

## Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission

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## IOWA SUFFRAGE MEMORIAL COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

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Were there records of the cave man to read, we would probably discover there the first agitation for the rights of women. Recorded history of the rise and fall of races discloses the continuous struggle for the rights of man with an occasional glimpse of an accompanying question of the rights of women.

The writings of Margaret, Queen of Navarre, and Catherine of Pisa in the fourteenth century demanded the recognition of equality of women and the conservation of morals in place of the licentiousness of that age. Queen Elizabeth's reign, 1558-1603, was called the "Paradise of Women," even though the change of women's place in the scheme of things was very slight. In the eighteenth century women demanded higher educational advantages, the right to vote and to enter Parliament. Mary Woolstonecraft dedicated a book, "Vindications of the Rights of Women," to Talleyrand in remonstrance to his new constitution in 1792.

In America the struggle of women for a broader sphere of action began in the Colonial period. Bridget Graffort in 1700 gave the first ground for a public school, but girls were refused admittance. Among the editors of the first newspapers of Colonial America were women, notably Clementia Reed of the *Virginia Gazette*, and Margaret Draper of the *Massachusetts Gazette*. Mabel Otis Warren in 1775 advised the separation of the colonies from the mother country, Abigail Smith Adams in 1776 protested against the formation of a new government in which women should not be recognized, and Hannah Lee Corbin in 1778 wrote against taxation of women unless they were allowed to vote.

Books on our library shelves by such foreign writers as Jane Marcet, Eliza Linn, George Sand, Harriet Martineau, Edmund Burke, and John Stuart Mill discussing women's rights preceded somewhat the anti-slavery work of our American women. The great triangle of progressive movements, slavery, temperance, and suffrage, became of almost equal importance in the minds of

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<sup>1</sup>This article has been written jointly by Mrs. Fred Hunter, Mrs. Fred Crowley, Mrs. E. A. Lingenfelter, Miss Mary Rosemond, Dr. Carrie Harvison-Dickey, and Mr. E. R. Harlan, members of the Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission.—Editor.

Emma Willard, Elizabeth Blackwell, Lydia Maria Child, the Grimke sisters, Abbey Kelly, Ernestine Rose, Margaret Fuller, Julia Ward Howe, Harriett Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Antoinette Brown, Frances E. Willard, Lucy Stone, and Lucretia Mott. The World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London refused admittance to women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott decided to "call a women's rights convention for a full and free discussion of women's rights and wrongs." On July 19 and 20, 1848, the women met in Seneca Falls, New York, for this purpose. Following this meeting a great educational movement was started throughout the country and until the Civil War this period was marked by the organization of suffrage clubs, conventions, and state, national, legislative, and congressional hearings. No conventions were held during the war. Women turned their attention to war-time duties through organizations called "loyal leagues." Little or no recognition was given their war service. Their former requests for equality were ignored.

The high point of the struggle for women's suffrage of the nineteenth century was the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. Great efforts to obtain representation were made in the first two post-war congresses with the result that the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted in 1868 defining a citizen for the first time and containing the word "male." The next congress refused to add the word "sex" to the Fifteenth Amendment. The women decided to take the suffrage fight to the states where constitutional amendment or revision was possible.

Brief accounts of pioneer suffrage work appear in Iowa newspaper files as early as 1854. Frances Dana Gage lectured through southern Iowa in that year. In 1855 Amelia Bloomer removed to Council Bluffs from New York and for twenty years was active in Iowa. In 1866 Anna Dickinson and Annie N. Savery lectured throughout Iowa. Coincident with the work of the suffragists are recorded in the newspapers at this early date the aversion of the "antis" and the growing alarm of the liquor interests. Later these two combined against the suffrage movement. Eastern speakers of note who early came to Iowa were Lucretia Mott, Mary A. Livermore, Henry B. Blackwell, Lucy Stone Blackwell, Susan B. Anthony, who made over a hundred

speeches in the state, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1868 suffrage clubs were organized in Dubuque, Burlington, and Mahaska, Kossuth, and Polk counties, with a strong equal rights association in the town of Algona. The *Upper Des Moines*, a newspaper published in Algona in the early sixties by Lizzie B. Reed, was an early suffrage organ.

The Iowa Equal Suffrage Association was organized in Des Moines November 17, 1870, which was some fifty years later to merge into the League of Women Voters. Attorney-General Henry O'Connor was the first president and in 1872 Amelia Bloomer was elected to this place. The Des Moines Political Equality Club was organized in the fall of 1870. This club assumed at once the burden of education and legislation and very definitely influenced the policy of the state work in the early days. There are on file in the office of the Suffrage Memorial Commission in the Historical Building in Des Moines, interrupted records of the work of this club from 1870 to 1920, and of the work of the state organization an almost complete record from its inception in 1870 to the ratification of the Suffrage Amendment in 1919. These records are invaluable to history, but at best poorly portray the struggles, difficulties, discouragements, and obstacles which the women of this club and the movement encountered.

