

# First to Vote

## Utah's Unique Place in the Suffrage Movement

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February 14, 1870, was election day in Salt Lake City. Citizens might have gathered with more than the usual excitement that day to cast their ballots because this was the first election in which Utah women citizens could vote. Seraph Young (later Ford), a twenty-three-year-old schoolteacher and grandniece of Brigham Young, was the first to exercise her new right and became the first woman in the United States to cast a ballot under a women's equal suffrage law.<sup>1</sup>

It makes sense that Seraph would arrive early at the polls—she had a long workday ahead of her at the University of Deseret, where she taught in the primary school.<sup>2</sup> So, like many voters today, she would have gone to City Hall before work to cast her ballot. However, unlike voters today, she would have had to navigate her way through stump speeches and the Tenth Ward Brass Band to do so.<sup>3</sup> Seraph's historic vote made local and national news, but then her life went on quietly. She never ran for public office or led an organization, but she made history by simply fulfilling her civic duty.

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1. "Telegrams to the Star," *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), February 23, 1870, 1, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1870-02-23/ed-1/seq-1/>.

2. "Second Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students in the University of Deseret, for the Academical Year 1869–70," Salt Lake City, 1870, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah. Seraph is listed as one of three assistants to the principal of the model school.

3. "The Election," *Deseret Evening News*, February 14, 1870, 2, [https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23156020&date\\_tdt=%5B1870-02-14T00%3A00%3A00.000Z+TO+1870-02-24T00%3A00%3A00.000Z%5D&q=%28election%29](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23156020&date_tdt=%5B1870-02-14T00%3A00%3A00.000Z+TO+1870-02-24T00%3A00%3A00.000Z%5D&q=%28election%29).



Seraph Young (Ford), *Deseret Evening News*, March 8, 1902, 19.

Seraph's role in history faded from public memory, but her vote paved the way for women's voting rights to spread across the United States from west to east. The national women's movement was already under way, but it would take fifty years after Seraph's historic vote to pass a women's suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>4</sup>

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of Utah women's historic first votes, the 100th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. These anniversaries offer an opportunity to reflect on the unique place of Utah and Latter-day Saints within the movement for women's voting rights. Women in Utah were the first to vote with equal suffrage rights, but Congress

later revoked their voting rights as part of the national conflict over the practice of polygamy. After they were disenfranchised, Utah women organized to regain the vote and secure a federal women's suffrage amendment. In many ways, their experience set the stage for women's voting rights to spread to the rest of the country.

### Utah Women Paved the Way

Testifying to Congress in 1898, Utah state senator Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon noted, "The story of the struggle for woman's suffrage in Utah is the story of all efforts for the advancement and betterment of humanity."<sup>5</sup>

4. The contemporary term used most often to describe women's voting rights was "woman suffrage," but I use the term "women's suffrage" in this article for modern readers.

5. Martha Hughes Cannon, "Woman Suffrage in Utah," February 15, 1898, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on House Joint Resolution 68,

Women in Utah did play a leading role in the national suffrage movement as they worked to secure their own voting rights and win the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Utah's suffrage story was unique in three ways.

First, Utah women gained the vote much earlier than women in the rest of the United States. They won suffrage *twice* before 1900, first through a territorial law in 1870 and again through Utah's state constitution in 1896. By the time the Nineteenth Amendment extended women's voting rights across the country in 1920, 16 Utah women had won election to the Utah legislature and approximately 120 women had been elected to county offices across the state.<sup>6</sup> Utah women testified to Congress about how suffrage was working in their state.

Utah's suffrage story was also unique because it was entangled in the conflict over the Latter-day Saint practice of polygamy. Polygamy was a contributing factor to Utah's 1870 women's suffrage law, and it was the reason Congress revoked Utah women's voting rights in 1887. The "Mormon Question" shaped Utah women's suffrage work in many ways, and polygamy often complicated their relationships with national suffrage leaders and organizations.

Finally, Utah suffragists benefitted from a unique level of support in their local community. Suffrage leaders in most of the United States faced stiff opposition all the way through 1920, but suffragists in Utah generally enjoyed public support. Both Latter-day Saint religious leaders and the majority of the community supported women's political rights.

