "forever¹ after, be united into one Kingdom" in their commercial, political, and religious affairs. Irish Protestants embraced this imperial assimilation and took pride in their allegiance to the crown, as their counties and neighborhoods quickly grew to resemble Anglican England. However, Ireland's Catholic majority despised the union with Great Britain, and they resisted inclusion and Anglicization, desiring instead to preserve their own native faith, cultural traditions, and social laws.² Opposition to things "English" and disillusionment over the Catholic masses' lack of power and rights found purposeful outlets in national associations throughout the nineteenth century. Employing both constitutional and militant methods, these associations championed a wide array of causes, including Catholic emancipation, land reform, and home rule (meaning Irish self-government over local affairs through a national assembly in Dublin).³ Yet, despite any differences amongst these groups, every nationalist desired to alter, and/or undermine in some manner, the Union as it stood, and Irish nationalism as a political movement thus developed from this history of disquiet and struggle.

By the mid- to late nineteenth century, the nationalist battle for self-determination was increasingly hostile and ultramontane, and those loyal to Union, particularly Protestants living in the province of Ulster (Ireland's nine most northern counties), emerged as its strongest defenders. The introduction of Home Rule Bills in 1886 and 1893 shook loyalist faith in Parliament, forcing Protestants to become more directly involved in the debate. Although both bills eventually failed to pass, they galvanized unionists to organize, and, as Patrick Buckland states, Ulster's desire to protect itself against the growing parliamentary, as well as popular, influence of nationalism established unionism as a coherent and organized political movement.⁴ This new movement was dominated by an aristocratic, protestant, and "conservative, Orange-backed element in Ulster society" who encouraged Englishmen to support their crusade to save the Union through money and the ballot box.⁵

These loyalists recognized that a strong, organized, and united unionist front was needed to counter the continuing progress of the nationalist campaign despite its recent failures over home rule. To that end, the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) formed in March 1905, and called for the "Unionists of Ireland" to "close up their ranks" in "emphatically declaring" their "determination . . . to oppose any scheme . . . that would place the loyal minority at the mercy of the disloyal majority".⁶ Moreover, council members were to consider "all minor differences" subordinate "to the all-important question of the maintenance of the Union".⁷ The Union's preservation had to come first above all other concerns, for the lifestyles, political power, economic status, and social prominence these men cherished would be seriously compromised without it. Embracing the council's directive was then an easy task for these men, as there was little else in early twentieth-century Anglo-Ireland that assumed greater importance.

As a third home rule bill loomed, women formally joined the loyalist movement in 1911. However, their adherence to the ideal of singular cause established by the UUC may have seemed undesirable or impractical in light of the shifting political landscape. Women's political activity was currently in a state of change, as suffragettes attempted to push women's work in the public sphere beyond traditional auxiliary roles. Such women placed the female franchise above all other political issues, even Irish nationalism, and they hoped that organized unionism would become a useful forum for their agenda. Female loyalists thus needed strong and dedicated leadership to sustain their purpose, proving that any other political gain, even votes for women, would mean little in the face of Irish self-government. It would, in fact, take an ideal unionist - Theresa, the Marchioness of Londonderry - to guide them through the Third Home Rule Bill Crisis of 1912-1914.

I.

Lady Theresa Susey Helen Chetwynd Talbot, eldest daughter of Charles John, the 19th Earl of Shrewsbury, was born at her family's estate in Staffordshire in June 1856.⁸ H. Montgomery Hyde (biographer of the Vane-Tempest-Stewart clan) described Lady Theresa's childhood as "happy", and claimed that her father, as a prominent peer and Conservative MP, fostered "a strong Tory political atmosphere" for his children.⁹ In fact, the Marchioness herself declared that she had begun "liking politics when [she] was only ten years old".¹⁰ She was presented to society in 1873, and, during these debutante years, she became an intense admirer of Disraeli, as her interests in government continued to reflect a Conservative bias. Yet, despite Lady Londonderry's obvious "love for politics", most historians, including Hyde, and more recently Diane Urquhart, have failed to fully detail her contributions in this arena.¹¹ Lady Londonderry's entire existence has, in fact, been overshadowed by a scholarly preoccupation with her male relatives or more popular Vane-Tempest-Stewart wives, like Frances Anne, wife of the Third Marquess, and Edith Helen, wife of the Seventh Marquess and daughter-in-law of Theresa. Nonetheless, her connection to this family, through her October 1875 marriage to Lord Charles Castlereagh, heir to the Londonderry Marquessate, would nurture her curiosity for politics, fostering opportunities in public service and organized civic activity.

The early years of Lady Theresa's married life focused upon home and family (she bore three children by 1879), but, when Charles became the sixth Marquess of Londonderry in 1884, their "public" lives took on a new importance. As a peer of the realm, the Marquess assumed his position in the House of Lords, and Lady Londonderry, now a marchioness, carried out several duties befitting her new rank.¹² Many of these projects went beyond the usual church and charity work. For example, reflecting her fascination with politics, she joined several civic associations, including the Primrose League's Women's Grand Council.¹³ By the late 1880's, Theresa was one of Great Britain's most celebrated political hostesses, and, when her husband served as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1886 to 1889, her social prominence, and, perhaps even more importantly, her political activity continued to grow.¹⁴ This activity now centered upon preserving Ireland's position within the British Empire.

