

I was born in Corning, New York in 1878. My mother died very young, but before she did she called me and my two sisters to her bedside and counseled us to go to Bryn Mawr College. Shortly thereafter my father also died. We were sent to live with my uncle who was horrified that we wanted to attend college because college women were looked upon as freaks in the 1890s. No matter. I graduated with a BA and then a Masters Degree in Biology and Chemistry.

After school I moved to Baltimore to be with my sister who was enrolled in the medical college. There I met my husband, Thomas Hepburn and married him in 1904. We moved to Hartford – eventually had six children, one of whom was my namesake - and over the years we both developed interests in unseemly subjects: he - social hygiene and urology. Me: woman's suffrage and the suppression of prostitution. I soon became locally visible, and even hosted Emmeline Pankhurst when she visited the country. My husband commented that it was indeed a peaceful morning when he did not see my name in the newspaper.

The public spotlight heightened with my work against commercialized vice in Hartford. This is the story I told to the Convention of College Alumnae in 1914.

There existed in Hartford a house of prostitution in a bustling neighborhood. A few doors down from the police station! The police were not addressing this situation, so the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association began to pass out fliers that said 'Mothers Beware: 60,000 innocent girls wanted to take the places of 60,000 white slaves who will die this year in this country.' Now visible, we asked Mayor to appoint a Vice Commission.

The complaint was simple – prostitution promoted white slave traffic and the spread of venereal disease. All women's lives were at stake. The Vice Commission

met and reported to the City Council that all houses of prostitution in Hartford be closed. The City Council took a vote and decided to postpone deciding indefinitely. We had the Commission's report reprinted.

NEXT we put a 5' sign up in our store front window. In large letters it read:

MOTHERS OF HARTFORD, DO YOU KNOW HOW THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL (WHO CLAIMS TO REPRESENT YOU) HAS VOTED WITH REGARD TO THE SUPPRESSION OF COMMERCIALIZED VICE IN THE CITY??

We listed the names and addresses and votes of the men on the Hartford City Council. The big sign in the front window acted almost like a rope. The people passing by would see it, stop short, read the names and come in to get a copy of the City Council's Report to take home.

Then, as now, women have no political pressure to bear. We have no vote. But we had publicity. Difficult at first. We had been taught that a modest woman ought not even to know about these things. Because of prostitution, however, every woman is at risk - from the girl being trafficked, to the girl with an illegitimate child, to the wife with an unmentionable disease and a ruined baby to be sent to an asylum. It is striking that even though thousands of girls of tender age are now working in factories and shops away from all restraint, low wages and long hours cannot drive enough women to supply men's demands. A regular traffic, like the old black slave traffic has had to be organized.

And yet we are held responsible, unlike the men involved. Men have said to us, 'If we are going to take you into our homes and make you the mothers of our children then you must prove that you are fit for motherhood. You must bring a clean record.' They have made this one demand of us so uncompromisingly that the very term virtue as applied to women came to mean virtue in regard to sex. Women are

not in a position to make demands on men. Today men own our property and our children, our legitimate children - women have always owned their illegitimate children. When we are free to demand, as we shall be, I believe women will demand what men have demanded of us. We shall say to men, 'If you are to come to us in that intimate relationship between man and woman, your body must not be tainted with sordid memories, and the children that you give us must have every chance to strong and healthy.' And when that time comes, as I know it will, I believe that men will have gained as much as women, for every man – even the worst - knows in his own heart that the present state of affairs is wrong and that it does not bring happiness even unto himself.

**Katherine Houghton Hepburn, Sr. 1878 -1951**

**Tulis McCall**