Women in Utah were the first in the United States to cast ballots under a law that gave women the same suffrage rights as men. When the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1787, it allowed states to regulate voting. New Jersey was the only state that did not specify that voters had to be white men, so for twenty years women (and Black men) were allowed to vote if they met the property requirement (since married women could not legally own property, this meant that a very small number of women could vote). But in 1807, the state legislature passed a law restricting

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p. 11, 324.623 C226w 1898, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL).

6. Based on local newspaper reports. See "Utah Women in County Office, 1896–1920," *Better Days* 2020, <https://www.utahwomenshistory.org/explore-the-history/utah-women-in-county-office-1896-1920/>, for a list of Utah women elected to county office from 1896 to 1920.

suffrage to white, taxpaying male citizens.<sup>7</sup> Women would not vote in another general election until Utah women did so on August 1, 1870. Although some states began to allow women to vote in limited circumstances such as school board elections, it would take more than a century to open the polls to women across the nation. In 1848, the women's rights movement was born as women and men gathered at Seneca Falls, New York, to determine how to improve women's status. One hundred of the participants signed resolutions, including a call to secure women's right to vote.

Suffrage activism began in earnest after the Civil War, but the movement soon split into rival groups over disagreements about the Fifteenth Amendment. The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, supported the amendment's enfranchisement of Black men as a step toward women's voting rights and focused on a state-by-state campaign for women's suffrage. The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, rejected the amendment because it did not enfranchise women. NWSA eventually focused on campaigning for a constitutional amendment for women's suffrage.

Women's voting rights were first enacted in the West, when Wyoming Territory passed a suffrage law that enfranchised women citizens on December 10, 1869. Utah's territorial legislature followed suit in February 1870, and due to the timing of elections, Utah women were the first in the nation to cast ballots with equal suffrage rights open to *all* citizens of voting age. (Still, discriminatory U.S. citizenship laws excluded Native Americans and other women of color.) Approximately twenty-five women voted in Salt Lake City's municipal election on February 14, 1870, and thousands voted across the territory in a general election held on August 1.<sup>8</sup> Wyoming women first went to the polls on September 6 of that year, but then the progress slowed. No other suffrage victories came for more than twenty years.

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7. Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, "The Petticoat Electors': Women's Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776–1807," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Summer 1992): 159–93, <https://i2i.org/wp-content/uploads/Petticoat-Electors.pdf>.

8. Brigham Young to Heber Young, February 16, 1870, in *Brigham Young's Letters to His Sons*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 140; "The Election," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, August 2, 1870, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6x93h8x/11520939>.

## Gaining the Vote

Utah women made history and surprised the nation when they cast ballots in 1870. Several factors converged to lay the groundwork for women's suffrage in Utah Territory. The end of the Civil War and the arrival of the transcontinental railroad connected Utah more closely with the rest of the United States. This brought an influx of new arrivals, shifted political dynamics, and attracted increased attention from federal lawmakers.

Opposition to the Latter-day Saint practice of polygamy also led to Utah's women's suffrage law. As Congress increased efforts to end polygamy, antipolygamists suggested that Latter-day Saint women might free themselves from polygamy if they could vote.<sup>9</sup> Susan B. Anthony and other leading suffragists made this argument and hoped that such an experiment would also create an opening for women's voting rights to gain a foothold in the West.<sup>10</sup> In the spring of 1869, Indiana Representative George Washington Julian proposed a law enfranchising Utah women as "a Bill to Discourage Polygamy in Utah."<sup>11</sup>

Representative Julian's bill died in committee, but deliberations in the nation's capital sparked discussions in Utah. George Q. Cannon, second counselor to Brigham Young and editor of the *Deseret News*, printed several articles in 1869 supporting the idea of women's suffrage. In one, he declared, "The plan of giving our ladies the right of suffrage is, in our opinion, a most excellent one. Utah is giving examples to the world on many points, and if the wish is to try the experiment of giving females the right to vote in the Republic, we know of no place where the experiment can be so safely tried as in this Territory. Our ladies can prove to

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9. "There is one State or Territory . . .," *New York Times*, December 17, 1867, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1867/12/17/80208399.pdf>.

