



WOMAN SUFFRAGISTS IN BUTTE IN 1914. Left to right, Mrs. R. F. Foote, Mrs. J. B. Ellis, Mrs. H. Salholm, Mrs. A. Obermeyer, Mrs. E. G. Clinch.

**The women of Montana must be an inferior race of beings
to take so little interest in their own concerns . . .**

**Woman suffrage should be limited to cases where the
husband and wife bear children alternately . . .**

**No woman could possibly find time for politics without
neglecting her family . . .**

**No class of citizens ever did want to vote until the
ballot was placed in their hands . . .**

Taxation without representation is tyranny . . .



The Women's Journal, Boston, Nov. 28, 1914

Montana Women and the Battle for the Ballot

by T. A. LARSON

Words such as these bombarded the citizens of Montana as election day, 1914, drew near. They were the words of out-of-state suffrage workers who had seen their efforts at organizing Montana women die for lack of enthusiasm. They were also the words of some of Montana's leading male politicians, of spokesmen for liquor interests who feared that prohibition would inexorably follow if women got the vote, of outspoken women "antis" who believed, with many of their men, that the place of females was in the home, insulated from the crass world of politics. They were also the words of reasonable and dedicated people, both men and women, who believed in simple justice.

Montana voters went to the polls on November 3, 1914, and although the result was perilously close, they granted women full

rights to vote and hold public office. Before another month had passed, the Territory of Alaska and ten of the eleven western states had taken this giant step, while only one state in the east had yet done so.

Yet all this had begun in the eastern United States. It had begun in earnest at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, when sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signed a Declaration of Sentiments. Paraphrasing the U.S. Declaration of Independence, they insisted that all men and women are created equal. They complained that men monopolized law-making, taxed women without representation, barred them from most jobs, denied them opportunity for a college education, and excluded them from "all avenues to wealth and distinction."¹

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N.Y., 1887), I, 63-74.

The spirit of Seneca Falls spread rapidly, reaching the Pacific Coast within a few years. The legislature of Washington Territory considered a woman suffrage bill in 1854. During the years 1869-1871, seven western legislatures (but not Montana's) debated the subject and two of them went further. Wyoming granted women the right to vote and hold office, while Utah gave them only the right to vote.

Susan B. Anthony's suffrage weekly, *The Revolution*, published in New York, first mentioned Montana on September 30, 1869, in a story relating that Mrs. James M. Ashley, president of the Toledo, Ohio, woman suffrage association, had gone to join her husband, the new Governor of Montana Territory. Optimistically, *The Revolution* forecast that "we shall soon hear of her good work for women in Montana, and from her husband — the Governor — too; for Mr. Ashley is an earnest believer in Woman Suffrage, and will heartily aid every movement for its success." Governor Ashley, however, failed to mention woman's rights in his message to the legislature in December, 1869. Perhaps it was just as well, since he was a Republican dealing with a Democratic legislature.

Two years later, in the next legislature, House member H. D. Smith of Deer Lodge County gave notice that he would "at some future day, introduce a bill to extend the right of suffrage in the territory to females over the age of eighteen years." Perhaps because it was late in the session, nothing came of it; there is no further mention of the subject in the journals of the 1871-1872 legislature. Governors and legislators in 1868, 1869, and 1871 talked about promoting immigration of Scandinavians but overlooked the possibility, discussed in the same period in Wyoming and Washington, of using woman suffrage to attract people, women in particular, from the eastern states.

It is sometimes said that scarcity of women in the West enhanced their value, stimulated chivalry, and accelerated extension of woman's rights. Nevertheless, Montana, with seven men for every woman twenty-one and over in 1870, lagged behind other territories where women were not scarce and showed little interest in suffrage extension in the 1870s.² The Territory also provided no evidence to verify the notion that married men worked for woman

suffrage so they could double their vote against transient bachelors. Tending to dampen incipient woman's rights enthusiasm was the high percentage of foreign-born in Montana, almost 39 per cent in 1870, and the formidable communication and transportation problems that faced women who wished to share ideas.

Montanans heard their first woman suffrage address in 1883 when Frances Willard, national president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, spoke on the subject while on a nationwide tour. She believed that the temperance movement needed women's votes. Traveling on the Northern Pacific, she organized four local unions and a territorial union at Butte, and recommended that they include franchise departments to promote suffrage.³

Abigail Scott Duniway, who had been publishing a suffrage journal, *The New Northwest*, in Portland, Oregon since 1871, passed through Montana going and coming from the American Woman Suffrage Association's convention in Minneapolis in October, 1885. Colonel Wilbur F. Sanders of Helena and Mrs. Alice Van Cleve of Billings, who were on her train on the return trip, asked her to stop over for some "missionary work," but she declined the invitation.⁴ Perhaps it is well that she did not stop, for surely she would have upset the temperance people who were beginning to advocate suffrage. Mrs. Duniway believed in temperance through education instead of prohibition. Insisting that prohibitionists frightened the liquor interests into organizing powerful opposition, she blamed the WCTU for defeat of a woman suffrage amendment in Oregon in 1884.

The *Woman's Journal*, national organ of the American Woman Suffrage Association, published in Boston, in March, 1886, ran a report from Billings of growing interest in woman suffrage in the territory, which it attributed to

² Col. Wilbur F. Sanders, member of the House of Representatives from Helena, probably was trying to give women the vote when he sought, on April 19, 1873 and again on January 22, 1874, to "enlarge the suffrage." The House rebuffed his efforts, 16-7 and 17-9. Another Helena legislator, A. H. Beattie in the Council, tried to strike the word "male" from a bill on voter qualifications on February 12, 1874. His attempt failed by a vote of 8-5. The Montana legislature did keep pace, in one respect, with several other western territories by granting, in 1874, married women the right to control their separate property, do business on their separate accounts, sue and be sued, and make wills and contracts.

³ Mary Long Alderson, "A Half Century of Progress for Montana Women" (1935), p. 20. Typescript manuscript in Montana Historical Society.

⁴ *The New Northwest*, XV, Nov. 5, 1885.

the WCTU and unidentified political leaders. "It is admitted," said the correspondent, "that woman suffrage has proved a perfect success in Wyoming." Some Montanans had come from Wyoming and many others had come from North Central and Eastern states where there had been agitation for woman's rights. Some of them subscribed to the *Woman's Journal* and the *New Northwest*.

Suffragists, however, were so scattered that they would not try to form an association without assistance. One of them, Mrs. Clara L. McAdow, who lived in Billings and sometimes at Maiden, where she and her husband owned the Spotted Horse gold mine, wrote to the *Woman's Journal* in January, 1887, proposing that eastern suffragists raise enough money to send out an experienced woman organizer. She thought that "an able champion in Helena" might be able to obtain adoption of a woman suffrage bill.

