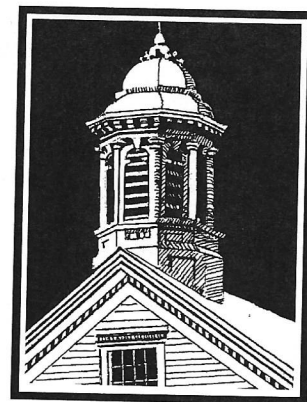


the CASTINE VISITOR

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Summer 2017

vol. 27 no. 2



2017 SUMMER EXHIBIT

CASTINE'S DEVOTED WOMEN: PARTNERSHIP AND SOCIAL REFORM 1910-1962

Lorna Stephens

Crafting a title to convey the most important aspects of a complex history exhibit is always a little tricky. It has to be snappy, concise, astute! The 2017 CHS exhibit committee put their heads together and hit on the title above, which is loaded with layers of meaning.

"Devoted" is the word family members of the two women at the center of this story use to describe their relationship. The word reflects commitment on several levels. Mary W. (Molly) Dewson (1874-1962) and Mary G. (Polly) Porter (1884-1972) were devoted to each other and referred to each other as partners throughout their fifty-two-year relationship. During their life together, they resided in Massachusetts, France, New York, Connecticut, and Washington, DC, but they never missed a summer in Castine at Polly's seasonal home, Moss Acre, and it became their full-time home when they retired in 1952. They built their lives around each other, all the while showing constant devotion to their families, friends, and communities.



Polly Porter (left) and Molly Dewson, 1958
Porter-Dewson Collection volume 22, Castine Historical Society

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

Castine Historical Society 2017 Summer Schedule

Saturdays, 10 am

Guided walking tours of historic Castine in July and August. Meet at 10:00 am in front of the Abbott School.

Sunday, June 25, 4:00-6:00 pm

Opening reception for the Castine Historical Society's 2017 summer exhibits. Light refreshments will be served.

Last Tuesday of the Month, 5:00 pm Abbott School

Exhibit talk: Discover *Castine's Devoted Women*. Offered Tuesdays: June 27, July 25, and August 29. Tour and discussion led by curator Paige Lilly in the Abbott School exhibit hall. Refreshments served.

Wednesday, July 12, 4:30 pm Unitarian Universalist Church on the Town Common

Biographer Susan Ware, author of *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics*, will give a talk entitled "Two Lifelong Partnerships: Molly Dewson, Polly Porter, and the Historian Who Wrote About Them."

Friday, July 14

The Town of Castine sponsors its second annual Bastille Day Festival. See www.visitmaine.com for more information.

Saturday, July 29 and Sunday, July 30

"Touring Through Time" is a collective open house with historical societies and museums around eastern Penobscot Bay and the Blue Hill peninsula, many of which will offer exhibits and events that weekend.

Tuesday, August 8, 7:00 pm Delano Auditorium, Maine Maritime Academy

Ninth Annual Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture: Blanche Wiesen Cook, author of a three-volume biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, will deliver a lecture entitled, "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Moral Basis of Democracy."

August 23, Wednesday, 4:00 pm Mitchell Room at the Abbott School

Castine Historical Society Annual Meeting and talk. After a brief business meeting, historian and Castine resident Lynn Parsons will give a talk entitled, "Some Thoughts About Alexander Hamilton: 'The Bastard Brat of a Scotch Pedlar'."

Abbott School Exhibits: Open June 12-Labor Day, Mon-Sat 10:00 am-4:00 pm, Sun 1:00-4:00 pm

- *Castine's Devoted Women: Partnership and Social Reform 1910-1962*
- *The Penobscot Expedition of 1779: Making Revolutionary History*
- *The Castine Community Bicentennial Quilt*

Also open Labor Day-Columbus Day Fri, Sat, and Mon 10:00 am-4:00 pm, Sun 1:00-4:00 pm

Samuel P. Grindle House:

Open June 27-Labor Day, Tues and Thurs 2-4 pm

Exhibit: *Preventable Pitfalls in Preserving the Past* Fostering awareness of the damage done to art, artifacts, and archives when attacked by pests, moisture, light, and mishandling.