10. "Woman Suffrage: The National Convention," *Evening Star*, January 19, 1870, 4, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1870-01-19/ed-1/seq-4/>; Testimony of James K. Hamilton Wilcox before the House Committee on Territories, reported in "Female Suffrage—Ends to Be Gained by It," *Deseret News*, March 24, 1869, 6, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2605153>.

11. "H.R. 64: A Bill to Discourage Polygamy in Utah by Granting the Right of Suffrage to the Women of That Territory," 324.623 H64r 1869, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=0e50ddddd-6f27-484e-9c28-1eb4dae89888&crate=0&index=0>. This was not the first proposed law that would have enfranchised Utah women; Representative Julian had introduced earlier bills in 1867 and 1868 that would have extended voting rights to women citizens in all U.S. territories or just in Utah. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols. (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1881), 2:325.

the world that . . . women can be enfranchised without running wild or becoming unsexed.”<sup>12</sup> Utah’s legislative assembly took up the issue in January 1870.

Polygamy was also a precipitating factor for Utahns’ support for suffrage. After a new antipolygamy bill was proposed in Congress in late 1869, leading Latter-day Saint women collectively inserted themselves into the national debate. The Cullom Bill aimed to enforce the 1862 Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act by stripping polygamists of U.S. citizenship, voting and office-holding rights, and homestead rights.<sup>13</sup> On January 6, 1870, Sarah M. Kimball chaired a meeting in her Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Hall where leading women organized a response to the Cullom Bill.<sup>14</sup> The meeting minutes were published in the *Deseret News* along with a call for an indignation meeting, a common form of nineteenth-century protest.<sup>15</sup> Omitted from the *Deseret News* version, however, was the fact that the women gathered in the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Hall had voted to “demand of the Gov[ernor] the right of Franchise” and to send women to represent them in Washington, D.C.<sup>16</sup>

The next week, on January 13, five thousand women packed into Salt Lake City’s “Old Tabernacle” to decry the Cullom Bill and defend Latter-day Saint doctrine on plural marriage.<sup>17</sup> As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich notes, the goal of this meeting was publicity; the organizers shrewdly banned

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12. “Female Suffrage in Utah,” *Deseret News*, March 24, 1869, 6, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6rj5doq/2605152>.

13. “A Bill in Aid of the Execution of the Laws in the Territory of Utah, and for Other Purposes,” H.R. 696, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess. [1870], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=1bcb9ceo-8aab-4b82-9243-0e48732fb54f&crate=o&index=7>.

14. “3.12 Minutes of ‘Ladies Mass Meeting,’ January 6, 1870,” in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women’s History*, ed. Jill Mulvay Derr and others (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 305–10, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-3/3-12?lang=eng>; Fifteenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, Relief Society Minutes and Records, 1868–1968, vol. 1, 1868–1873, pp. 139–42, LR 2848 14, CHL.

15. “Minutes of a Ladies’ Mass Meeting,” *Deseret News*, January 12, 1870, 8, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews2/id/41795/rec/2>.

16. “3.12 Minutes of ‘Ladies Mass Meeting,’ January 6, 1870,” 308.

17. “3.13 Minutes of ‘Great Indignation Meeting,’ January 13, 1870,” in Derr and others, *First Fifty Years*, 311–32, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-3/3-13?lang=eng>; “Great Indignation Meeting of the Ladies of Salt Lake City, to Protest against the Passage of Cullom’s Bill,” *Deseret Evening News*, January 14, 1870, 2, and January 15, 1870, 2.

all men except reporters and “showcased their most effective speakers.”<sup>18</sup> Latter-day Saint women had both local and national audiences in mind, and the success of the indignation meeting demonstrated that Latter-day Saint women could be powerful political partners for Latter-day Saint men.