There were two precedents for success without organization: there had been no suffrage association in Wyoming in 1869 and none in Utah in 1870 when their legislatures extended the franchise to women. Yet the circumstances in both territories had been most unusual. Success normally required extensive education, organization, and agitation. In Oregon, for example, victory eluded the organized suffragists in five statewide elections before success came in 1912. It should be noted, however, that winning suffrage was easier in a territory than in a state. Victory in a territory required only a majority vote of a small legislature and the governor's consent, while victory in a state usually required a two-thirds majority in the legislature, plus approval by a majority of the electors.

In any event, eastern suffragists did not accept Mrs. McAdow's invitation in 1887, preferring to spend their limited funds in areas where women had shown more interest. But despite the absence of organization, Montana's territorial legislature that year gave women the right to vote for school trustees if they were taxable residents of the district.⁵

Partial suffrage whetted the appetite. Although there still was no suffrage organization in the territory, petitions for equal suffrage

⁵ In 1883 the legislature had made them eligible for election as school trustee and county superintendent. *Compiled Statutes of Montana, 1887* (Helena, 1888), pp. 1043-1046, 1176, 1180.

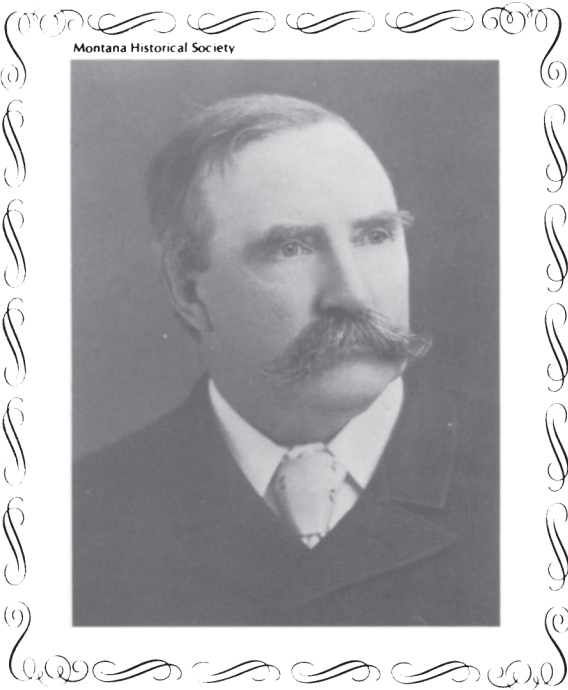


SUSAN B. ANTHONY

Dictionary of American Portraits

FRANCES WILLARD





HIRAM KNOWLES

arrived at the 1889 constitutional convention, one from Jefferson County and another from Madison County.

All the way from Boston came Henry B. Blackwell, editor of the *Woman's Journal* and secretary of the American Woman Suffrage Association, to urge the constitutional conventions of North Dakota and Montana to include equal suffrage in the documents they were drafting. After appealing unsuccessfully in Bismarck, he took the Northern Pacific to Helena.

A Deer Lodge County lawyer argued against giving Blackwell a hearing: "We are perfectly capable of managing our own affairs here without these people coming from outside and wanting to intrude themselves upon our attention."⁶

Hiram Knowles, a lawyer from Silver Bow County, replied that he would like to hear what there was to be said on the question. Knowles' opinion prevailed. By a vote of 55-13, Blackwell received permission to speak at an evening session the same day. Many guests, more women than men, crowded the convention hall as he spoke.⁷

⁶ *Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention . . . 1889.* (Helena, 1921), p. 79.

⁷ *Helena Journal*, July 18, 1889. See also *Helena Daily Independent*, same date.

The *Helena Independent* described the famous suffragist as "a man with silvery hair and beard" who was "erect and vigorous" and had "a pleasant, agreeable voice."

In his remarks, Blackwell appealed first to simple justice, asserting that under the principles of the Declaration of Independence, a woman has the same right to vote as a man, but, well aware that justice arguments left most men unmoved, he quickly turned to expediency. He promised that, if woman suffrage were included in the constitution, "within five years you would have in Montana 100,000 of the most progressive, and the most desirable immigrants that America can furnish." This brought the first burst of applause.

When it subsided, he continued: "100,000 of the best immigrants that New York, the New England and Middle Western States can furnish . . ." Blackwell knew better, and probably so did most of his audience. The attract-population argument had been used from time to time in the West where women were scarce, as they were in Montana, where the ratio of males to females was highest in the nation in both 1870 and 1890. Coupled with a promise of free advertising, this argument had been decisive in the Wyoming legislature in 1869, but Wyoming's subsequent slow growth had undermined the argument's credibility. After twenty years with woman suffrage, Wyoming's population had increased by only 50,000, while Montana's had increased 120,000 without woman suffrage. Eastern suffragists had scorned the suggestion that they go to Wyoming. When told that if they did not like it in the East without the right to vote, they should go West, they had replied they would stay where they were until their rights were recognized.

Becoming serious again, Blackwell turned to another expediency argument, one which suffragists regularly employed. He asserted that women would bring to politics an "elevating and refining influence." They were more peaceful and temperate than men, he added. The word temperate, he knew, carried him on to slippery ground, since he realized that most of his audience used liquor. A few Montana men had already told him they were afraid woman suffrage would lead to prohibition. This was an unreasonable fear, he said, because prohibition was unpopular. He reminded the fearful that woman suffrage had not brought

prohibition to Wyoming. Yet he went on to say that woman suffrage would mean temperance, but not necessarily prohibition of high license. Probably Blackwell won no converts among stout opponents of prohibition.

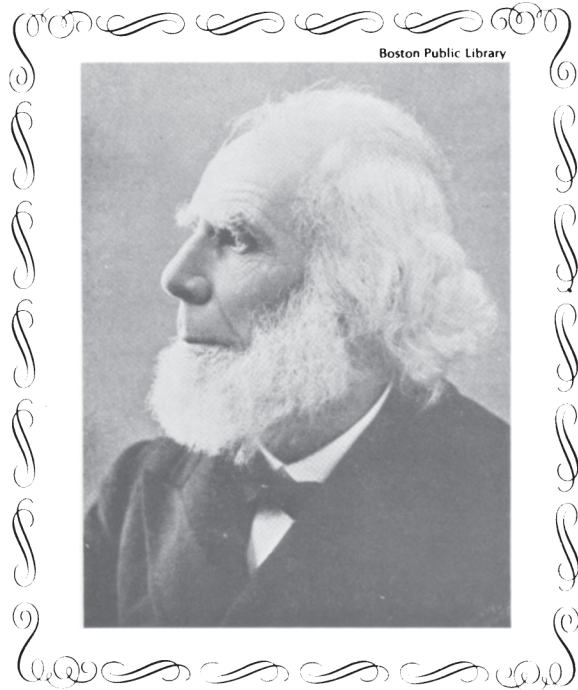
Admitting that many women did not want the vote, he defused that standard objection by explaining that "no class of citizens ever did want to vote until the ballot was placed in their hands." Moreover, men were to blame "because we have always taught the women that it is not their business to meddle with politics, and women of Montana do not want to be irritable and lose the esteem of their male friends."