She and the Marquess became outspoken champions of Union amid the debates surrounding the Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1893. In fact, to protest the 1893 legislation, the Marchioness of Londonderry organized a "monster petition" signed by

just under 20,000 Ulster women. This single petition was later presented to Parliament as part of a larger package of petitions, which totaled over one million signatures.¹⁵ These efforts mirrored the activities of other female loyalists who, much like their male counterparts, had begun organizing to battle Irish self-government. However, early groups tended to be disorganized, decentralized, and disconnected.¹⁶ The intensification of the nationalist threat in the early 1900's eventually facilitated the formation of a new loyalist organization, the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC), in January 1911. Building upon the foundation of earlier societies, loyalist women sought to "bear their share" in the continued struggle against nationalism.¹⁷

Lord Londonderry had taken a leading role in the creation of the UUC, and his involvement initially encouraged his wife's connection to the women's council. Nonetheless, the Marchioness's own political interests and personal devotion to the unionist cause more directly guided her participation. She worked tirelessly against home rule, using her family and political connections to spread Ulster's message to England. Her close relations with the royal family (she had hosted Edward VII and Alexandra at her husband's Ulster estate - Mount Stewart - in 1903), Unionist politicians, like Edward Carson, and Tory MP's, such as Andrew Bonar Law, greatly assisted the new undertaking.¹⁸ Lady Londonderry's leadership, bolstered by such support, enabled the UWUC to grow from a small auxiliary organization into a large action group whose concerns would extend into social, economic, and political realms.

II.

As aforementioned, the Marchioness of Londonderry's staunch devotion to the Union was evident from the UWUC's founding meeting, and such beliefs would help to define the Council's objectives through the next seven years. Serving as meeting chair and Council Vice-President, Lady Londonderry exhorted supporters to take up the cause against nationalism, declaring:

. . . I earnestly appeal to the Loyalist women all over Ireland to do the same as we are going to do - to begin work at once, to canvass voters, to trace removals, and to endeavor to bring every single voter to the polls during elections, so that every seat in Ulster shall be won for Union . . . We all know well Lord Randolph Churchill's historical words, "Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right". Not only Ulster, but as heretofore the whole Unionist party will continue to fight for the Union, and I feel certain that the women of Ulster will be in no way behind the men in striving for so noble a cause.¹⁹

However, the Marchioness feared the potential distraction and division other issues might have upon the movement, and, reflecting the ideal of singular cause first promoted by the Ulster Unionist Council, she urged the women to avoid formally associating with any topic outside of the unionist sphere of influence. The Council's constitution, ratified at its first annual meeting in 1912, echoed the Vice-President's sentiments, and provided a framework for the women's activities, declaring that "the sole object of the Council shall be to secure . . . the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland".²⁰ Other subjects, namely suffrage, were not promoted or officially pursued by the organization.

Although this new organization pledged to fill its membership with both "the peeress and peasant", the support of women like Theresa Londonderry, meaning wives of Ulster Unionist Peers and Ulster Unionist Members of Parliament, was pursued more

urgently.²¹ The influence these women possessed in their husband's districts would invariably help the Council to create new branches, spread the unionist message, and raise funds. The UWUC built its own contact network upon the power and connections of these women, who were political and cultural trendsetters in their localities and acquaintances of Britain's elite. As wives of politicians, they represented the values and practices deemed acceptable in their neighborhoods and social circles. They were role models whose examples gave legitimacy and recognition to the Council. Their success seems to confirm Brian Harrison's assertion that "in a strongly hierarchical society with a small political elite, women could achieve much through personal influence".²² These women dominated the Council's governing body, the Executive Committee, by serving as officers, chairing sub-committees, and creating policy.²³ While Council rosters topped 200,000 by 1913, a small oligarchy of elite and wealthy women dominated its decision-making processes.²⁴

The early work of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council focused upon spreading the loyalist message. To that end, women canvassed, spoke at drawing-room meetings and other larger venues throughout the British Isles, and distributed pamphlets and circulars encouraging women to join the cause.²⁵ Lady Londonderry suggested that slips be printed and given to every member on behalf of the Council. These slips were to serve as letters of introduction explaining the ancillary's work to outsiders, namely "the dangers that will arise to your country and mine by the adoption of the Government policy of Home Rule and that I do not concern myself with other questions. . .".²⁶ Such an introduction was crucial to establishing how this new organization would be perceived. A conscious effort was being put forth to identify these women as unionists first and foremost, and thereby disassociate them from unfavorable images of women in the public sphere, particularly those connected with feminism and the franchise.

