

## The Mt. Olive Governor and Women's Suffrage

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The 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Until this amendment was ratified by 36 states and officially adopted on August 26, 1920 female citizens of the US did not have uniform rights to vote throughout the country. The amendment was submitted to the states for ratification in June 1919 after a long battle for women's suffrage rights. In 1807 every state constitution denied female suffrage. As new states were added, some allowed women suffrage, particularly in the West. In the late 1800s, efforts to gain women's suffrage intensified and opinions strongly divided.

When the 19th Amendment was submitted to the states, the Governor of South Carolina was Robert Archer Cooper, a native of Laurens County. Cooper was born in Waterloo Township in 1874 in a community known as Mt. Olive today. His parents were Henry A. and Elizabeth Jones Cooper. His Grandfather was the Rev. John A. Cooper, a Baptist minister. Young Robert helped his father with his modest farm. As a young man, he worked at Masters' Kiln.<sup>1</sup> There were at least three working limestone mines in an area running east/west across this part of the county. The limestone was used for monument stone or heated in kilns to make cement mortar.<sup>2</sup> "During breaks at the lime kiln, Cooper was said to stand on of the large rocks situated around the lime kiln and practice his oratory skills. When asked what he was doing, he would reply he was honing his speaking skills for the future, as one day he planned to be elected governor."<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 shows the mentioned locations as shown on the Kyzer & Hellams Map of 1883.

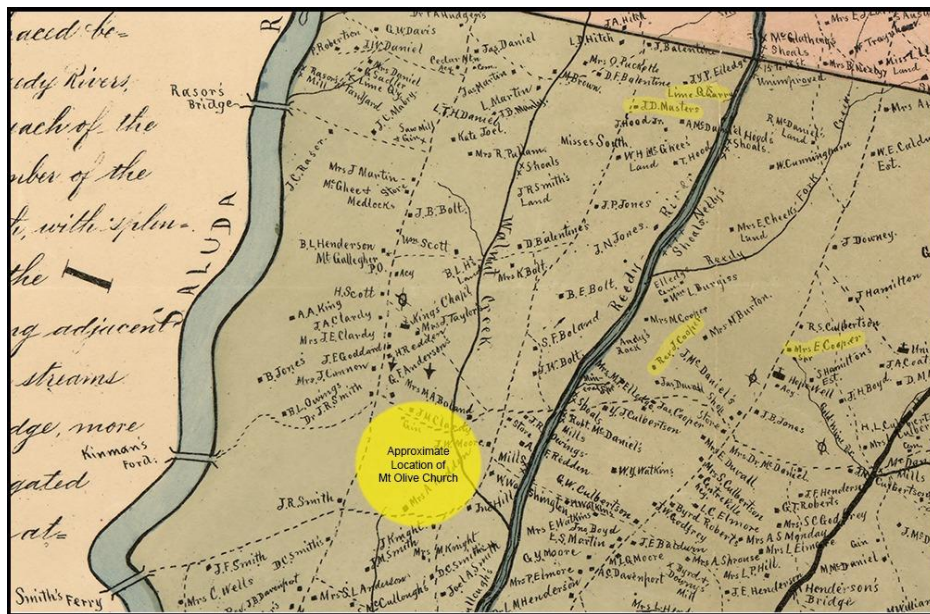


Figure 1. Mt. Olive Community

<sup>1</sup> The Kyzer & Hellams Map of Laurens County, dated 1883, shows a lime quarry located on the west bank of the Reedy River near the home of J. D. Master near today's Mt. Olive Community.

<sup>2</sup> Hillyard, M. B., THE NEW SOUTH. A Description of the Southern States- Noting: Each State Separately, and giving their distinctive features and most Salient Characteristics, THE MANUFACTURERS' RECORD CO., BALTIMORE, MD., 1887. P. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Banyon, Dan, The Governor from Mt Olive, The Observer newspaper, Ware Shoals, SC, May 10, 2017.