In this peroration, the distinguished Bostonian defined the question as not one of woman suffrage but of "the amelioration of the human race . . ." It appears that in his hour-long address, Henry Blackwell disturbed some prejudices without uprooting them. The press credited him with an eloquent, well-received effort.

The constitutional convention spent a full day wrangling over the issue. Opponents employed arguments long since worn thin and tiresome elsewhere: woman's place is in the home; woman suffrage would cause dissension in the home; women do not want to vote; women are not qualified for military duty; government is founded on force, and women are not able to enforce the law. Democrat Martin Maginnis of Helena, erstwhile Delegate to Congress for twelve years, presented a fresher objection. He was afraid that female voters would be guided by ministers. Theocracies, he warned, had provided the worst governments in history. Proponents, on the other hand, argued that women had the right to be represented and would be on the side of law, order, and morality.⁸

The convention concentrated on consequences rather than abstract justice. Several votes were taken. First by a vote of 26 Ayes and 32 Noes, woman suffrage was rejected. Then the convention defeated by a tie vote a provision authorizing the legislature to decide the matter without a constitutional amendment. By another tie vote it blocked a last-ditch attempt to submit to the voters the question of legislative authority as a separate proposition. Opponents argued that any concession to woman suffrage

⁸ *Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, pp. 329-375.



HENRY B. BLACKWELL

would endanger statehood. This was a potent argument among delegates intensely thirsty for statehood. So Montana, in 1889, passed up the opportunity to become the first state with woman suffrage, yielding that honor to Wyoming, which became a state in 1890.

Perhaps inspired by Henry Blackwell or by the debate in the constitutional convention, women in Helena organized Montana's first suffrage club in January, 1890. "We are few in numbers, but we hope to grow," the corresponding secretary reported to the *Woman's Journal*.⁹ She added joyfully that the state's first U.S. Senators, W. F. Sanders and W. A. Clark, were both suffragists.

The two national woman suffrage associations, the National and the American, which had competed for twenty years, merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Encouraged by Wyoming's admission to statehood with woman suffrage in its constitution in 1890 and by Colorado's becoming the second equal suffrage state in 1893, national suffrage leaders scanned the West for other prospects.

At its convention in Atlanta in January, 1895, NAWSA created a Committee on Organization with Carrie Chapman Catt as chairman.

⁹ *The Woman's Journal*, XXI, pp. 41, 82.



CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT

EMMA SMITH DEVOE

Tacoma: Its History and Its Builders (Chicago: 1916)



The committee decided to send a lecturer-organizer, Mrs. Emma Smith DeVoe, to Idaho where the situation looked favorable. As an afterthought the committee asked Mrs. DeVoe to spend one month organizing clubs in Montana on the way.¹⁰

Montana's only suffrage club, the one formed in Helena in 1890, had collapsed, but other developments encouraged Mrs. Catt. On February 19, 1895, the lower house of the legislature voted 42-12 for a constitutional amendment (the senate later postponed action indefinitely). At the same time several labor unions had unanimously passed woman suffrage resolutions. Mrs. Catt wrote to Mrs. DeVoe: "I feel confident that you will raise enough money there to pay for yourself, and without doubt, some more besides."¹¹ She would receive a salary of \$125 a month — soon to be reduced to \$100. Montana women were expected to furnish "entertainment" — board and room in private homes. They were expected also to take up collections and make pledges sufficient to cover travel and salary.

Mrs. DeVoe launched her campaign in Miles City on May 15, 1895. Working mostly along the Northern Pacific, she organized clubs in Miles City, Billings, Red Lodge, Big Timber, Livingston, Bozeman, Helena, Marysville, Great Falls, Butte, Dillon, Virginia City, Anaconda, and Missoula before leaving for Idaho. She employed many of the stock arguments of the day: justice demands representation; it is unjust to class enlightened women with idiots and criminals; bad men outnumber bad women; "give women suffrage and all wars will cease;" women can lift men out of the mire of politics; government can not be perfected without women.¹²

Mrs. DeVoe preferred the term "equal suffrage" to "woman suffrage", and recruited men as well as women. Press notices called her talented, brilliant, logical, and attractive. One reporter said "she wore her hair in the latest vogue, a pink waist with balloon sleeves and a

¹⁰ Carrie Chapman Catt letter to Mrs. DeVoe, Feb. 9, 1895, in Emma Smith DeVoe Papers, Box 1, Washington Room, Washington State Library, Olympia. (Cited hereafter as E.S.D. Papers).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Mrs. Catt to Mrs. DeVoe, March 7, 1895.

¹² Emma Smith DeVoe Scrapbooks in Washington State Library, Vol. 5.

skirt of the approved fashion of the times." Wife of a poor lawyer in Harvey, Illinois, Mrs. DeVoe was a truly talented suffragist with most of her splendid career still ahead of her.

Emma DeVoe laid the groundwork for a state convention at Helena, to be followed by an appeal to the next legislature. Mrs. Catt, Iowa's major gift to the suffrage movement, came to Helena for the convention, slated for September 2 and 3, 1895. Thirty-three delegates participated — seventeen from Helena, five from Great Falls, four each from Bozeman and Marysville, and three from Butte. Mrs. Catt did most of the talking, addressing the convention four times. She supervised adoption of a constitution, and recommended a plan of work which included sending an organizer throughout the state to form new clubs and spread suffrage sentiment. She recommended that the association seek political party endorsements and offer speakers to the G.A.R., labor clubs, and church societies.¹³

Formation of the Montana Woman's Suffrage Association in 1895 marked a significant step forward. Yet not all was well. For one thing, the attendance at the first convention was disappointing — only five clubs represented by only 33 delegates, all from a small area in and around Helena. As one of Mrs. DeVoe's friends in Miles City explained to her: "Our distances are magnificent and rates exalted in this country." Moreover, morale faltered in the host Helena club. Just before the convention, Sarepta Sanders, president of the club, a school teacher, wrote to Mrs. DeVoe: "We lack workers who are able to make it go . . . those appointed to do the work, accept . . . and then stay away. Helena is a society town — the women who are capable are the women who are too busy (they think) to assume a new work — the society woman would not be in sympathy with us, or if she were, would have nothing to add to the interest of the Club."¹⁴ Mrs. Catt, who thought it important to get society women involved, succeeded to some extent when Harriet P. Sanders, wife of U.S. Senator Wilbur F. Sanders, and sister-in-law of Sarepta,

¹³ "Montana Woman Suffrage Association First Convention 1895." (Bozeman, 1896). A printed pamphlet preserved in the Montana Historical Society Library, Helena.