Archives and Library: Open for information and research year-round by appointment

All events are open to the public and admission is free.

Any changes to the schedule will be posted in local papers and at www.castinehistoricalsociety.org



We seek to invigorate our community through collaborative exploration and stewardship of our region's rich history, engaging residents and visitors of all ages in Castine's extraordinary past and, through it, that of New England and North America.

The Castine Visitor is published three times a year by the Society for its members and friends.

Wendy Knickerbocker.....Editor

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**Castine
 Historical Society**

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Why is history relevant? Last month when Curator Paige Lilly and I interviewed candidates for the Summer Intern position, most of the applicants expressed a desire to be a part of making history relevant to the public. This theme is an ongoing challenge at the Castine Historical Society. I feel it is an important question, so I enlisted the help of Dr. Lynn Parsons, Professor Emeritus at the State University of New York, College at Brockport, to give us his answer to the question.—*Brooke Tenney*

When I was asked to share my thoughts about “history,” I agreed, believing that with well over a half-century of teaching and writing about it, the task would be either a slam-dunk or a piece of cake (depending on what metaphor you prefer). We academics have often been called upon to explain, defend, and otherwise justify our discipline. Go to the website of any college with a history department, and you will see what I mean.

But, not so fast. If we are honest, we have to admit that it is possible—although not necessarily desirable—to go through life without ever reading a book on history, or indeed thinking seriously about it at all.

And let's face it, there is a counter-narrative out there that questions or derides history's relevance in the first place. Historians, wrote H.L. Mencken, are just “failed novelists.” History is a “lie agreed upon,” said Napoleon; “mostly fluid prejudice,” added Mark Twain; “more or less bunk,” concluded Henry Ford. The noted historian A.J.P. Taylor once remarked that “the great lesson of history is that there are no lessons of history.” (You won't find that one on many history department websites.)

Yet for many, an understanding of the past is crucial to their identity in the present. Witness the controversy over the removal of statues honoring the white leaders of the Confederacy in many southern states today. Or, closer to home, the proper words that should be used in writing about Native American Indians in New England. Or, even closer yet, the accuracy of Charles W. Noyes's “Historical Signs” put up in our town over a century ago. To one extent or another, our view of the past, either as individuals or a nation of individuals, has an effect on the choices we make in the future. And that's why, although history for some may be “a lie agreed upon,” or “mostly fluid prejudice,” or even “bunk,” it's still important. That's what George Orwell meant, when, in his novel *1984*, he has the totalitarian state he writes about proclaim that “he who controls the past controls the future.”

Now, we in Castine do not have to deal with the cosmic issues that are raised in *1984*. Our town, like most other New England towns, has been the scene of quarrels over land boundaries, disputes over theology, accusations of adultery and worse, not to mention trials for murder and the public hangings that followed. We also have been invaded by the British twice, a distinction that few if any other towns in America can claim.

My own research, using materials in Emerson Hall, the Wilson Museum, and the Castine Historical Society, as well as conversations with longtime residents and others with a passion for understanding the past, has not taught me any “great lesson of history,” but it has taught me much about what one of my former colleagues liked to call “the everyday lives of ordinary people.” So, whether you are one of those who want to “control the future” through history, or are simply curious about how your fellow humans lived their “everyday lives,” you can't go wrong with history.—*Lynn H. Parsons*

Staff and volunteers at the Castine Historical Society are excited about the 2017 summer season. We are sending this edition of *The Castine Visitor* to all residents of Castine as well as to members, with the hope that our entire community will have the opportunity to learn about and visit our events this season. If you are not a member already, becoming one is easy to do. Just fill out and send in the membership form in this newsletter, or join online at www.castinehistoricalsociety.org. We look forward to seeing you!