Active in the early days were Amelia C. Bloomer, Annie N. Savery, Caroline A. Ingham, Lizzie B. Reed, Margaret N. Campbell, Narcissa T. Bemis, Eliza Heaton Hunter, Mary A. Work, Maria A. Orwig, Susan Charman, Mary Jane Coggeshall, and Martha C. Callanan. The latter two were the original editors of the *Women's Standard*, official organ of suffrage activity in Iowa from 1886 to 1917.

The Iowa Equal Suffrage Association had a bitter struggle. The peak years of discouragement were 1903 to 1905. Had it not been for Mary Jane Coggeshall, called the "Mother of Suffrage in Iowa," these pages in our history would be darker than they are. Noted for her fearless attitude, her persistent and consistent efforts, her generous donation of funds, time, and energy, she "mothered" the movement throughout her forty-one years of activity. Her membership on the board of the American Women's Suffrage Association linked Iowa more closely with the national movement and with the states active in their struggle for the

ballot. She served as president of the state association and was always its staunch supporter. She was a firm believer in the lobby which was maintained at the Capitol for many years to look after the interests of suffrage.

Carrie Lane Chapman in 1890 read two papers before the Polk County Suffrage Society, one on Shakespeare and one on suffrage. The society heartily endorsed the suffrage paper and urged her to take up the work. She became a lecturer on this subject and later as Carrie Chapman Catt, national president, led the suffragists to victory in 1919.

An intensive organization took place in Iowa in 1911 and 1912. Suffrage, emerging from the stages of indifference and ridicule, was becoming popular. In 1910 the Men's League for Woman Suffrage was organized in Des Moines and, due to the efforts of Susan B. Anthony, similar leagues were organized over the state. There were four new suffrage clubs in Des Moines in 1911-1912, the Des Moines Business Women's League with the slogan "Votes for Women in 1916," the Votes for Women League, the Des Moines Still College of Osteopathy Club, and the Eliza H. Hunter Club. As the work progressed the legislative side was emphasized. In 1911 a suffrage council was organized which later became a joint committee with the state organization and assisted in the legislative work. The primary object of the council was to harmonize and unify the efforts of the different local clubs. The State Federation of Women's Clubs unanimously endorsed suffrage in 1911 under the presidency of Mrs. Homer A. Miller. The Women's Christian Temperance Union persistently worked for the ballot through their suffrage department, as this movement was closely linked with the temperance work, and as early as 1905 the State Federation of Labor endorsed suffrage.

Miss Flora Dunlap was elected president of the state association in 1914. Plans were made to organize all the ninety-nine counties and eleven congressional districts, preparatory to the intensive educational campaign to get out and vote for the Suffrage Amendment June 5, 1916. Carrie Chapman Catt with funds and workers came to our assistance, extensive headquarters were established, and a state-wide effort was made. The amendment when submitted to the people was defeated by 10,000 votes.

From 1870, the date of the organization of the state associa-

tion, there was a bill before every session of the legislature asking some form of suffrage for women. The number of signatures to the petitions accompanying these bills varied from 8,000 to 100,000.

In 1884 a bill for municipal suffrage was introduced, amended to include school suffrage, and recommended for passage, but it never came to a vote. This bill was again introduced in 1888, and in 1890, but failed to pass. It was not until 1894 that women were given the right to vote on municipal and school and bond issues. The greatest difficulty in securing municipal and school suffrage was the opinion prevalent among legislators that it would be unconstitutional. In view of this fact the state association decided to ask only for the full franchise by constitutional amendment. In 1898 the legislative committee of the association secured a joint resolution for the submission of an amendment, and this they continued to do through all of the sessions down to 1919.

In 1913 their efforts were rewarded. A joint resolution for the submission of an amendment passed both houses for the first time. The proposed amendment provided for the repeal of Section 1 of Article II of the Constitution of the state and for the enactment and adoption of the following substitute: "Every citizen of the United States, of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been a resident of this state six months next preceding the election, and of the county in which he or she claims his or her vote, sixty days, shall be entitled to vote at all elections which are now or hereafter may be authorized by law. Resolved further, that the foregoing proposed amendment be, and is hereby referred to the legislature to be chosen at the next general election for members of the next assembly, and that the secretary of state cause the same to be published for three months previous to the day of said election as provided by law."

In 1915 the resolution was again passed by both houses of the Thirty-sixth General Assembly, and the question was submitted to the people at the primary election on June 5, 1916, but was lost by a vote of 162,683 to 173,024—a majority of 10,341.

The fight was again taken up and carried successfully through the Thirty-seventh General Assembly, but through an oversight in the office of the secretary of state, the amendment was not pub-

lished three months before the election, as required by law, and therefore could not be referred to the Thirty-eighth assembly.

The Thirty-eighth General Assembly, in 1919, gave to women the right to vote for presidential electors, and also again passed the woman suffrage amendment, in order that it might be referred to the Thirty-ninth assembly, which would meet in 1921, but on July 2, 1919, the Thirty-eighth General Assembly in special session ratified the federal amendment for woman suffrage, Iowa being the tenth state to ratify. On August 18, 1920, the thirty-sixth state ratified the federal amendment, and the long struggle for the suffrage was ended.