¹⁴ Letter from Sarepta Sanders, Helena, Aug. 7, 1895, to Mrs. DeVoe. E.S.P. Papers, Box 6.



HARRIET P. SANDERS

Montana Historical Society Photos

SAREPTA SANDERS



accepted the state presidency in 1895 after much coaxing.

To give club members something to do and to educate them, NAWSA began distributing a course of study in political science in the fall of 1895. Mrs. Catt thought the three-year course, complete with final examination and diploma, would be "the greatest thing we have ever done yet." She hoped that hundreds of new clubs could be formed in each state with the help of the new course. To get a mailing list of prospective enrollees, she asked state presidents to write to postmasters, ministers, and WCTU presidents in all cities and larger towns for names of "respectable, reliable men and women who were interested in suffrage."¹⁵

Mrs. DeVoe returned to Montana in the spring of 1896. She revived defunct clubs, started new ones, promoted the course of study, and built interest in getting the 1897 legislature to submit an amendment to popular vote. But apathy and hard times made it uphill work. Most of the 1895 pledges had not been paid, and receipts failed to cover Mrs. DeVoe's salary and expenses.

Miss Helen M. Reynolds, who had been a leader in the Colorado campaign of 1893 and was now working in Mrs. Catt's New York office, became so exasperated with the poor response to the flood of letters she sent to Montana in her efforts to make arrangements for Mrs. DeVoe's 1896 tour that she exploded: "The women of Montana must be an inferior race of beings to take so little interest in their own concerns . . . I assure you I am very glad that I am a western woman, but not a Montana woman. Nothing would tempt me to live in such a state . . ." In another letter she wrote that if western states got suffrage within the next ten years "it will be because the men give it to them, not because of the women."¹⁶

Somewhat more restrained, Mrs. Catt wrote: "The people of Montana are dreadful about answering letters. Not one tenth of those we have written have met with any response whatever."¹⁷ State president Harriet Sanders,

in turn, lamented the "indifference and thoughtlessness of some of our own sex."¹⁸

But Emma DeVoe persevered. She traveled by "rail, stage, wagon and buckboard, and through storms and mountain cold," as Mrs. Catt reported to NAWSA's convention in Des Moines in February, 1897. After three months of work, Montana had clubs in twenty-five communities scattered all the way from Glendive to Missoula.

Mrs. Sanders' 1896 statement indicated that Montana had paid a total of \$25.60 in dues to NAWSA, more than had any other western auxiliary except California. Since standard dues were ten cents, this suggests that there were 256 members in Montana that year. There were problems of congeniality, however. Because the women of Butte could not work together, seven ward clubs were established. The same sort of problem loomed in Helena, making two clubs desirable, one a business women's organization.

Mrs. Catt, Mrs. DeVoe, and Miss Reynolds were all concerned about getting the "right" women involved. After considerable effort to attract women who could command respect in Idaho and Montana in 1895 and 1896, Mrs. Catt offered these observations: "It seems very ludicrous to me the way these western people in the small cities assume airs of society. I used to think there was one place where caste was unknown and where society was bound together only by congeniality. But it appears that wealth and show are gaining ground and trying to compel adoration. We have tried in vain to win society people to become workers in our cause. While there are many individuals who announce themselves as suffragists, I think we will all have to admit that we have not yet found a real society woman who has amounted to very much as a working force. I think we will have to organize them into societies by themselves where they will not be expected to do anything but to have their names referred to when they can do any good."¹⁹

Whether they were society women or not, Mrs. DeVoe defended the character of her Montana recruits: "I am willing to have the class

¹⁵ Letter to Mrs. DeVoe, March 7, 1895 and letter, June, 1896, to State Presidents, E.S.D. Papers, Box 1.

¹⁶ Letters to Mrs. DeVoe in Box 3 of E.S.D. Papers, first undated, second, June 4, 1896.

¹⁷ Mrs. Catt to Mrs. DeVoe, May 8, 1896, E.S.D. Papers, Box 1.

¹⁸ Harriet Sanders statement in Montana Equal Suffrage Association Collection, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California at Los Angeles. This suffrage collection is a small one, consisting of only ten items.

¹⁹ Mrs. Catt to Mrs. DeVoe, June 25, 1896, E.S.D. Papers, Box 1. Mrs. Catt rated Alice L. Park as the best worker in Montana at this time. Wife of a metallurgist, Mrs. Park soon followed her husband to California where she rose to prominence in that state's suffrage history. See Alice L. Park Collection in Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

of people whom I have interested there compared with the people of any state in the union for their standing in the state."²⁰

The second annual convention of the Montana Woman Suffrage Association met at Butte November 17 to 19, 1896 with delegates from Livingston, Bozeman, Marysville, Butte, Helena, and the Lewis and Clark County Association. Butte and Helena each had two clubs represented.

Dynamic Ella Knowles Haskell now became state president in place of the reluctant Harriet Sanders, who had been a disappointment to the national organizers. A graduate of Bates College, Ella Knowles, a little blue-eyed blonde, had come west to teach school in Helena in 1888, then was admitted to the practice of law in 1889, the first woman so privileged in Montana. The Populists surprised her with nomination for the post of attorney general in 1892. Soon hailed as the "Portia of the People's Party," for her eloquence, she ran a good race, though losing to Henri Haskell, a Republican, who appointed her his assistant and later married her.²¹

Mrs. Haskell represented the Helena Business Women's Suffrage Club in the State Association. Under her leadership, 2,500 of the "best citizens" petitioned the 1897 legislature for a suffrage amendment, and many of them followed up the petition by lobbying. Suffragists jammed the House chamber to hear Mrs. Haskell plead her cause. Maintaining that she had never heard a "solid argument" against woman suffrage, she asked, "Will the men of this legislature say the women are not to be equally trusted with the women of Idaho, of Wyoming, and of Colorado?"²²

In the subsequent debate, Representative G. L. Ramsey from Bozeman quoted pages of statistics from other states, called woman suffrage unChristian, and told of having heard of a woman's boast that she had voted five times at different windows in a school trustees election. Another legislator from Butte reported that he had heard two women bragging that they had voted seven and eighteen times.²³

²⁰ Mrs. DeVoe to Mrs. Catt, June 11, 1896, E.S.D. Papers, Box 1.