At the age of 20, he entered Jones High School just across the Saluda River in what is now Greenwood County. It is said that William P. Culbertson, the school's principal, provided Cooper with much inspiration and daily encouragement in his studies. At the end of the school year, he obtained a teaching certificate and taught for about four years. During his teaching years, Cooper began studying law under B. W. Ball. In 1897, he moved to the Town of Laurens and entered the law office of Senator J. L. M. Irby for work and study.<sup>4</sup>

Cooper received an LL.D. from the Polytechnic Institute in San German, Puerto Rico. He was admitted to the South Carolina Bar in 1898 and began practice in the Town of Laurens. He was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives at the age of 26 and served from 1900 to 1904. Later he was elected three times to the position of Solicitor of the Eighth Judicial District of South Carolina. He won election as the 93rd Governor of South Carolina in November 1918. He was sworn into office on January 21, 1919. He was re-elected for a second term. He resigned the governorship on May 20, 1922 to accept an appointment to the Federal Farm Loan Board, where he served for five years. Afterward, he resumed law practice. The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (Black Tuesday), and the nation and developed world entered the Great Depression. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Cooper to help organize the Commodity Credit Corporation by serving General Counsel. In 1934, Roosevelt appointed him judge of the district court for Puerto Rico, a position he would hold for 13 years. Robert Archer Cooper died in 1953 and is buried at the Laurens City Cemetery.

As governor, Cooper launched a progressive program that sought to establish a seven-month school term in the state, compulsory statewide school attendance, higher teacher salaries, expanded public health services, and increased road construction. Unfortunately, the political mood

of South Carolina and most other Southern states did not favor extending voting rights to women. In fact, South Carolina and many other states passed resolutions rejecting the 19th Amendment in attempt to defeat it. (See Figure 2.)

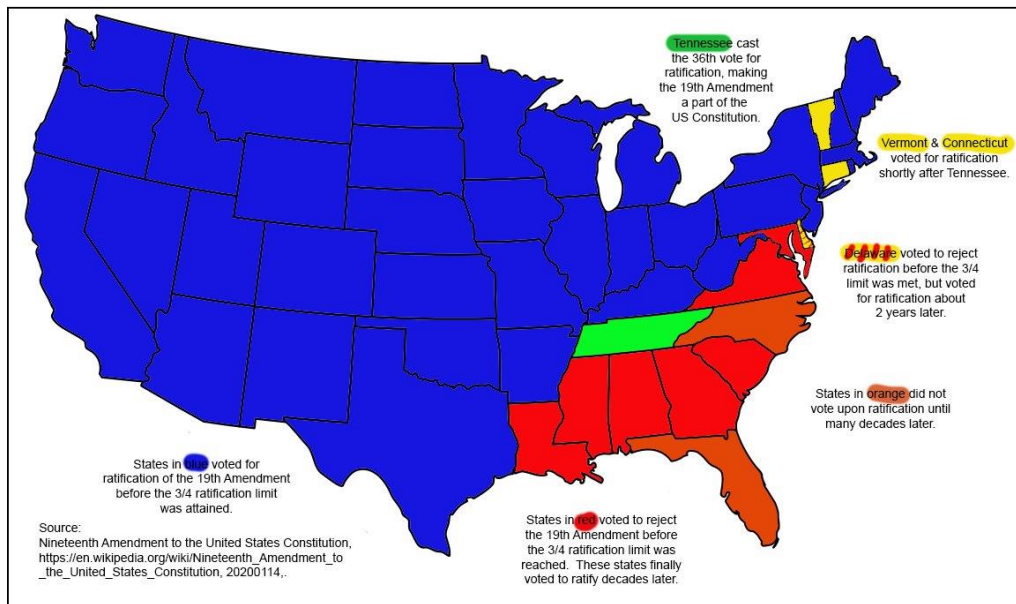


Figure 2. Ratification of the 19th Amendment

Following the amendment's adoption, the state recognized the right of women to vote, but denied them service on juries.<sup>5</sup>

End

<sup>4</sup> Blazed Own Trail into Prominence, The Horry Herald, Conway, South Carolina, February 6, 1919, P. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Boddie, T. Michael, SC Waited Until 1969 to Ratify the 19th Amendment, Giving Women the Right to Vote, The Post and Courier, Charleston, SC, June 30, 2019.