Dora Hurd Kelly Lewis

*Born October 13, 1862 to Henry P. Kelly and Louise Hurd. Died January 31, 1928*

*Married attorney Lawrence Lewis in 1883 and they had three children. Lewis’ husband died in a train accident in 1890 leaving Dora a wealthy widow.*

She supported the strikers during the Philadelphia Shirtwaist Strike in 1909-1910. 7,000 strikers mostly young immigrant women struck demanding a 50-hour week, better pay and better hours. Lewis & and other wealthy women helped with food, transportation, etc. The strike was settled in early 1910, but the employers refused to recognize the women’s union. In New York, wealthy women such as Inez Milholland and Alva Belmont played similar roles.

Lewis became involved in the NAWSA activities in 1912. In charge of the local arrangements committee for a convention, she asked Alice Paul recently returned from England to help her and the two became very close. A long-term acquaintance with Anna Howard Shaw, leader of NAWSA in the early 20 th century, helped Lewis smooth over the sometimes-fractious relationship between Paul and the older NAWSA leaders. When Paul split with NAWSA and founded the Congressional Union in 1913 (later the NWP) Lewis became a member of the Executive Committee (1913-1920). After 1917 she led the NWP’s fund-raising efforts using her contacts with wealthy women to raise money for NWP.

When Paul collapsed in 1917 and she was misdiagnosed with Bright’s Disease, Lewis insisted she see her brother at Johns Hopkins. He told Alice to rest and eat better.

During 1917-1919 Lewis was arrested 4 times. She was sent to Occoquan in November 1917 and as spokesman for the suffrage prisoners, her demand to be recognized as a political prisoner helped touch off the Night of Terror. She was told to “Shut up’ By Superintendent Whitaker before being dragged away. She was one of the women who was force fed at the Occoquan Workhouse. She also led the protest in August 1918 (Inez Milholland’s birthday) when she and other NWP members climbed up on the Lafayette Statue. Lewis was giving a speech when the arrests began. She managed just one
sentence before she was dragged away. She was arrested on New Year’s Day in 1919 when she began burning Wilson’s speeches during the Watch Fire demonstrations.

She became the national treasurer for NWP in 1919. She also worked in Georgia and Kentucky to try to convince those states to ratify the 19th. Georgia refused, but Kentucky said yes in Jan 1920. In 1920 she was the chair of the NWP ratification committees. In 1921 she and Jane Addams were part of the group that dedicated the Adelaide Johnson suffrage memorial place in the capital.

*(She is picture in the photograph to the right, in the center.*)