²¹ *Progressive Men of Montana* (Chicago, 1901), pp. 472-474. See also Thomas A. Clinch, *Urban Populism and Free Silver in Montana*, (Missoula, 1970), 53, 54, 59, 64, 84.

²² *The Helena Independent*, Feb. 10, 1897; *House Journal, 1897* (Helena, 1897), pp. 207-208, 221.

²³ As noted before, Montana women could vote in school elections under territorial law. The 1889 Constitution gave them the same right and also taxpaying suffrage.



ELLA KNOWLES HASKELL

A third adversary proposed an amendment limiting woman suffrage to "cases where the husband and wife bear children alternately." Still another hostile legislator asked, "How many of these women who have been fighting for this measure do we find who are not mothers and in the great majority of cases are husbandless?" The great majority of women do not want the ballot, he said, and it should not be forced upon them by a few "strong-minded" leaders. Friendly legislators countered that women needed power to protect themselves and their children against men "not half so intelligent."

Becoming noticeable in Montana now was a tendency often observed elsewhere. As pressure from women increased, there was a correspondingly stronger reaction. The legislators postponed the bill. Later, on third reading, it received 41 Ayes and 35 Noes, which was short of the required two-thirds vote. "Another of the popocratic measures . . . was killed . . . There were but few ladies present, and none of the leaders of the strong-minded women . . ." reported the *Helena Daily Herald*.

The woman's rights tide, like Populism, which gave it some impetus, ran high in the Rocky Mountain West in the 1890's, as Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho all became suffrage states. Sentiment crested at a lower

level in Montana, and discouragement followed the 1897 defeat. One club after another disbanded until in 1900 only one survived, the Helena Equal Suffrage Club, into which the Helena Business Women's Club had evolved.

NAWSA agents returned to the scene in 1902. Carrie Chapman Catt, who had become president in 1900 when Susan B. Anthony retired at 80, visited the state for two weeks. She brought two talented lecturer-organizers, Gail Laughlin and Laura A. Gregg, who stayed longer.²⁴ They reorganized the Helena club, formed a strong club in Butte, and then turned their attention to the rest of the state. Miss Laughlin remained for several months, started more than thirty clubs, supervised the activities of a state convention at Butte in September, and paved the way for an assault on the legislature in January, 1903. Giving special attention to labor unions and labor delegate assemblies, she won many endorsements from them. The state labor convention passed a woman suffrage resolution with only one dissenting vote.

As had been the case in 1895 and 1897, the amendment proposed in the 1903 legislature won much support, but not quite enough. Again discouragement and apathy ensued; clubs disintegrated, although brief flurries of interest occurred during the 1905 and 1907 legislative sessions. NAWSA's treasurer reported in 1908 that there was no suffrage organization in Montana.²⁵

The morale of suffragists everywhere improved in 1910, however, when Washington became the fifth suffrage state after a strenuous campaign directed by the indefatigable Mrs. DeVoe. The margin of victory, almost two to one, raised hopes in all non-suffrage states. Progressivism also stimulated suffrage reform, as Populism had done in the 1890s.

Carrie Chapman Catt had worried earlier about finding the "right" women for leadership roles. The right woman now turned up in the person of Miss Jeannette Rankin. Montana native and graduate of the University of Montana, she had studied and practiced social work in New York and Washington before turning to suffrage reform in both states. She returned to Missoula in 1910, formed a political

equality club there, and began lobbying in Helena. She was thirty. A member of her campaign team recalled in 1972 that she was "delightful, enthusiastic, attractively dressed, genial, most friendly, slender, five-foot-five, full of energy, most pleasant looking."²⁶

Scenes in the 1911 legislature resembled those of 1895 and 1897 when women had packed the floor of the House and the galleries. Addressing the legislators by invitation on February 1, 1911, Miss Rankin reminded them that "taxation without representation is tyranny," and added, "Men want women in the home and they want them to make the home perfect, yet how can they make it so if they have no control of the influences of the home?"

Miss Rankin preferred the moderate, reasonable approach rather than bombast. Despite the news that the California legislature had just agreed to submit an amendment in that state, and a Montana legislator's challenge that "surely we are just as progressive as they are in California," the House failed to give the amendment measure a two-thirds majority.

Instead of folding their tents and disappearing as they had done repeatedly in the past, however, the suffragists continued their promotion, especially in Helena, Missoula, Butte, Kalispell, Bozeman, and Roundup. They formed a state central committee, whose temporary chairman, Miss Rankin, visited every county seat to line up campaign workers. She and her associates obtained endorsements from the Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties and from the successful gubernatorial candidate, Democrat Sam V. Stewart.

Astonishingly energetic, Jeannette Rankin also found time in 1911 and 1912 for extensive suffrage work under NAWSA auspices in California, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Delaware, Michigan, and Florida. Experienced, confident, her head full of plans, she returned home in December, 1912. The state central committee of the revived state woman suffrage organization elected her its permanent chairman. Governor Stewart, in his opening message to the legislature in January, 1913, urged submission of an amendment as one part of a reform package his party had promised to deliver if elected. So strong was the reform

²⁴ Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York, 1922), VI, 380-361. See also *The Woman's Journal*, Vol. 33, pp. 215, 276, and the Helena Equal Suffrage Club Minute Book, Minutes of Sept. 13, 1902 meeting, in Montana Historical Society.

²⁵ Harriet Taylor Upton, letter to Mrs. DeVoe, May 4, 1908, E.S.D. Papers, Box 3. Since Mrs. Upton's vision did not extend to them, there may have been a few clubs that were not paying dues.

²⁶ Letter to the author from Mrs. Norman Winestine (Belle Fligelman), Helena, Aug. 18, 1972.



JEANNETTE RANKIN — CIRCA 1910

spirit that the suffrage amendment passed with only two dissenting votes in each house of the legislature.²⁷

The national suffrage group celebrated Montana's success with a mass meeting in New York City's Carnegie Hall to raise money for the forthcoming public campaign.²⁸ Eastern money, speakers, and literature were welcome in Montana and they would all play important roles. Planning, organizing, press work, and getting endorsements, particularly from the State Federation of Labor and the A.F. of L., dominated the stage in 1913.²⁹ Campaign headquarters opened in the Thornton Hotel in Butte in January, 1914. Following the pattern which Mrs. Catt had first tried in Idaho in 1896, Miss Rankin extended her organization, wherever possible, all the way down to the precincts. By summer, 1914, the state central committee was composed of Jeannette Rankin, chairman; Mrs. G. M. Gilmore, Glendive, assistant chairman; Mary E. O'Neill, Butte, second assistant chairman and press chairman; Mrs. John Willis, Glasgow, recording secretary; Mrs. E. G. Clinch, Butte, treasurer; Eloise Knowles, Missoula, literature chairman; Dr. Maria M. Dean, Helena, and Mrs. L. O. Edmunds, Absarokee, finance committee.³⁰ After checking the organization in August, 1914, NAWSA's field secretary reported "Montana is remarkably well organized. There are organizations in practically every county."³¹ She was much impressed by leaders in Butte and Helena, mentioning specifically Jeannette Rankin, Mary O'Neill, Dr. Dean, and Belle Fligelman.