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website has a new look! Go to
castinehistoricalsociety.org to view
the new design!



Molly (left) and Polly in Castine with their dogs Fu T'ou, Yuang,
and Coony

Porter-Dewson Collection volume 5, Castine Historical Society

Molly especially was devoted to social work and efforts to reform national policies to improve the lives of women, families, and workers. In history, it is risky to make assertions about the influence of specific individuals, but it is difficult to overstate Molly Dewson's importance! Her work on FDR's campaigns was inspired, using the tactics of the women's suffrage movement to reach voters on a local level. She cared deeply about labor and social issues, working tirelessly both in the nonprofit private sphere and in public legislation to improve women's lives and working conditions. She believed that women had the ability to succeed and should have the opportunity to do so. Polly shared those goals, although on a more local scale. She and Molly advocated for women's suffrage before volunteering for the American Red Cross efforts to resettle French refugees during World War I. While the Porter-Dewsons lived in New York, Polly worked with labor reform organizations to educate children of workers and help them develop a sense of social responsibility.

Molly and Polly documented their experiences and interests in twenty-eight meticulously assembled scrapbooks from c1910-1962. This summer's exhibit is built around these scrapbooks, donated to the Castine Historical Society by Molly's great-niece, Virginia Stone Bourne, in June of 2016. The committee is excited to present this exhibit in the style of a scrapbook, telling the story through the words and eyes of Molly and Polly as much as

possible. The goal is to present each aspect of their life and work through quotations from their correspondence, contemporary newspaper articles clipped and pasted into the pages of their scrapbooks, and the words of those who knew them.

Almost every image of the exhibit comes from one of their scrapbooks. Visitors will have the opportunity to take on the role of historian as they explore the clippings, photos, and correspondence of these women and their friends and colleagues. Explanations written by the committee help viewers put these words and pictures into a larger historical context but do not make any conclusions about what they should take away from the information presented, encouraging each viewer to read the Porter-Dewsons' life story on his or her own terms.

Marti Brill designed the aesthetic experience of the exhibit, inspired by the Porter-Dewson scrapbooks. It is composed in this style in part to bring the visitor's attention to the selection process that is inherent in the telling of history. There are multiple layers of selection in this story, beginning with the initial process of assembling the scrapbooks. Molly and Polly made choices about the information they felt was most important to them and to the memory of their experiences. This was both an act of historical documentation and active memory-making. As committee members went through the scrapbooks researching Molly and Polly's life together, the committee's understanding of their story was influenced by their choices.

It is impossible to translate twenty-eight scrapbooks and their historical context directly into one exhibit, and committee members as researchers made choices about the material that seemed relevant to the storyline. Of course, the first concern was reproducing Molly and Polly's story as close to their own telling as possible, but certain sacrifices had to be made. Each visitor comes in with different experiences and assumptions about the world, history, people, and relationships. The exhibit format allows everyone to construct his or her own understanding of Molly and Polly's life together.

In the 1950s, Molly donated many of her professional papers to Harvard University's Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. While the scrapbooks present a well of valuable information on Molly and Polly's early work, summers in Castine, and time with family and friends, Molly's papers in the Schlesinger Library collection cover her professional activities in greater

detail. Molly's papers were extremely helpful in developing an understanding of her activities in social reform in New York in the 1920s and her political work on FDR's campaigns and his New Deal policies.

To supplement this information, the committee reached out to the Frances Perkins Center in Damariscotta, Maine, and to the Wellesley College Archives. Molly's great-niece, Virginia Stone Bourne, was also extremely generous, welcoming committee members to visit Moss Acre to view framed letters, a wealth of Polly's detailed diaries, photographs, and other archival gems. Marti Brill was also able to visit, and she was inspired by the décor to design the exhibit panels' backdrop to imitate the grasscloth wall coverings in the dining and living rooms at Moss Acre.

