



# Madeline McDowell Breckinridge and the Battle for a New South (Topics in Kentucky History)

*Melba Porter Hay*

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Preeminent Kentucky reformer and women's rights advocate Madeline McDowell Breckinridge (1872--1920) was at the forefront of social change during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A descendant of Henry Clay and the daughter of two of Kentucky's most prominent families, Breckinridge had a remarkably varied activist career that included roles in the promotion of public health, education, women's rights, and charity. Founder of the Lexington Civic League and Associated Charities, Breckinridge successfully lobbied to create parks and playgrounds and to establish a juvenile court system in Kentucky. She also became president of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association, served as vice president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and even campaigned across the country for the League of Nations. In the first biography of Breckinridge since 1921, *Madeline McDowell Breckinridge and the Battle for a New South*, Melba Porter Hay draws on newly discovered correspondence and rich personal interviews with her female associates to illuminate the fascinating life of this important Kentucky activist. Deftly balancing Breckinridge's public reform efforts with her private concerns, Hay tells the story of Madeline's marriage to Desha Breckinridge, editor of the *Lexington Herald*, and how she used the match to her advantage by promoting social causes in the newspaper. Hay also chronicles Breckinridge's ordeals with tuberculosis and amputation, and emotionally trying episodes of family betrayal and sex scandals. Hay describes how Breckinridge's physical struggles and personal losses transformed her from a privileged socialite into a selfless advocate for the disadvantaged. Later as vice president of the National American Women Suffrage Association, Breckinridge lobbied for Kentucky's ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote in 1920. While devoting much of her life to the woman suffrage movement on the local and national levels, she also supported the antituberculosis movement, social programs for the poor, compulsory school attendance, and laws regulating child labor. In bringing to life this extraordinary reformer, Hay shows how Breckinridge championed Kentucky's social development during the Progressive Era.

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