Less than a month after this impressive display of organization and political strength, the Utah Territorial Legislature unanimously passed a bill extending voting rights to female citizens. Utah women first went to the polls just two days after the bill became law on February 12. The next week, Eliza R. Snow, Bathsheba W. Smith, and Sarah M. Kimball led a committee to thank federally appointed Acting Governor Stephen A. Mann for signing the bill against his own inclination.<sup>19</sup>

To many observers, it seemed impossible for the Latter-day Saint practice of polygamy to continue to exist in a society where women had voting rights. As one popular magazine opined, “Utah is a land of marvels. She gives us, first, polygamy, which seems to be an outrage against ‘woman’s rights,’ and then offers the nation a ‘Female Suffrage Bill,’ at the time in full force within her own borders. Was there ever a greater anomaly known in the history of society?”<sup>20</sup> In fact, that seeming paradox was one of the many reasons why women’s suffrage became a reality in Utah Territory in 1870.

## Voting Women

Utah women’s votes drew national attention and scrutiny. Due to Wyoming’s sparse population, Utahns were the only substantial population of voting women in the United States for years.<sup>21</sup> Americans watched to

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18. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), xii.

19. “Special Notices,” *Deseret News*, March 2, 1870, 1, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews2/id/44657/rec/9>; “3.16 Ladies’ Cooperative Retrenchment Meeting, Minutes, February 19, 1870,” in Derr and others, *First Fifty Years*, 343–49, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-3/3-16?lang=eng>.

20. “William H. Hooper, The Utah Delegate and Female Suffrage Advocate,” *Phrenological Journal* 51, no. 5 (November 1870): 328, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d003245406&view=1up&seq=776>.

21. Extrapolating from information in the 1870 U.S. census, we can estimate that there were almost 1,500 female citizens of voting age in Wyoming, and over 17,000 female citizens of voting age in Utah. See “Sex and School, Military, and Citizenship Ages,” *Compendium of the Ninth Census*, 1870, U.S. Census Bureau.



see what Utah women would do with their votes, and national suffrage leaders soon visited the territory.

Former Latter-day Saints in the dissident “New Movement” were the first to establish connections with these leaders. At the invitation of the Godbes, NWSA leaders Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton stopped in Utah during their travels in the summer of 1871. Staying over a week, they lectured in both the “Old” and “New” Tabernacles, as well as the New Movement’s Liberal Institute.<sup>22</sup> Stanton declared, “I would rather be a woman among Mormons with the ballot in my hands than among Gentiles without the ballot. If there is hereafter any slavery among the women of Utah it is their own fault, for they hold the power within their own hands to rid themselves of it. Their first thought should be how to use the ballot for their own good.”<sup>23</sup>

It soon became clear that Latter-day Saint women’s votes were not ending polygamy. Antipolygamists changed their minds about the value of Utah women’s suffrage and sought to repeal their voting rights in order to decrease the political power of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah and undercut polygamy. The Liberal Party filed several unsuccessful lawsuits to invalidate Utah’s woman suffrage law, and starting in 1873, federal lawmakers began including measures to revoke Utah women’s voting rights in their proposed antipolygamy legislation.

In the face of these threats, Latter-day Saint women in Utah sought to defend their religious practice and political rights on a national stage. They drew on the network and organizational skills they gained through the Relief Society to generate a grassroots system of protest, holding indignation meetings, printing pamphlets, and petitioning Congress to preserve their voting rights.<sup>24</sup> As they spoke and wrote for a national audience, Latter-day Saint women argued that as citizens they were entitled to government protection of their religious and political rights. They also countered the charges that they voted only as their husbands directed, such as in this 1878 petition against a bill that would have disenfranchised them: “We have exercised the ballot with our own free

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22. Susan B. Anthony diary, June 28–July 7, 1871, Library of Congress, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11049.mss11049-001\\_00683\\_00886/?sp=102&t=-0.032,0.063,0.663,0.403,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11049.mss11049-001_00683_00886/?sp=102&t=-0.032,0.063,0.663,0.403,0).

23. “Woman Suffrage,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 1, 1871, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s62n6927/12867488>.