To further promote a favorable image, the Marchioness additionally suggested that direct references to religious tensions be avoided in meetings, speeches, and the like. Although ardent Protestants dominated the Council, Lady Londonderry maintained that members' personal opinions should be kept separate from the organization's public campaign.²⁷ She hoped to protect the credibility of the wider anti-home rule movement by removing the entanglements of sectarian bitterness. The Executive Committee, following the lead of its Vice-President, thus declared in January 1911 that the organization would "urge the Ulster case against Home Rule mainly on social and economic grounds, by which the charge of Ulster bigotry will be avoided".²⁸ Council platforms then centered upon the need to protect civil rights and liberties, social privilege, and economic livelihood, rather than upon the evils of Catholicism and the papacy.²⁹

The need for a focused and deliberate unionist message had assumed a new urgency with the passage of the Parliament Act of 1911, which reduced the veto power of the House of Lords to a mere delaying tactic. More importantly, the Act removed the last political barrier to home rule, as the Lords could no longer interfere with the Commons' management of the Irish Question. While this edict, as Lady Londonderry lamented, "deprived the Unionists of their greatest bulwark against Home Rule", it did not derail the movement; in fact, both male and female unionists were drawn "even closer together in the face of common danger, as Ulster's line of defense slipped away."³⁰ Fearing that the introduction of another measure of Irish self-government was imminent, loyalists

protested throughout early 1912. Yet, such demonstrations failed to stall the forces of Irish nationalism, as a third Home Rule Bill was introduced to the Commons on 11 April 1912.³¹

As a show of unionist force against the measure, Ulster unionists decided to stage the grandest, most impressive anti-home rule rally ever; deemed “Ulster Day”, the gathering was planned for 28 September 1912.³² The day’s festivities were to include parades, demonstrations, and the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, a written declaration of commitment to Crown, Empire, and Union by male loyalists. The UWUC constructed its own separate covenant, the “Women’s Declaration”, as a means for female loyalists to pronounce their beliefs.³³ The council and its branches organized signing centers throughout their constituencies, and, two weeks before the event, Edith Wheeler, UWUC secretary, updated Lady Londonderry on the women’s progress. Wheeler, with a sense of anticipation and enervation, reported that “everything is going well but there is endless work for ‘Ulster Day’”. There seems to be a great many visitors coming and much hospitality asked for, but I feel sure that everyone will rise to the occasion”.³⁴

When Ulster Day arrived, loyal orange men and women queued up all over Ireland to endorse their sacred pledges for Union.³⁵ The *Solemn League and Covenant* defiantly proclaimed to defend the men’s “cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom” and to defeat “the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Ireland”.³⁶ The Women’s Declaration echoed these sentiments and stated:

We, whose names are underwritten, women of Ulster, and loyal subjects of our gracious King, being firmly persuaded that Home Rule would be disastrous to our Country, desire to associate ourselves with the men of Ulster in their uncompromising opposition to the Home Rule Bill now before our Parliament, whereby it is proposed to drive Ulster out of her cherished place in the Constitution of the United Kingdom, and to place her under the domination and control of a Parliament of Ireland. Praying that from this calamity God will save Ireland, we hereto subscribe our names.³⁷

This document represented the UWUC’s arrival as an official and equal partner in the movement. The men’s council, in recognition of the women’s efforts, offered acceptance and inclusion, and the crisis surrounding the Third Home Rule Bill marked the UWUC’s shining moment.

As the UWUC’s influence was growing within the unionist movement, Theresa Londonderry’s role and influence was expanding within the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council as well. She became the organization’s president in April 1913 when Mary Anne, Duchess of Abercorn, a founding member of the council and its first president, retired following the death of her husband.³⁸ The Marchioness had already been assuming much of Lady Abercorn’s responsibilities within the Council. For example, Lady Londonderry handled a potentially disruptive battle over the role of Honorary Secretaries.³⁹ Controversy emerged when Sarah Finlay, upon her election to the post in January 1912, questioned the decisions, methods, and constitutional changes ordered by the Executive Committee at a branch meeting in her own district. Although branch officers were perceived as useful in winning over new members and spreading the Council’s message, the Executive Committee was reluctant to delegate real power to the

peripheries. This reluctance naturally fostered resentment among branch officials who wanted greater input into the UWUC's decision-making processes. UWUC colleague Charlotte King-Kerr openly chided Finlay for exceeding the bounds of her authority, and demanded an immediate apology.⁴⁰ When Finlay refused, the two women completely broke faith and a campaign of slander and threats ensued between them and their respective supporters. Lady Londonderry became the intermediary, attempting to foster reconciliation. Months of in-fighting finally ended in April 1912 when the Marchioness engineered a compromise, and, for an association formed around the principle of unconditional unity, such a settlement was paramount. Finlay resigned her post as Honorary Secretary, but retained her general membership in the Council, and, in an effort to bury their animosity for the greater good of Ulster Unionism, Finlay and King-Kerr were forced to work together on the Advisory Committee, which assisted the UWUC's organizing secretary, John Hamill.⁴¹

The Finlay/King-Kerr episode represents more than just growing pains for a young organization or a personality clash between two headstrong women; it was the first test of the Marchioness's leadership skills. Although Lady Londonderry herself had always recognized the crucial importance of loyalist unity, she now more earnestly impressed upon the Council that its platform must be sincere both in word and action, no matter what the loss of pride or personal sacrifice. Whatever the depth of the women's conviction before the episode, they recognized after that paying lip service to the loyalist creed would not defeat the nationalists. It was a valuable lesson in human relations, and, throughout the remainder of Londonderry's administration, the UWUC was hypersensitive towards potentially divisive endeavors, cautiously approaching matters of recruitment and suffrage. Members applauded Lady Londonderry's deft management of the situation, claiming that she "surpassed" expectations and that "all [ended] grandly".⁴² When the Duchess of Abercorn formally resigned the presidency, the Council's unanimous motion to select "our senior Vice-President . . . as Her Grace's successor" seemed inevitable.⁴³