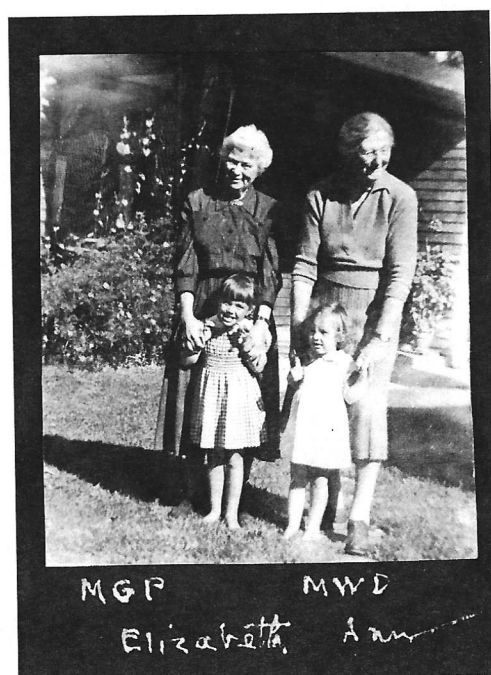
Another significant source of background research for the committee was Susan Ware's biography of Molly, *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics*. It is an excellent resource for the context and consequences of Molly's work, and this summer Ware will be giving a lecture in celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the book's publication. The exhibit will tell a story informed by all of these sources, with an emphasis on primary source information centered on the scrapbooks and special attention to Molly and Polly's connection to Castine.

What makes this exhibit special is the relevance it has to our lives today, both on a larger, sociopolitical scale and a more local understanding of community. Molly Dewson was a powerful, influential woman devoted to benefitting her community on

both local and national levels. She worked for women's and workers' rights, refused to take "no" for an answer, and was utterly committed to her professional career. Visitors will discover themes from Molly's work that persist in current political and legislative news. Likewise, visitors will recognize that Molly and Polly also worked hard at their relationship, making sacrifices and compromises to be together and to support each other. For example, every year Molly arranged to take a break from her work and campaigns, usually for several months, to return to Moss Acre with Polly and spend time with their friends and family.

We call them "Castine's devoted women" because this is where they made their home, and their fellow residents of Castine loved them for their hard work, ambition, sharp wit, and warm hearts. We don't know every aspect of their lives; we only know what they felt was important, what they documented and saved. We can only reconstruct their story for ourselves using the legacy they left behind.

Editor's Note: Lorna Stephens served as a CHS intern in December of 2016, researching the Porter-Dewson story, organizing the scrapbooks in archival storage, and outlining a framework for the 2017 summer exhibit. She and Curator Paige Lilly traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to study Molly Dewson's papers in the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard. Much of the research, image selection, and storyline for the exhibit is Lorna's work. She is in her fourth year of a five-year double-degree program at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. She studies vocal performance and history.



Polly and Molly with great-great-nieces Elizabeth and Ann Bourne at Moss Acre, 1956
Porter-Dewson Collection volume 19, Castine Historical Society



Moss Acre, 1906
Private Collection

Author Susan Ware to Speak on Molly Dewson and Polly Porter

The Castine Historical Society is pleased to welcome biographer Susan Ware for a special talk, entitled "Two Lifelong Partnerships: Molly Dewson and Polly Porter, and the Historian Who Wrote About Them." Ware's talk will be presented at the Unitarian Universalist Church on July 12 at 4:30 pm.

From her website: "A pioneer in the field of women's history and a leading feminist biographer, Susan Ware is the author and editor of numerous books on twentieth-century U.S. history. Educated at Wellesley College and Harvard University, she has taught at New York University and Harvard, where she served as editor of the biographical dictionary *Notable American Women: Completing the Twentieth Century* (2004). Since 2012, she has served as the general editor of the *American National Biography*, published by Oxford University Press under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies. Ware has long been associated with the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and is currently writing a book of suffrage stories inspired by its collections."