24. Lola Van Wagenen, “In Their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise,” *Dialogue* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 31–43.



will and choice, having fully demonstrated that honorable women command as much respect at the polls, as in the drawing-room, the parlor, and the Church.”<sup>25</sup>

Latter-day Saint women also represented their views through the *Woman's Exponent* newspaper founded in 1872. In the first issue, editor Lula Greene Richards declared, “The women of Utah to-day occupy a position which attracts the attention of intelligent thinking men and women everywhere. . . . Who are so well able to speak for the women of Utah as the women of Utah themselves? ‘It is better to represent ourselves than to be misrepresented by others!’”<sup>26</sup> The *Exponent* was an important platform for Latter-day Saint women to tell their own story. It also shared Relief Society news, encouraged women to vote, reprinted articles from suffrage newspapers, and reported advances for women’s educational and professional opportunities throughout the world.

Still, Latter-day Saint women occupied an uneasy place within the fractured suffrage movement because of polygamy. Only the radical NWSA headed by Susan B. Anthony was willing to work with Mormon polygamists. The rival AWSA led by Lucy Stone was concerned that an association with polygamous women would damage public opinion, and AWSA members often criticized Susan B. Anthony and other

To the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.

Your Memorialists, the undersigned Women of Utah, in consideration of a Bill known as the Christiancy bill, having been presented before your Honorable Body, for the purpose of obtaining special legislation, subversion of the rights and liberties of the people of said Territory; and whereas a clause in said bill is expressly designed to disfranchise the women of Utah, we deem it our imperative duty to plead in self defense.

Should the aforesaid obnoxious bill become a law, it would not only disfranchise the women of this Territory, women who, with their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, have encountered every conceivable hardship and privation in opening up an oasis in the American Desert, but would form a precedent most perilous to those Equal Rights Liberties for which our ancestors valiantly fought and bled. Many of us, your petitioners, are descendants of those patriotic men and women of our noble line, who held sacred those principles of justice and equity, and now, as our last and highest earthly court, we appeal to you for their protection.

Nearly eight years we have exercised the ballot with our own free will and choice, having fully demonstrated that honorable women command as much respect at the polls, as in the drawing-room, the parlor, and the Church; and also, that the presence of woman there, as elsewhere, has a moral and elevating influence.

Furthermore, we well believe that the passage of the aforesaid bill, or anything from us every legal means of self defense, would furnish a pretext for the exercise of jurisdiction and order, to inaugurate a state of things akin to the horrors of the Inquisition, and ultimately in great national calamity, thus

First page of “Memorial of Utah Women against the Christiancy-Luttrell Bills Which Would Disenfranchise Them,” March 4, 1878. National Archives.

25. “Memorial of Utah Women against the Christiancy-Luttrell Bills Which Would Disenfranchise Them,” March 4, 1878, DocsTeach, National Archives, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/utah-women-disenfranchisement>.

26. “Woman’s Exponent: A Utah Ladies’ Journal,” *Woman’s Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 8, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/912/rec/3>.

NWSA leaders for “any appearance of affiliation” with women defending polygamy.<sup>27</sup> NWSA leaders Belva Lockwood and Sarah Spencer became the most outspoken champions of Utah women’s voting rights, but NWSA was careful to clarify that it did not support polygamy.<sup>28</sup>

When Emmeline B. Wells became the editor of the *Woman’s Exponent* in 1877, she forged connections with NWSA leaders by organizing a signature drive in support of the NWSA’s petition campaign for a federal suffrage amendment. Utah sent just under seven thousand signatures, the most of any state or territory.<sup>29</sup> This success created goodwill between Latter-day Saints and NWSA leaders and resulted in an invitation from Sara Andrews Spencer for Utah suffragists to attend the 1879 NWSA convention in Washington, D.C.<sup>30</sup>

Spencer’s invitation came just as one of the greatest threats to Utah women’s plural marriages and voting rights was developing. The Ladies’ Anti-Polygamy Society of Utah was organized in November 1878 and quickly sent petition forms to every minister in the United States so their congregants could urge Congress to pass stricter antipolygamy legislation. More than 250,000 women signed these petitions, which flooded into Congress from every corner of the country.<sup>31</sup>

The Anti-Polygamy Society did not initially seek to repeal Utah women’s voting rights. Within a few years, however, Society vice

27. Amanda E. Dickinson, “Polygamy Degrades Womanhood,” *Woman’s Journal* 10, no. 13 (March 29, 1879): 97, <https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:48874698s103i>.