The campaign's first publicity splurge came early in February when James L. Laidlaw, wealthy banker and president of the New York Men's League, and Mrs. Laidlaw, chairman for Manhattan of the Woman Suffrage Party, close friends of Miss Rankin, arrived. On their way to California in a special railroad car, they stopped to aid the cause in Billings, Butte, Helena, and

Missoula.³² Miss Rankin escorted the Laidlaws during a "continuous five-day hustle for . . . votes," which included receptions, mass meetings, speeches, luncheons, and money raising, the race unimpeded by sub-zero temperatures and sluggish locomotives. Everywhere it was emphasized that the Laidlaws had come, not as meddling intruders, but as invited guests. In Missoula Mrs. Tyler Thompson, president of the influential State Federation of Woman's Clubs, hosted a reception. The conservative Federation never endorsed woman suffrage but many of its members worked for it as individuals.

Other out-of-state suffragists, at least eleven, followed the Laidlaws. All but two donated their services. None spoke as often as Miss Rankin, who logged 9,000 miles of in-state travel, speaking regularly to all types of audiences. Many other Montana men and women lectured, sometimes on street corners.

The *Weekly Bulletin* delivered suffrage news to every paper in the state, and advanced these arguments: suffrage would increase the proportion of native-born and educated voters; it is right and fair; those who must obey the laws should have a voice in making them; the home demands it; the worker needs it; it would increase the moral and law-abiding vote; it would bring needed legislation for the protection of children; it would make women more broad-minded; it would help women who needed it most; experience elsewhere has proved its worth; and let us give the women a chance, they can not make a bigger failure. The *Bulletin* stressed utility rather than justice.

Hundreds of thousands of leaflets flooded the state, some being acquired from the national organization, which had a wide variety to offer. The Missoula Teachers' Suffrage Committee contributed 30,000 copies of a locally prepared leaflet, "Women Teachers of Montana Should have the Vote," which listed seven arguments, among them: teachers are in a position to appreciate community needs; suffrage will identify them with the community; suffrage will increase the number of voters

²⁷ *Senate Journal*, 1913 (Helena, 1913), p. 110; *House Journal*, 1913 (Helena, 1913), p. 169.

²⁸ *The Woman's Journal*, Vol. 44, p. 54.

²⁹ The year's activity is summarized in *The Suffrage Daily News* (Butte), election edition, Nov. 2, 1914, preserved in Montana Historical Society Library, Helena.

³⁰ "Weekly Bulletin," June 12, 1914, preserved in Montana Historical Society Library.

³¹ *The Woman's Journal*, Vol. 45, p. 251.

³² A detailed account of their Montana activities appeared in the *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 25, 1914, a clipping of which is preserved in the Montana Woman Suffrage Mss. in the Montana Historical Society Library.

who can speak with authority on school matters. One can only guess what influenced the public most — speeches, newspaper publicity, leaflets, or door-to-door canvassing.

As in other states, a few representatives of the National Anti-Suffrage Association received publicity and cost some votes. An anti from Brooklyn harvested ridicule when she withdrew from a scheduled debate with Miss Rankin in Butte, using the excuse that “the men might capture the meeting and cause great disturbance.” The *Weekly Bulletin* advised her that Butte men were among the most chivalrous in the world. Another anti, Mrs. J. D. Oliphant of New Jersey, who debated Miss Rankin in Helena, won most of the applause, perhaps because, as a suffragist historian explained, the meeting had been “packed by the liquor interests . . . and the confusion was appalling.”³³

Mrs. Oliphant and Miss Minnie Bronson, executive secretary of the national anti-suffragists, organized the “Montana Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage” in Butte. A prominent Butte woman, the mother of eleven children, argued in the *Anaconda Standard* that no woman could possibly find time for politics without neglecting her family, that suffragists were “far in the minority,” and that ballots for women would not abolish the liquor traffic since there are drinking women as well as men . . . a great many right here in Butte.”³⁴

The antis in Butte advanced the claim that they were not “imported professional suffragists” but only “plain home women” trying to protect their rights to be “just women as the good Lord intended us to be.”³⁵ Although she disagreed with their suffrage views, Mrs. M. W. Alderson, the WCTU’s state president and managing editor of the Union’s monthly *Woman’s Voice*, conceded that the Butte antis “included some of the finest and most honored women in Montana.”³⁶

The liquor interests posed a greater threat than the antis. Jane E. Thomson, NAWSA field secretary, rated Montana “the most wide-

³³ Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 366.

³⁴ *Anaconda Standard*, Jan. 25, 1914.

³⁵ *Butte Miner*, Sept. 18, 1914.

³⁶ *The Woman’s Voice*, II, No. 1, p. 4. Mrs. Matthew W. Alderson of Marysville is often listed as Mary Long Alderson, and sometimes as Mrs. Matt W. Alderson.



MARY LONG ALDERSON

open state in the Union” in September, 1914.³⁷ While her expertise in such matters may be questioned, there can be little doubt that many Montanans who liked a nip now and then suspected that woman suffrage would lead to prohibition, and planned to vote No for that reason. Liquor wholesalers, saloonkeepers, and associated businessmen constituted a core of hostility. The Montana Protective Association (of the liquor interests) early in 1913 had appealed to associates in the east for financial aid in launching a statewide fight.³⁸

Later in the same year the *National Forum*, the Protective Association’s organ, published in Butte, played into the hands of the suffragists. Miss C. E. Markeson, anti-suffrage organizer from the east, visited the *Forum* publisher and recommended that he conceal his antagonism and leave open opposition to the female antis. Somehow, news of the interview leaked out, whereupon the *National Forum* confirmed it, and went on to explain that it preferred open opposition because Montanans were “too intelligent to be deceived as to the attitude of the liquor interest.” The *National Forum*’s forthrightness embarrassed the Anti-Suffrage Asso-

³⁷ *The Woman’s Journal*, Vol. 45, p. 251 (Sept. 5, 1914).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 44, p. 128 (April 19, 1913).

ciation.³⁹ Miss Rankin charged that Miss Markeson's conference with the publisher of the *National Forum* belied denials in other states of affiliation between the liquor interests and the anti-suffragists.