Now, as UWUC president, the Marchioness wanted to build upon the momentum generated by Ulster Day, and continue anti-home rule demonstrations, including ones in Antrim and Balmoral (a Belfast suburb). Lady Londonderry reported that the Antrim rally was "largely attended" by both male and female loyalists, and she later reflected upon the day's events:

. . . I could not help wishing that all English sceptics could have seen the [crowds of supporters] - - they marched onto the field and I then took the chair for Sir Edward Carson . . . it would show the Government (a woman taking the chair) that not only had they the whole political community against them but a whole countryside.⁴⁴

Resolutions against the Home Rule bill were also passed at these rallies. Carson, praising Londonderry's efforts, remarked that "no one is better qualified than you are to express the deep sentiments of loyalty to the King and the United Kingdom which animate Ulster men and Ulster women at the present moment. . . I know. . . how determined they are never to allow themselves to be deprived of their privileges as citizens of the United Kingdom".⁴⁵

This relationship between Sir Edward Carson and Lady Theresa Londonderry best exemplifies the respect that many felt towards the Marchioness. Her efforts and abilities

were clearly appreciated by her colleagues in the UWUC, as evidenced by her council presidency, and the pre-partition era's leading politicians. Yet, the relationship between Carson and Londonderry points to an even more significant reality. Carson viewed the Marchioness as an intellectual and political equal. Their relations, as demonstrated through their letters, was one perhaps found more commonly between men. He lent the Marchioness unconditional support in her role as UWUC president, acting as advisor, listener, and cheerleader when needed. Such respect and support reflected the importance of unity among the loyalist ranks, and would prove invaluable to Londonderry's (as well as the Council's) political credibility.

This relationship was indicative of the sentiments shared between most male and female loyalists. In fact, since its formation in 1911, the Ulster Women's Unionist Council had enjoyed the support of its male colleagues in the UUC. The groups worked in tandem to battle nationalism, staging joint rallies and demonstrations, such as Ulster Day 1912. Their like beliefs regarding the singular importance of the cause had initially connected the two groups, and familial and marital ties between the male and female loyalists reinforced the positive feelings. They eventually became, as Brendan Clifford has argued, a "unionist family" in both a figurative and literal sense.⁴⁶ Gender and other potentially destructive differences thus became inconsequential; only the ideas that connected them, not those that could, or did, divide them, were made important. Within such a supportive atmosphere, Londonderry and her organization, now a band of ideal unionists, flourished.

Beyond rallies and resolutions, the UWUC under Lady Londonderry also began aiding the newly formed Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a citizen militia designed to defend the province against home rule and forced inclusion under Dublin rule.⁴⁷ The Council created the Million Pounds Indemnity Fund in September 1913 to compensate members of the UVF and their dependents for losses, injuries, or disabilities suffered in civil conflict while in the service of Ulster.⁴⁸ However, the Marchioness cautioned her colleagues' approach to fund-raising. She reminded that they must "exercise great care in any appeals for help", as many, particularly "friends in England", might conclude that loyalist resources were "becoming exhausted".⁴⁹ A strong mien remained her top priority especially now that civil war loomed on the horizon. Yet, finances had, in fact, been a constant worry since 1911, and several programs only succeeded because of the very generous contributions from wealthy members of the Executive Committee, like the Marchioness.

To further augment the Ulster Volunteer Force's operations, the UWUC also formed a new branch, the Ambulance and Nursing Corps, in 1913. Its participants were to serve as ambulance drivers, dispatch riders, nurses, and signalers in the event of civil war between nationalists and unionists.⁵⁰ They also gathered equipment, and formulated "supply stores" stocked with necessary medical supplies, including bandages, surgical gowns, and sheets.⁵¹ The Corps was also charged with holding first-aid classes throughout the province, but discussion of such activities led to old concerns over finances. While several women voiced their misgivings about excessive lecture fees and program costs, Lady Londonderry ended the debate, stating that Ulster's preservation was worth any price or sacrifice. The association, following its President's belief that "prevention [was] better than the cure", then established classes to train unionist women

to care for those husbands, brothers, or sons who become injured while in the service of Ulster.⁵² As a result, over 4,000 women were instructed in First Aid and Home Nursing Training between October 1913 and May 1914.⁵³ The Council also considered the formation of subsidized hospitals between January 1912 and March 1914. The Marchioness offered Mount Stewart (ancestral home of the Londonderry family) as a potential infirmary and triage site, but issues of cost and the availability of suitable buildings hindered any real progress on the matter.⁵⁴

III.