28. “Seeking Freedom,” *The National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), March 6, 1884, 2, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053573/1884-03-06/ed-1/seq-2/>; “Mormon Ladies Calling at the White House,” *Woman’s Exponent* 7, no. 20 (1879): 212, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/6366/rec/166>.

29. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells, 1870–1920* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 154–56.

30. Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 154.

31. Kathryn L. MacKay, “Women in Politics,” in *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox?*, ed. Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 373. See Enforcement of the Anti-Polygamy Law of 1862, Dec. 5, 1878–Mar. 1, 1879, Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions and Memorials (HR 45A-H11.4), 45th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Enforcement of Anti-Polygamy Law of 1862, Jan. 9–Feb. 22, 1879 (SEN45A-H10.1), Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions and Memorials, 45th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Petitions on the subject continued to be referred to the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary when the 46th Congress began on March 4, 1879. See Various Subjects, Mar. 4, 1879 to Dec. 14, 1880 (HR 46A-H12.3), Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions, and Memorials, 46th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

president Jennie Froiseth, herself a Utahn and NWSA officer, became a vocal proponent of repealing women's suffrage in the territory.<sup>32</sup> In the pages of the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, which she published from 1880 to 1883, Froiseth argued that “the only effect that the franchise has had in this Territory, has been to increase the spread of polygamy and the consequent degradation of woman, to make them, if possible, greater slaves than before.”<sup>33</sup> Froiseth and the Anti-Polygamy Society began to lobby Congress to repeal Utah women's suffrage as a means of ending polygamy.

In response to the Anti-Polygamy Society's founding, Latter-day Saint women held an indignation meeting, printed and circulated a memorial and resolutions, and sent Emmeline B. Wells and Zina Young Williams to Washington, D.C. Wells and Williams spoke at the NWSA convention (where they were honored as voting women), delivered petitions to congressmen, and appealed directly to President Rutherford B. Hayes and First Lady Lucy Hayes. As antipolygamy pressure mounted in the coming years, Latter-day Saint women continued to call indignation meetings, send petitions protesting their proposed disenfranchisement, and speak at NWSA conventions against their disenfranchisement. NWSA leaders raised lonely but welcome voices of protest on Latter-day Saint women's behalf, but the tide was eventually too great. Congress passed the Edmunds Act that disenfranchised polygamous men and women in 1882, and then the Edmunds-Tucker Act in March 1887. Among other measures, this law disenfranchised *all* Utah women, regardless of religion or marital status. This was the only instance in U.S. history in which Congress stripped women of their voting rights.

### **Building Bridges—Working to Regain the Vote**

Having voted for seventeen years, many Utah women were outraged at their disenfranchisement and eager to regain voting rights. Latter-day Saint suffragists hoped to regain the vote with Utah's eventual statehood. But the issue of polygamy continued to divide suffragists both locally

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32. Froiseth attended the NWSA annual convention in Washington, D.C., in 1884 and held the position of vice president for Utah from at least 1884 until 1888. See *National Woman Suffrage Association: Report of the Sixteenth Annual Washington Convention* (Rochester, N.Y.: C. Mann Press, 1884), 141, [https://books.google.com/books?id=Zn4EAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=Utah&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=Zn4EAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=Utah&f=false).

33. “Polygamy and Woman Suffrage,” *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, June 1880, 20, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=eb489548-1f12-4b40-98b3-05c35d2246a0&crate=0&index=3>.

and nationally. Emily S. Richards and Isabelle Cameron Brown attended the NWSA executive session in the spring of 1888 and received authorization to form a territorial suffrage association in Utah, but fellow Utah NWSA officer Jennie Froiseth joined AWSA to protest NWSA's formal inclusion of polygamous suffragists. Froiseth refused to help Brown and Richards organize a NWSA chapter in Utah as long as polygamy still existed. However, Charlotte Godbe Kirby, who had spoken against polygamy, assisted in organizing the chapter and held a leadership role.