Her book, *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics* (Yale University Press, 1987), focuses on the life of Molly Dewson. "Dewson, a life-long Progressive reformer and the driving force behind women's expanded roles in politics and government in the New Deal, inhabited a world

where women's personal friendships and professional associations often overlapped. Dewson shared most of her adult life with a woman named Polly Porter, a fifty-two-year partnership that profoundly affected her career. Dewson's woman-centered existence led her to develop a style of feminist political activism that was based on mobilizing networks of reform-minded women in public life and shows one direction feminism took in the years after suffrage."

The event is free and open to the public. For additional information about this event and others sponsored by the Castine Historical Society, please call 326-4118 or visit www.castinehistoricalsociety.org



Blanche Wiesen Cook to Give the Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture: “Eleanor Roosevelt and the Moral Basis of Democracy”



Photo by Brian Lamb

Blanche Wiesen Cook, author of a three-volume biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, will deliver the Ninth Annual Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture on Tuesday, August 8, at 7:00 pm. She will speak on “Eleanor Roosevelt and the Moral Basis of Democracy.”

The third and concluding volume of Dr. Cook's biography, *Eleanor Roosevelt: The War Years and After, 1939-1962*, was published last year, and it was listed by the *New York Times* as one of the “100 Notable Books of 2016.” Cook was interviewed in Ken Burns' documentary “The Roosevelts: An Intimate History,” produced by PBS in 2014.

Dr. Cook is Professor Emerita at the John Jay College of the City University of New York, and she received her PhD in History from Johns Hopkins University. In addition to the biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, Cook has written *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare*.

The Pulliam Lectures were established in 2009 to honor the memory and achievements of Deborah Pulliam, a longtime supporter of the Castine Historical Society. This year's lecture will take place in the Delano Auditorium of Maine Maritime Academy. It is free and open to the public.

Castine Historical Society Annual Meeting

Wednesday, August 23, 4:00 pm

The Castine Historical Society will hold its Annual Meeting in the Mitchell Room on the lower level of the Society's Abbott School. Following a brief business meeting, the evening's program will be a talk with historian Lynn Parsons entitled “Some Thoughts about Alexander Hamilton: ‘The Bastard Brat of a Scotch Pedlar’.”

Dr. Parsons will explore his relationship with Alexander Hamilton, which began more than a half-century ago when, as a graduate student, he published his first peer-reviewed essay. That was followed by his doctoral dissertation, which was also about Hamilton, and then the relationship extended to last December, when Parsons attended the musical “Hamilton” in New York City.

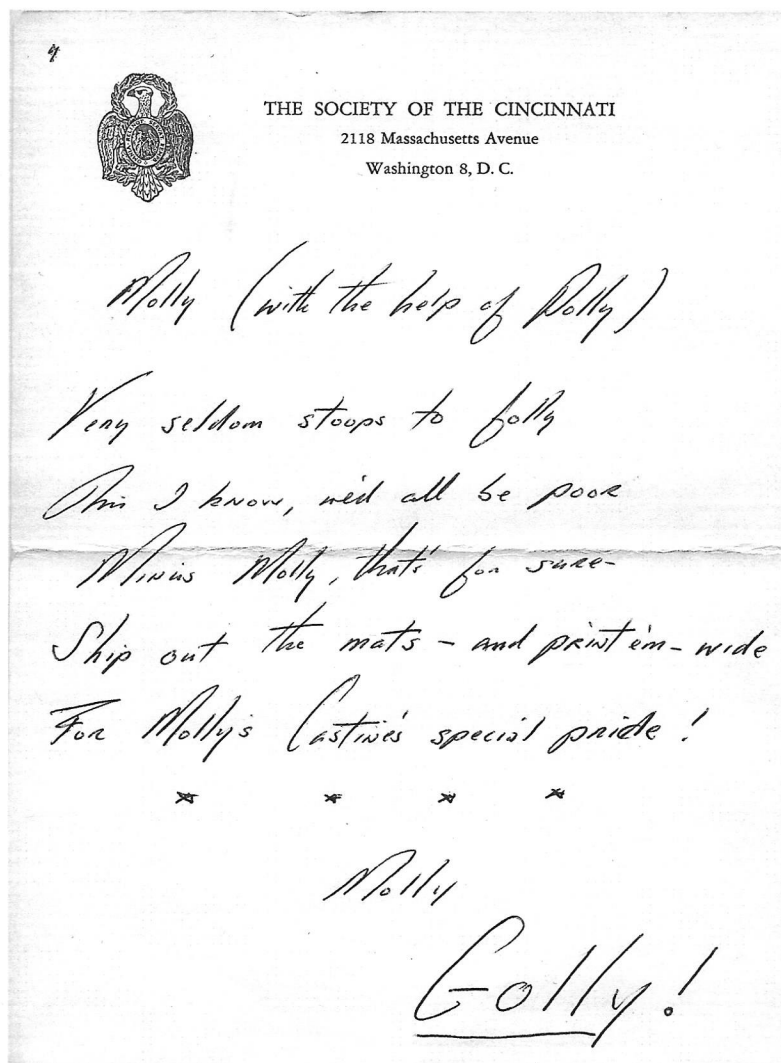
The event is open to the public and admission is free.