The WCTU's *Woman's Voice* in February, 1914, published the contents of a letter alleged to have been mailed to liquor retailers by the Protective Association in Butte. The Association warned the saloon keepers that woman suffrage would mean abolition of saloons. They should, therefore, "use every endeavor" to prevent adoption of the amendment.

A special franchise edition of *The Woman's Voice*, May, 1914, accused the *National Forum* of flooding the state with copies of an anonymous pamphlet, "Reasons Why the Voters . . . Should Oppose Woman Suffrage." One reason, reminiscent of Martin Maginnis's argument in the 1889 constitutional convention, was that women are too much influenced by the church, and therefore prone to support fanatical reforms. Perhaps the liquor interests were behind the anonymous pamphlet, but they certainly launched no large-scale attack, and, curiously, WCTU president Alderson wrote in the same May, 1914, issue that "In reality, since the liquor men, assembled in Great Falls, have proclaimed themselves neutral on the question of extending suffrage to women, there is no organized opposition to woman's being given the ballot in our state."

Meanwhile, the WCTU, whose membership of 1,500 probably surpassed that of the suffrage association, joined in the campaign. The Union's thirtieth annual convention at Glendive in October, 1913, decided that it should carry on its own franchise work, as in the past, but should also cooperate "where practicable" in the suffrage association's campaign. Many suffragists shunned open affiliation with the Union, lest the liquor people be frightened into spending large sums to defeat equal suffrage. In February, 1914, Mrs. DeVoe, who in 1895 and 1896 had organized so many suffrage clubs in Montana and who had been responsible, more than anyone else, for Washington's great victory in 1910, made a brief visit. She obtained a pledge from Montana campaign leaders that they would avoid

entanglement with the potentially explosive prohibition issue and "every other ism."⁴⁰

Mrs. M. W. Alderson's first love was prohibition, but she had a foot in each camp, having been recording secretary of the original state suffrage association in 1895. As president of the WCTU and managing editor of the *Woman's Voice* in 1914, she called temperance and suffrage "twin sisters" and resented suggestions that advocacy of temperance hindered suffrage. She wrote in July of that year that trying to keep temperance under cover had defeated suffrage in other states. She continued to build WCTU interest in suffrage, encouraging the state's 61 unions to distribute suffrage literature and to promote the cause through meetings, speakers, "back-door" campaigning, food sales, debates, teas, medal contests, and men's extension clubs.

Relations between temperance women and suffragists became strained in September, 1914, when the WCTU was not permitted to march under its own banner in a great suffrage parade at the state fair in Helena. Mrs. Alderson wrote in the *Woman's Voice*: "Our committee was arranging for float, banners, etc., according to invitation given, when our chairman was informed that some suffragists thought it better not to have the WCTU in the parade as a body. It is laughable to have the suffragists so considerate of the liquor men . . . So the oldest suffrage organization in the state . . . which is proud of its white ribbons, was not represented in the parade, though many individual members marched in with the county organizations. But quiet work counts more than the 'Hurrah'."⁴¹

Fortunately, public recriminations over the incident were avoided, and the "twin sisters" marched their separate routes to a common victory. In fact, they got along much better than their counterparts in some other states.

For all except the temperance women, the mile-long suffrage parade at the state fair in September, 1914, was the high point of the campaign. Suffragists came from every county. Miss Anna Howard Shaw, president of NAWSA, and Jeannette Rankin led the march, followed by Boy Scouts with banners bearing the words,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403. See also the *Montana Progressive*, Jan. 22, 1914 and the *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 25, 1914.

⁴⁰ Letter from Mrs. DeVoe to Mrs. Duniway, March 3, 1914, in "Suffrage Correspondence" file in the Abigail Scott Duniway Papers, Salem, Oregon.

⁴¹ *The Woman's Voice*, II, No. 1 (Oct., 1914).

"I want my mother to vote." Girls dressed in white and carrying a huge American flag represented the full suffrage states; women in gray, the partial suffrage states; women in black, the states with no woman suffrage. Other women wore the traditional suffrage color, yellow. Here and there were horsewomen, automobiles, male suffragists (as numerous as the women), buglers, bands, floats, and one woman in Indian costume representing Sacajawea, "the first Montana suffragist."

It is noteworthy that, unlike what happened in some other states, no split developed between college and non-college women, or between newcomers and veterans. Moreover, the Montana suffragists worked harmoniously with NAWSA, which their opposite numbers in many other states could not do. Jeannette Rankin wove into her neat campaign pattern the talents of out-of-state volunteers who worked under NAWSA auspices. More than half of the \$9,000 that the campaign cost came from outside of Montana.⁴²

Optimism prevailed on election day, November 3, 1914, because the press was generally favorable; friends were enthusiastic; enemies, except for a few antis, were quiet; the powerful Amalgamated Copper Company did not openly oppose.⁴³

As it turned out, however, the vote — 41,302 to 37,588 — was closer than most suffragists had expected. Delayed returns from Deer Lodge County (Anaconda) impelled Miss Rankin to hire lawyers and send delegations of women to protest.⁴⁴ Perhaps influential opponents there planned to stuff the ballot boxes if returns from the rest of the state were so close that the outcome could be reversed by manipulation of the one county's returns, which proved not to be the case.

Twenty-two counties voted Yes, seventeen, No. Six northwestern counties — Lincoln, Sanders, Mineral, Ravalli, Flathead, and Missoula — provided 3,301 of the 3,714 plurali-

⁴² Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 365.

⁴³ Mrs. Norman Winestine of Helena, who as Belle Fligelman was in the thick of the battle in 1914, expressed the opinion in 1972 that "The Company certainly worked against us. They were as frightened as the liquor people that the voting women would begin throwing monkey-wrenches into their well-organized machinery around the state." This shrewd observer also thought that the conservative businessmen and "status quo people generally" voted "No." Interview, June 7, 1972 and letter to the author, Aug. 18, 1972.

⁴⁴ *The Woman's Journal*, Vol. 45, p. 297 (Nov. 14, 1914).



ANNA HOWARD SHAW

ty.⁴⁵ Taken together, the six voted 64.1% in the Yes column. Proximity to Idaho and Washington (both very pro-suffrage) and strong leadership from Missoula may be the explanation. Returns from most counties, on the other hand, showed small pluralities. Ten contiguous counties in the southwest and on the Continental Divide voted No, but not emphatically so except for Deer Lodge. The suffragists lost Deer Lodge by 501 votes, Lewis and Clark (Helena) by 236, and populous Silver Bow (Butte) by 34.