Two new political threats beyond Irish nationalism -- total continental war and the suffrage movement -- engaged the Marchioness of Londonderry by the summer of 1914. While the Third Home Rule Bill, which included all Irish provinces, had already passed on 25 May, its enactment as the Government of Ireland Act was suspended due to the outbreak of World War I in August 1914.⁵⁵ Most nationalists accepted the measure's suspension, recognizing that a return to peace would bring its inception, and, like most unionists, turned their attentions to the war effort. The UWUC suspended its campaign against home rule in January 1915 to aid Britain in its struggle against Germany, and resolved in its annual report to "help our people in maintaining duty and discipline in the home and also by teaching patriotism and love of country."⁵⁶ To fulfill this pledge, the organization's war-time activities assumed three main forms. The members collected clothing and food, visited families of servicemen, and offered comfort, usually money, "where they could".⁵⁷

However, Irish suffragists, unlike female loyalists, continued their normal activities during the war. The nationalist Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) directed the franchise movement in Ireland, and, since 1911, it had been trying to persuade the women of Ulster to join the campaign.⁵⁸ The League opened a branch office in Belfast in September 1914 with the hopes of "keeping the suffrage flag flying in Ulster".⁵⁹ During the next several months, this "Ulster Centre" carried out a propaganda campaign in an effort to attract new members. Yet, as support for suffragism was relatively small compared to unionism, this would be a difficult task.⁶⁰

Most women in Ulster tended to be loyalists, and the majority belonged to the UWUC rather than franchise clubs. The Council's firm commitment to Union, and Union alone, prevented many women, despite interests to the contrary, from formally joining the suffrage campaign.⁶¹ To thwart this challenge, the League stepped up its activities in the north and began targeting leaders, like the Marchioness of Londonderry, whose influence was seemingly pressuring other unionist women to reject the female franchise. As the IWFL proclaimed:

. . . it is worth noting that most of the leading women [of the loyalist movement] are anti-suffragists; they are content and proud to stand by and support "our men"; they ask for no other position; they disregard the offer of citizenship . . . [loyalist women] have, no doubt, done what from one point of view deserves to be called splendid work; but again, we ask has it been man's work or women's work? Government, social institutions, religion, are in the melting-pot in Ireland to-day, and it depends largely on women -- and most of all on Ulsterwomen -- in what form they come out of it.⁶²

Lady Londonderry had, in fact, never been a suffrage crusader. Her “official indifference” to the cause had been evident since her days in the Primrose League in the late nineteenth century.⁶³ From the perspective of the IWFL, such women were enemies, but the League’s efforts against them did little to sway the attitudes of unionist women loyal to their leaders. This lack of support, coupled with the League’s financial problems, facilitated the Ulster Centre’s closing by 1915.⁶⁴ Given the UWUC’s dominance in the region, the IWFL’s experiment was perhaps doomed from the outset.

Interestingly enough, when votes for women became law in early 1918, Lady Londonderry did not view the passage of suffrage as inherently important to women.⁶⁵ She did consider it inherently important to unionism, however. Suffrage provided the perfect opportunity to expand the loyalist voter support base. The third home-rule crisis had emphasized the importance of constituent support, and, with a wider voter base, unionism would be strengthened. The expansion of the franchise introduced a new population of voters to the unionist campaign, and the Marchioness asserted that this new legion of voters would be instructed to “always” use the privilege “for the preservation of our rights as an integral part of England”.⁶⁶ The female franchise, however, did little to change the UWUC’s daily activities, objectives, or outlook. Its focus remained survival, and, when World War I ended in November 1918, peace meant a return to their usual round of speeches, rallies, and fund-raising.

IV.

These decisions about the franchise marked Lady Londonderry’s last major campaign as a UWUC President. The Marquess of Londonderry had died in early February 1915, and, in the succeeding months, the now Dowager Marchioness began withdrawing from her responsibilities in the Council.⁶⁷ Although her peers repeatedly re-elected her as president, she, much like her predecessor the Duchess of Abercorn, assumed a notably less public role in the unionist movement following her husband’s death. Between 1912 and 1914, Lady Londonderry had planned and attended numerous rallies, and given endless speeches. She repeatedly drew praise from men and women alike, as well-wishers applauded her “top rate speech” or cheered “the work of Ulster and their President”.⁶⁸ While she continued to lead the UWUC over the next thirty months, most of her work was now either performed in private or carried out by others. Nevertheless, her personal loyalty to unionism never wavered, and, when her own health began failing, letters and telegrams sustained her connection to the Council, its agenda, and loyalist politics in general. Unionist politician Edward Saunderson was one such correspondent. He bemoaned Lady Londonderry’s absence from meetings and activities, as he recalled in one letter the success of her past presentations, and how most of her replacements were “lacking”, as “the ordinary woman is [of] no use on these occasions”.⁶⁹

Influenced by her advancing age (early 60’s), declining health, and role as dowager marchioness, Lady Londonderry decided by late 1918 that the UWUC deserved more than a part-time leader.⁷⁰ Speaking at the Council’s Annual Meeting in Old Town Hall, Belfast on 28 January 1919, she announced her official retirement:

The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council was formed in 1911 to help the Men’s Unionist

Council to preserve the Union between England and Ireland, which was settled by Act of Parliament in 1800, (the then Lord Castlereagh being Chief Secretary for Ireland) and to express the feelings of the people of Ulster, who have fought with every means in their power to remain associated with England in a legislative union. I may say with truth that there never was a prouder moment in my life than that which I was elected President of such an influential body. I believe at the time, we were the largest number of women to band ourselves together for political work.⁷¹