Suffragists felt that further education of the people, following the defeat of the referendum, was not required and that all efforts should be confined to legislative work. Defeated by the people, the "antis" and the "wets," the suffragists, though undaunted in courage were depleted in energy and funds. The legislative fight was waged by only a few active participants. Rapid changes were taking place in both the national and local life of suffrage. Legislators and parties, recognizing that votes for women were inevitable, fought more bitterly and stubbornly than ever. Intensive lobbying was resorted to by the suffragists. Every political trick on the calendar was resorted to by some of our esteemed legislators to hinder, to prohibit, to defeat if possible the enfranchisement of women. The legislative record explains more eloquently than words the attitude of the legislature against women, against the movement, against the pioneer suffragists whose efforts should not be minimized or soon forgotten, who toiled early and late, in and out of season, to bring about equality of manhood and womanhood before the law.

Senator Addison Parker said to his colleagues one day, "It is a little singular that every time woman's suffrage comes before the Senate supposed friends try to obscure the issue by misleading amendments." Again: "Two years ago when the amendment to the Constitution giving suffrage to women was before the Senate, Senator Kimball sought to amend it by an amendment which was not germane and the chair so ruled." Again: "Now supposed friends of suffrage seek to delay and embarrass the bill by confusing amendments." And again: "I should like to believe that Senator Rule is a friend of suffrage as he claims, but

his actions on the measure do not so prove. The substitution of the Rule resolution is nothing but subterfuge, and the men who stand up here and espouse this substitution are not the real friends of the women nor the friends we want."

In 1917 an effort was made for a resubmission of the question to the people, but this failed because of an error in the clerk's records in the office of the secretary of state. The women then worked for a primary bill, which was defeated by certain senators who were solicitous that women have full suffrage and not partial suffrage, as provided in the primary bill. The Senate then thought they had seen the last of the women, but the Legislative Committee met at once and planned to submit the Presidential Bill. On April 4, 1919, this bill passed the Senate, having previously been passed in the House. This made Iowa the twenty-ninth state in the Union to grant presidential suffrage.

The Nineteenth, or the "Susan B. Anthony Amendment" to the Constitution of the United States passed Congress June 4, 1919, and was submitted to the people for ratification. The two women doing intensive work in Iowa at this time were Mrs. Pauline Lewellyn Devitt of Oskaloosa and Mrs. Lillian Hall Crowley of Des Moines. They seized this opportunity to bring Iowa forward among the first states to ratify. They circularized the members of the legislature as to their views in calling a special session and, much to the satisfaction of the suffragists, Governor William L. Harding at once convened the legislature of Iowa in extraordinary session on July 2, 1919, for the sole purpose of ratifying the Federal Suffrage Amendment without delay. The legislature convened at 10 A. M. and at 11:40 o'clock the resolution had passed both houses, making a record for efficiency and dispatch.

The suffragists took their victory quietly, but with a feeling of deep thankfulness to Almighty God that their nearly fifty years of service had resulted at last in bringing the vote to women.

"Come, let us make a monument unto the Lord," is always in the heart that holds the jewel of gratitude. The Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission was organized in September, 1920, for the purpose of erecting a memorial commemorating the event and the workers for the achievement of equal suffrage. A research committee was appointed to tabulate data and collect materials to be

placed in a room secured in the Historical Building, these records to be available to all posterity.

Whenever, among the races of man, conspicuous culture has been attained there has been a racial custom or trait to erect memorials. Tribute was attempted to be paid thereby to such persons, events, or periods as denoted or produced some advancement toward the racial ideal. The hands and hearts which engaged in designing, modelling, constructing, or financing any such structures were engaged in what was in their time their most solemn, sacred, and inspiring service. They paid their tribute to their ideal, person, or event and through their arts afforded us, a different race in a different period, the text and set the measure whereby we determine their and our own racial culture. Memorials, then, occur as the fruits of intelligent, enthusiastic gratitude, the attainment of a racial ideal.

As marking the time and place at which universal suffrage, a great change in the affairs of men, took place, our nation and our state have both been important factors. All other leading nations have figured in and been altered by the general revolution in political thought, and the national intelligence has finally awakened to the realization that among the qualities of citizenship there is no gender. Yet no nation, no state, no public or private enterprise has taken steps to commemorate this advance in the march of mankind. This movement in our state, this enterprise, stands here alone on earth, a unique and noble instance of small numbers leading in a world affair. Through the Suffrage Commission, for purely esthetic ends, in gratitude only, working without money pay, we are to bring from the soul of some one with a genius for stating through bronze or stone the composite feeling of this generation. The consummation of this task will be to the glory of the past, to the honor of the present, and to the inspiration of future generations.

In Iowa, with the choice of eminences available, man accepted nature's invitation and crowned the most majestic of them with our noble Capitol. No other in all America is placed in that full contemplation of memorial and artistic environment. Mr. Masqueray, the architect of the grounds, reading the public mind which wished to add to and not take from the stately beauty of our Capitol, spaced the grounds especially for future architect-

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