Molly Golly—There's More!

Paige Lilly

Preparing for the 2017 seasonal exhibit at the Abbott School has been a treasure hunt. The photographs and memorabilia in the Porter-Dewson scrapbooks are clues, each leading toward friendships, political connections, or familiar locales. Most point the researcher, or unsuspecting exhibit committee member, off in more than one of these directions. The CHS events calendar includes three opportunities to discover more about the Porter-Dewson story. Join me on the last Tuesday of June, July and August at 5 pm for more treasure, more historical connections, and more intriguing stories!

The poem, or song, on the next page was written by Francis W. (Frank) Hatch in 1954, and it is an excellent example of “more.” Hatch, himself devoted to Castine through ancestry, seasonal residence, and force of personality, was a neighbor of the Porter-Dewsons on the Shore Road. You will see two documents by him in the exhibit. He and his son Frank were both well known for writing songs and poems in honor of Castine history and their friends near and far.



Last part of Frank Hatch's poem "Molly on a mat, Fancy that!" (1954)
Porter-Dewson Collection volume 20, Castine Historical Society

"THERE'S MORE" (CONT.)

In this tribute to Molly, Frank Hatch sings her praises (supplying one of the best portraits of her personality) in the context of both her local and national popularity. The "mat" refers to a matrix, the surface for typesetting print, and must have followed Molly's appearance in a newspaper in 1954. Edmund Muskie, mentioned in the first verse, won the Maine gubernatorial election in 1954 and later served as Maine's Democratic Senator for over twenty years. Hatch mailed these verses, handwritten on four sheets of stationery, from Washington, DC, to Molly in Castine. The pages are in a scrapbook, but they didn't make the cut for the exhibit. Enjoy!

Molly on a mat, Fancy that!

by Frank Hatch, 1954

Molly matted for the millions
Clerics, servicemen, civilians,
Molly for the New-Deal-doters,
Molly for the Orland voters
Molly for Penobscot huskies
Molly for the Edmund Muskies
Molly looking prim as Quincy
Reading facts by Dr. Kinsey --

Molly ready for the worst
At the hands of W.R. Hearst,
Molly with expression solemn
Made to fit a single column,
Molly with a wry expression
Like a priest who hears confession,
Molly waiting on the brink
For a smear of printers ink,
Molly with her shampooed tresses
Ready for the printing presses

Molly ready for a rub
With the Castine Women's Club
Where Republicans hold sway
(Molly hopes to mend their way!)
"Print my mug to help the party"
Molly so that all may see
What she looks like--Mercy me!
Molly sassy as a jay-bird
Molly, bless her, such a gay bird

Molly (with the help of Polly)
Very seldom stoops to folly
This I know, we'd all be poor
Minus Molly, that's for sure.
Ship out the mats--and print 'em wide
For Molly's Castine's special pride!