The UWUC accepted the Marchioness's resignation with regret, but noted its "unending appreciation" of her "great ability and wide political experience" and "inestimable value" to the loyalist cause.⁷²

Lady Londonderry planned to retreat to England, allowing her son, the Seventh Marquess of Londonderry, and his wife Edith to fulfill the family's public responsibilities. Yet, this retirement was short-lived, as Theresa, the Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry, died in March of 1919. The Executive Committee of the UWUC expressed its "deep regret" over her passing.⁷³ Its members also offered the following tribute to their former President -- "by her constant and unflagging interest in Ulster, and her untiring energy, she largely promoted the welfare of the Council and the success of its work. We beg to offer our deepest sympathy to the members of her family in the great loss they have sustained."⁷⁴ Beyond the UWUC, fellow unionists, like Colonel Repington, revered her as "clear-headed, witty and large-hearted, with unrivalled experience of men and things social and political, and with a retentive memory and immense capacity".⁷⁵ While the Marchioness' death surely left a void, the grave state of Anglo-Irish politics forced the UWUC to move forward with its agenda.

Conclusion

Civil war and the partitioning of Ireland, despite her efforts to the contrary, followed Lady Londonderry's death. She surely would have seen partition as disagreeable, but, like most loyalists, would have resigned herself to it in order to keep the majority of Ulster's population within the United Kingdom.⁷⁶ Theresa Londonderry had worked tirelessly against Irish self-government throughout her political career, motivated by her love for Union, support of family and position, and respect for tradition. She used her family and political connections to spread Ulster's message to England. Yet, more than a political hostess, the Marchioness helped to facilitate the formation of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC), an anti-home rule organization, in 1911. She served as UWUC president from 1913 to 1919, directing loyalist women through Ulster Day, the Government of Ireland Bill, and the difficult years of World War I. Although Londonderry and her supporters could not prevent the coming of Irish self-government, their work is credited with demonstrating the usefulness of ancillary women in the public sphere, and, as Martin Pugh asserts, contributing, albeit largely indirectly, to the passage of women's suffrage in the United Kingdom.⁷⁷

Wrongly dismissed by historians as stuffy, old-fashioned, and determined, despite practicality, to hold onto the vestiges of a decaying empire, loyalists, like the Marchioness, actually represented a powerful and influential force in Anglo-Irish politics.⁷⁸ Their participation reflects not only the magnitude of the unionist movement, but reveals a different type of political participation that emphasized inclusion and preservation. In the pre-suffrage era, aristocratic women used personal influence and

social connections to achieve political power, a power based upon their support of the status quo and acceptance of traditional gender roles. As K.D. Reynolds concludes, women of Lady Londonderry's rank "engaged in politics . . . because politics provided the *raison d'être* of their class . . . the part which they took in political society was significant for the smooth running of that society, providing venues for informal political meetings and discussions between both supporters and opponents, and keeping together political parties . . ."⁷⁹

To Lady Londonderry, "the smooth running of society" meant the protection of civil and religious liberties in Ireland as provided under the Union. Her concern with the larger issues afflicting her social circle in Ireland, as well as her ceaseless adherence to the ideal of singular cause established by the Ulster Unionist Council, set the tone for the UWUC's agenda during the Third Home Rule crisis. Because of this commitment to unionism above all else, she managed to keep a political organization and movement together in a perilous time, circumventing threats from nationalists, suffragettes, continental war, personality clashes, and financial challenges. Even supporters of the Irish Women's Franchise League could appreciate such devotion, as an anonymous contributor to its newspaper, the *Irish Citizen*, declared, "Ulsterwomen show that their interests as human beings are stronger than those of sex. We may not agree with their tactics, but let us not forget that they are a fine practical argument against Anti-feminists".⁸⁰

NOTES

1. 40 George III, c. 67.
2. Patrick O'Farrell, England and Ireland Since 1800, (1975), 22.
3. The definition of home rule popularized by Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1880's included a unicameral parliament and an Irish executive residing in Dublin with the power to manage Irish affairs, develop industries, control education, deal with land, and direct the national, religious, and commercial life of the people. Alan O'Day, Parnell and the First Home Rule Episode, 1884-1887, (1986), 4.
4. Patrick Buckland, Irish Unionism, 1885-1923: A Documentary History, (1973), xiv.
5. B. M. Walker, Ulster Politics: The Formative Years, 1868-1886, (1989), 257. The Orange Order, named in honor of William of Orange, first organized around 1795 with the expressed intent of preserving the power of the Protestant Ascendancy. By the nineteenth century, its strong anti-Catholic, anti-home rule position won many converts in Ulster; in fact, two-thirds of adult male Protestants belonged to the Order by the early twentieth century. For more on this association, see Tom F. Baldy, The Battle for Ulster: A Study of Internal Security, (1987), 40.
6. The Council initially consisted of two hundred members - one hundred nominated by local unionist associations, fifty nominated by the Orange Order, and not more than fifty others co-opted as "distinguished unionists" from alternative outlets. Ulster Unionist Council, Minutes, PRONI, D.1327/7/6A, 3 March 1905.
7. Ibid.
8. H. Montgomery Hyde, The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait, (1979), 63.
9. Theresa had two younger sisters, Guendolin and Muriel, and one brother, Charles. Charles later became

the 20th Earl of Shrewsbury. Ibid.

