

# The Daily Fight

**Tom Palaima**

Mar 30, 2011, 4:19 pm CST

## LOST BOOKS OF TEXAS

**MOST OF US NEVER HOLD HIGH POLITICAL OFFICE.** Neither did Jane McCallum until, as she was approaching 50, she served as Texas secretary of state from 1927 to 1933.

Ginger Rogers wore high heels and danced backward. McCallum raised five children. She supported her husband, Arthur Newell McCallum Sr., during his four decades as superintendent of Austin schools. She was a member of the school Mothers' Club, the Colonial Dames of Texas and the Shakspere (*sic*) Club. She lobbied legislators and organized statewide information blitzes supporting "equal suffrage." On a typical day, like Friday, May 4, 1918, she saw to 21 commitments between 5:30 a.m. and 11 p.m., not including the "dozens of little things left out."

In *A Texas Suffragist*, we glimpse McCallum's take on daily life from October 1916 to the end of 1919, based on pages of her "write and run" diary and weekly columns she wrote on suffrage politics and women's issues for the *Austin American* newspaper.

McCallum appeals because she did exceptional things with unexceptional skills. She was determined to keep moving her causes forward and do well by her children. She indulged reasonably in personal reflection and self-doubt. Her ambitions were for the people who mattered to her and the ideas whose time she thought had come.

She is a Southern lady, for better and worse. She feels righteous anger that “the Mexicans, negroes, Republicans, I.W.W.’s [Industrial Workers of the World], Reds, socialists and ‘what-nots’ including ‘first paper’ Huns [were] allowed to vote while loyal American women were not.” She declared, even before Gov. “Pa” Ferguson had his handpicked regents fire six University of Texas professors and the university secretary, that she would be wickedly delighted if the governor and his regents—she names four—“were to be killed.”

In a more reflective moment, she writes that “I feel sometimes that I’ve failed every body, and every thing. Why do we have to live a life nearly through before we know how? And then—do we know?”

McCallum’s answer is as good, and good for us, as any: “Think I’d better stop and go look at my poppies.”

*Tom Palaima is professor of classics at the University of Texas at Austin.*