Molly Golly!

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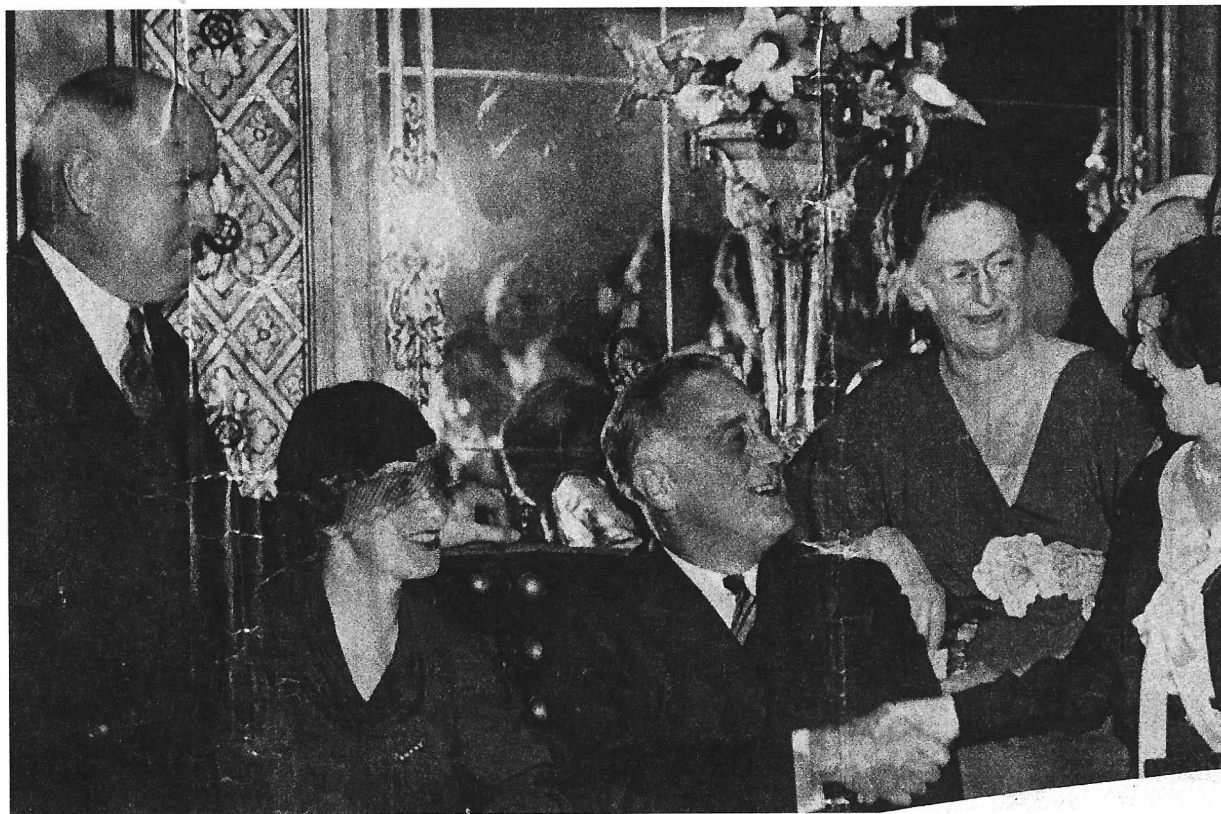
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Molly Dewson's influence on women's politics and labor reform rivaled that of her close friend, Eleanor Roosevelt. Much of Dewson's most important work was accomplished behind the scenes, pushing for greater representation and power of women in politics. For example, Molly convinced President Roosevelt that Frances Perkins was the most qualified person to serve as Secretary of Labor in the New Deal administration, which led to Perkins' appointment as the first woman Cabinet member. From left: Jim Farley, Mrs. Anna Curtis Dall, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Molly Dewson. Unknown newspaper, December 24, 1932.

Private Collection