10. Quoted by *ibid.* Hyde's work more fully emphasizes the male members of the Vane-Tempest-Stewart family, and his study of the Marchioness is often anecdotal and peripheral, providing more details of her infidelities and social life rather than her political activities. For example, he relates the incident on Edward VII's coronation day when Lady Londonderry's tiara (encrusted with priceless family jewels) fell into the lavatory pan as she readjusted her gown in the ladies' room before the ceremony. Unable to retrieve it, she called for a doctor with forceps, reasoning, according to Hyde, that "nothing less than a gynecological instrument" would suffice in order to protect the stones. This request apparently shocked the gathering crowd of peeresses, who pondered what possibly could be afoot. *Ibid.*, 98.

11. *Ibid.*, 65. Despite recognizing the Marchioness as "the leading Tory political hostess" of the 1910's, Urquhart's works tend to be general analyses with discussions of several women, including Lady Cecil Craig and Mary Anne, the Duchess of Abercorn, and much work remains regarding the movement's key leaders. Diane Urquhart, Women in Ulster Politics: 1890-1940, A History Not Yet Told, (2000), 55-57.

12. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

13. The Women's Grand Council was an auxiliary wing of the male-run Primrose League, a Conservative political group dedicated to the maintenance of the rights and privileges of the British Empire, particularly Anglicanism. The League began admitting women in 1885, and, by 1896, female membership topped 1600. The Primrose League: Its Rise, Progress, and Constitution (London: 1887), 49-50.

14. Hyde, Londonderrys, (1979): 69-70.

15. Nancy Kinghan, United We Stood: The Official History of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, 1911-1974, (1975), 8.

16. *Ibid.*, 3.

17. Lady Theresa Londonderry, My Visit to Antrim in Connection with the Anti-Home Rule Campaign, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/7, 20 September 1913.

18. The Marchioness, in fact, had arranged Bonar Law's social engagements since the death of his own wife in 1908. Jonathan Bardon, A History of Ulster, (1992), 434.

19. Speech by Lady Londonderry, The Ulster Women's Unionist Council, The Fight Against Home Rule, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/3, 23 January 1911, ff. 2-4.

20. Constitution of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 1911.

21. *Ibid.*, and UWUC, The Fight, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/3, 23 January 1911, ff. 6.

22. Brian Harrison, Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain, (1978), 81-82.

23. UWUC, The Fight, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/3, 23 January 1911, ff. 10.

24. In a January 1913 letter to UWUC colleague Lady Dufferin, the Marchioness of Londonderry alluded to such figures, citing the fine work of "our splendid Association of 200,000 women". This figure is impressive given the fact that the total population of Ulster protestants in 1911 was approximately 695,000. The Census of 1911, PRONI, MIC354. For more membership statistics, see Lady Londonderry to Lady Dufferin, PRONI, D. 1098/1/3, 13 January 1913, The UWUC Annual Report of 1912, PRONI, D.1098/2/1, January 1912, and The Belfast Newsletter, 22 September 1913, 7.

25. UWUC Executive Committee Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/1, 31 January 1911.

26. Resolution of Lady Londonderry, UWUC Executive Committee Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/2/3, 7 June 1911.
27. The Marchioness of Londonderry, UWUC Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/1, 30 January 1911.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Lady Londonderry, My Visit to Antrim, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/7, 20 September 1913.
31. The bill reflected the Gladstonian Liberal tradition, in the sense that it preserved the sovereignty of Westminster while establishing an Irish Parliament with a nominated senate and elected lower house. If enacted, the parliament would possess general powers over regional domestic matters, but issues of Crown, war and peace, the military, foreign trade, defense, treaties, land purchase, national insurance, and old-age pensions would be excluded. The bill also reduced the number of Irish MPs at Westminster to forty-two. For a complete discussion of the bill's provisions, see D. George Boyce, Ireland, 1828-1923: From Ascendancy to Democracy, (1992), 79-80.
32. A. T. Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis: Resistance to Home Rule, 1912-1914. (1993), 62.
33. Robert Dawson Bates to Edith M. Wheeler, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 13 September 1912.
34. Edith M. Wheeler to Lady Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/8/17, 10 September 1912.
35. Bardon, Ulster, (1992), 437.
36. UUC, The Solemn League and Covenant, PRONI, D.1496/3, 28 September 1912.
37. *The Women's Declaration* in My Visit to Antrim, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/7, 20 September 1913.
38. The Duchess of Abercorn was the eldest daughter of an English lord, Earl Howe, and her husband, James Hamilton, Duke of Abercorn, had been a prominent member of the Irish peerage and the Ulster Unionist Council. UWUC, Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 1 April 1913.
39. S. A. Finlay to Lady Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/8/6, 19 February 1912.
40. Charlotte King-Kerr to S. A. Finlay, PRONI, D.2846/1/8/6B, 19 February 1912.
41. UWUC, Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 10 April 1912.
42. Lady Harriet Dufferin and Ava to Lady Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/8/13, 10 April 1912.
43. UWUC, Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 1 April 1913.
44. Lady Londonderry, My Visit to Antrim, PRONI, D.2846/1/2/7, 20 September 1913.
45. Sir Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/1/109, 17 November 1913.
46. This author contends that the term "unionist family sums up communal Unionism", as it "expresses the ethnic or sectarian mentality which underlies all Unionist political thought and activity". In essence, loyalists were joined by their common beliefs and experiences while differences of opinion were pushed aside to preserve unity within the wider movement. Brendan Clifford, The Unionist Family, (Belfast):

1987, 11-13.

