



Caroline Maria Seymour Severance (1820–1914) was an American abolitionist, suffragist, and founder of women's clubs.

In 1840, Caroline married Theodoric C. Severance, (nicknamed *T. C.*), an abolitionist banker from Cleveland, Ohio.

After hearing lectures by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott, Severance became increasingly committed to social justice and peace.

In 1853, after several years of attending and speaking at conventions on behalf of woman's rights, she made her first appearance as a speaker to the general public with a speech to Cleveland's Mercantile Library Association, the first lecture delivered there by a woman. Her subject was "Humanity: A Definition and a Plea", by which she meant that women should be included as part of "humanity." It was a radical idea, but the speech was well received by the audience, and by the Cleveland press. That same year, she presided over the first annual meeting of the Ohio Women's Rights Association.

In 1854, Severance was elected, alongside her husband, to offices for the Fourth National Women's Rights Convention in Cleveland and testified to the Ohio Legislature in favor of women holding their own inherited property and earnings.

Severance helped establish the New England Women's Hospital. She also campaigned with Susan B. Anthony against the inclusion of the word "male" in the Fourteenth Amendment.

In 1875, for various reasons which included her husband's health and the fact that her two older sons had moved to the West Coast, she relocated with her husband to Los Angeles, buying a tiny home on West Adams Street which they called "Red Roof."

Both Caroline and T. C. Severance had a major impact on the development of Los Angeles. Together they founded the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles in 1877. T. C. was a founder of the Orphan's Home Society, and the Horticultural Society. Caroline began organizing the women of the rapidly growing community. She brought the kindergarten movement to Los Angeles, serving as president of the city's Free Kindergarten Association, and helped establish the Los Angeles Public Library. In 1878 she founded the first Los Angeles Women's Club. Her interests were far ranging, from woman suffrage to historic preservation [working with Charles Lummis] to world peace. As she grew older, she began to be considered the elder stateswoman of women's rights movements in the city. She also became more radical in her thinking and was active in the city's Christian socialist movement at the turn of the 20th century. She began to be referred to in the press as "Madame Severance", an indication of her prestige and position in the city.

At first they returned regularly to the east, and without Caroline's immediate leadership, the Los Angeles Women's Club twice failed. Finally, in 1881, she established a lasting institution, the Friday Morning Club, devoted to cultural and social betterment and civic reform. As reported by Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt in their book *Los Angeles: From A-Z*, "[The Friday Morning Club] ran a lending library, maintained an employment bureau, and conducted classes." It became one of the most powerful and prestigious organizations in the city.

Caroline Severance died on November 10, 1914 at the age of 95.