Available facts suggest no sensational generalization. Census data for Montana's 28 counties of 1910 are not precisely relevant for the 39 counties of 1914. Attempts to correlate the 1914 county vote totals with marital status of voters, rural or urban population, livestock numbers, crop production, native or foreign-born population, church membership (1916), and mining, railroad, or manufacturing employment, lead invariably to contradictions or dead ends. What, for example, did the three widely separated counties, Wibaux, Deer Lodge, and Blaine, have in common except male chauvinism to cause them to give the smallest percentages of support? Why did Powell and Granite

⁴⁵ Ellis Waldron, *An Atlas of Montana Politics Since 1864*, p. 153 (Missoula, 1958).

Will She Vote?

by EDGAR FAWCETT
Appleton's Journal, August 14, 1869

*To peaceful altars of our homes
In scorn she points at last,
As lawless, now, she fiercely roams —
Change, the Iconoclast!
Through startled towns her banner floats,
Her vassals, oddly human,
Shrieking from amazonian throats:
"The Equal Rights of Woman!"*

*And will she vote? is met no more
With jest and scoff and sneer;
That which was fantasy before
Takes outlines firm and clear.
A weightier question stirs the time,
A gloomier thought perplexes,
While sorer discords drown the chime
And harmony of sexes.*

*To some the future years unfold
Chaotic visions dire —
Sweet customs, beautiful and old,
Consumed in error's fire!
To others, the millennial plan
Reveals its dawning feature—
A woman for the Coming Man,
And man the lesser creature!*

*But wise are they who yet keep pure
What factious tongues disclaim—
Belief that God's just laws endure
Immutably the same;
That this wild creed shall surely pass,
Whoever its propounder,
And woman still continue as
Old Father Adam found her!*



*Walking amid no troublous fears
That throng the paths of men,
Wielding no editorial shears,
No keen polemic pen,
Daring no intellectual heights,
And neither sage nor preacher,
True womanhood has yet the "rights"
Fanatics cannot teach her.*

*O wrangling zealots, lift no hand
To harm these duteous lives —
True daughters of our native land,
Fond mothers, faithful wives!
Pass to our polls—and Councils, too,
Of their sweet eyes unnoted,
And drop your votes, while only you,
Not Woman, shall have voted.*

vote negatively when the other six counties on the western slope mustered such strong support? Except for the well distributed wets and dries, no group or class played a strikingly friendly or hostile role. Labor and agriculture did not deliver the solid support some suffragists had counted on.

In retrospect, the timing had been perfect. It seems most unlikely that a majority of the electors could have been persuaded to vote Yes before 1914. Happily, the Montana suffragists did not have to endure one heartbreak

after another, as was the case in many other states.

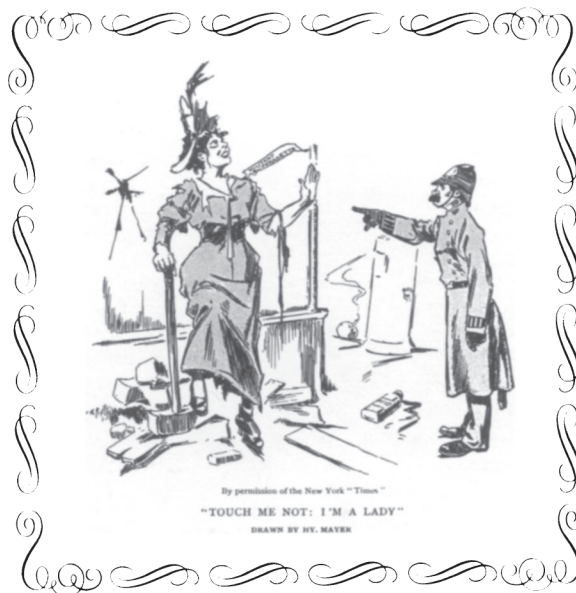
Most of the opposition came from the liquor industry and its many customers — rich and poor, rural and urban, foreign-born and native. Their misgivings were legitimate. The link between the "twin sisters" of woman suffrage and temperance, though minimized by suffragists, was genuine; yet there is no evidence that the liquor industry bought any votes, stuffed any ballot boxes, or intimidated anyone.

As usually happens, the consequences of the 1914 victory were less exciting than advocates had hoped. The temperance forces, to be sure, achieved prohibition in 1916, thanks mainly to the newly enfranchised women.⁴⁶ Thirty-eight of forty-one counties voted Yes, piling up a plurality of 28,886 (102,776 to 73,890). The beleaguered saloon crowd won only in three urbanized counties along the Continental Divide, mustering pluralities of 3,566 in Silver Bow County, 190 in Deer Lodge and 155 in Lewis and Clark County. Time, however, turned the tables after Abigail Scott Duniway's 1885 prophecy came true: prohibition would not prohibit.

⁴⁶ Joseph Pope, state superintendent of the Montana Anti-Saloon League, estimated that not less than seventy or seventy-five per cent of the women voted dry. Letter to Mrs. Mary Sumner Boyd, New York, November 13, 1916, in "Prohibition" file in Montana Equal Suffrage Collection, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena. For an assortment of comments on Montana women in politics see Mary Long Alderson's ten-page typewritten manuscript "Women in Politics" (n.d.), also in the Historical Society Library.

The Montana suffrage campaign's principal heroine, Miss Jeannette Rankin, still "going strong" at 92 as this is published, won a seat in Congress in 1916, but lost in a run for the U.S. Senate two years later. Two other women won seats in the state legislature that year, a breakthrough that had taken 42 years — 1869 to 1911 — in Wyoming, but very few women followed them into elective office. That the quality of government improved after women got the vote is difficult to demonstrate; some reforms followed, but they might have come without woman suffrage.

Disappointments and frustrations notwithstanding, what really matters is that justice triumphed in Montana nearly six decades ago. Less important is how the women chose to use their new power. One conclusion is unavoidable: November 3, 1914 deserves recognition, long withheld, as one of Montana's finest days.



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A native of Nebraska, T. A. Larson is an outstanding western historian and educator, although his doctoral work, completed in 1936 at the University of Illinois, was in medieval English history. Indeed, its pursuit sent him to the University of London for the following academic year. But for 36 years now, Al Larson has been on the faculty of the University of Wyoming at Laramie, for two decades as head of the history department, and since 1968 as William R. Coe Professor of American Studies. He earned his A.B. at the University of Colorado in Boulder, then took graduate work at the University of Chicago before completing work on his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois.

Dr. Larson is a member of a number of historical groups, including the Organization of American Historians and the Western History Association, serving the latter as president in 1970-1971. He is the author of *Wyoming's War Years* (1954) and the definitive text, *History of Wyoming* (1965). More recently he edited *Bill Nye's Western Humor*.