47. Bardon, Ulster, (1992), 439-441.

48. By January 1914, the fund amounted to over one million pounds, and, on average, the branch organizations of the UWUC had pledged about £1000 each. Cited by Kinghan, United We Stood, (1975), 27.

49. UWUC Executive Committee Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/2, 21 April 1914.

50. Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/2, 18 November 1913.

51. Vere Galway to Lady Theresa Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/11/17, 22 March 1914.

52. UWUC Executive Committee Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 21 April 1914, ff.49.

53. Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/2, 10 July 1914.

54. G. Sharvey to Lady Theresa Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/11/48, 1914.

55. George Dangerfield, The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations, (1976), 128.

56. UWUC, Annual Report of 1915, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 19 January 1915.

57. For example, the Council formed the Ulster Women's Gift Fund in the fall of 1916 to "look after the welfare and comfort" of those Ulstermen serving in the Ulster Regiments, on the different ships of His Majesty's Fleet, and as prisoners of war. The Fund specifically distributed parcels filled with cigarettes, tobacco, woolen articles, socks, shirts, handkerchiefs, razors, pipes, sweets, writing pads, soap, tea, and sugar. The endowment not only benefited over 20,000 soldiers, but kept the spirit of the unionist campaign alive in a trying time. By the end of 1915, the Fund stood at £120,000, and was second only to the British Red Cross Society in terms of funds raised. Ibid., and The Ulster Women's Gift Fund, PRONI, D.2846/1/9/8, October 1916.

58. "Organised Suffragism in Ireland", *The Irish Citizen*, 25 May 1912, 7.

59. "Irish Women's Franchise League, Ulster Centre", *Irish Citizen*, 12 September 1914, 134.

60. According to the IWFL, the "total body of organised woman suffragists" in Ireland during this period was 3,000. This number was comparative to English franchise supporters, but clearly much less than UWUC rosters. "Organised Suffragism in Ireland", *The Irish Citizen*, 25 May 1912, 7.

61. Constitution, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 1911.

62. "Ulster Unionist Women", *Irish Citizen*, 9 May 1914, 403.

63. Ellen Carol Dubious, "Woman Suffrage Around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism", In Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives, Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., (1994), 266-267.

64. "Irish Women's Franchise League, Ulster Centre", *Irish Citizen*, 11 December 1915, 195.

65. Speech of Lady Londonderry, UWUC Annual Report of 1919, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 28 January 1919, ff. 8.

66. Ibid.
67. UWUC, Annual Report of 1915, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 19 January 1915.
68. Richard Talbot to Lady Theresa Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/11/53, 22 January 1914.
69. Edward Saunderson to Lady Londonderry, PRONI, D.2846/1/11/49, 28 February 1919.
70. Speech of Lady Londonderry, UWUC Annual Report of 1919, PRONI, D.1098/1/3, 28 January 1919, ff. 6.
71. Ibid.
72. UWUC, Annual Report of 1919, PRONI, D.2846/1/8/74D, 29 January 1919.
73. UWUC Executive Committee Minutes, PRONI, D.1098/1/2, 18 March 1919.
74. Ibid.
75. Eulogy of Colonel Repington, quoted by Hyde, The Londonderrys, (1979), 137.
76. In 1920, 820,000 Protestants and 430,000 Catholics lived in the six counties which eventually made up "Northern Ireland". John Darby, "The Historical Background". In Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict. John Darby, ed., (1983), 20.
77. Martin Pugh attributes the coming of the female franchise to the fact that men, after experiencing the benefits of women's participation in the public sphere, specifically through their ancillary political work and wartime activities, were now more receptive to the ideas and opinions of women. Pugh's argument explains why Ulster politicians may have eventually accepted the vote, as the UWUC, not the Irish Women's Franchise League, had the greater impact in the region. Martin Pugh, The Impact of Women's Enfranchisement in Britain, In Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives, Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., (1994), 321.
78. Asserting that "Ulster women have been living in the shadows of historical obscurity for too long", Janice Holmes and Diane Urquhart call for a wider analysis of Irish women, particularly unionist women. Because unionist women tended to join more conventional ancillary associations that supported the status quo rather than the radical franchise societies and labor associations of nationalist women, their contributions have often been overlooked. Diane Urquhart and Janice Holmes, eds. "Introduction", Coming Into the Light: the Work, Politics, and Religion of Women in Ulster, 1840-1940, (1994), viii.
79. K. D. Reynolds, Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain, (1998): 155-156.
80. "In Praise of Ulster Women", *Irish Citizen*, 7 February 1914, 301.