Emily S. Richards led the formation of the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah (UWSA) in the Salt Lake Assembly Hall in January 1889. The UWSA leadership was exclusively monogamous at first, with Margaret N. Caine as president. Just one week later, Emily Richards reported to the NWSA convention in Washington, D.C., that the UWSA already had 200 dues-paying members and had gathered over 8,000 signatures in support of suffrage.<sup>34</sup>

Two events in 1890 smoothed the way for Latter-day Saint suffragists to cooperate more fully with other suffragists. In January, the rival NWSA and AWSA organizations merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). With Elizabeth Cady Stanton as president, the NAWSA overcame internal disagreements about working with polygamous women and accepted the UWSA as a member organization. And in October 1890, Wilford Woodruff's Manifesto officially discontinued the practice of plural marriage, which helped pave the way for Utah statehood. Increasingly, a younger generation of monogamous Latter-day Saint women stepped forward to represent the Church and work for suffrage on the national stage.

The Woman Suffrage Association of Utah spread through the network and organization of the Relief Society. As Emily Richards, Mary Ann Freeze, Emmeline B. Wells, and other leaders organized chapters across the territory, Relief Society women formed the backbone of UWSA membership, especially in rural areas. In some places, suffrage activity mapped almost directly onto the Relief Society organization. For example, the secretary of the Glenwood Woman Suffrage Association (WSA) in Sevier County continued noting records of Relief Society meetings and mothers' classes in her minute book once Utah women regained the right to vote.<sup>35</sup> The women elected to UWSA offices were

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34. "Utah's Lady Delegate," *Woman's Exponent* 17, no. 18 (February 15, 1889): 138, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/25028/rec/404>.

35. Woman Suffrage Association Minutes, Glenwood Ward, CHL.

generally well known for their leadership in local Relief Society, Primary, and Young Ladies' National Mutual Improvement Association (YLNMIA) organizations.

Although minute books have survived for only a few local associations, those records, reports published in the *Woman's Exponent*, and stories in local newspapers show that many Utah suffragists were tirelessly committed to the cause. Alvira Lucy Cox, president of the Sanpete County WSA, reported to a territorial UWSA convention that "we who have accepted the new gospel of Equal Rights, must labor with untiring zeal for the redemption of the masses."<sup>36</sup> UWSA members took this charge seriously as they encouraged the women and men in their community to support restoring women's voting rights. Cox expressed the hope of many Latter-day Saint suffragists that indifference and opposition to women's equality would "melt away like snow before a summer sun in the dawning light of the twentieth century."<sup>37</sup>

By 1895, the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah had chapters in twenty-one of the twenty-seven counties in the territory. Utah suffragists often gathered monthly in Relief Society halls, although they also met in courthouses, schools, and theaters. While women led the organization, men also participated in local and territory-wide meetings. Meetings opened with prayer and songs from the Utah Woman Suffrage Song Book, which was published in 1891 with suffrage lyrics Utah women had written to familiar tunes and Latter-day Saint hymns. Favorites included "Equal Rights," written by Emily H. Woodmansee to the tune of "Hail Columbia," and "Woman, Arise," written by Louisa Lula Greene Richards to the melody of "Hope of Israel." The chorus of Richards's song proclaimed, "Woman, 'rise, thy penance o'er, Sit thou in the dust no more; Seize the scepter, hold the van,<sup>38</sup> Equal with thy brother, man."<sup>39</sup>

UWSA meetings prepared members to be educated and informed participants in local and national politics. Women both young and old participated, lecturing on suffrage and current political issues, teaching lessons

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36. "Equal Suffrage," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 7 (October 15, 1893): 50, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/17203/rec/511>.

37. "Equal Suffrage," 50.

38. In this case, "van" referred to "vanguard," a group of people leading the way. The song urged Utah women to be explorers at the head of the movement, i.e., the vanguard.

39. "Woman, Arise," *Utah Woman Suffrage Song Book* ([Salt Lake City: Woman's Exponent], 1891), 5, copy at CHL, <https://cdm15999.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15999coll24/id/33466>.

UTAH

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*Utah Woman Suffrage Song Book* ([Salt Lake City: Woman's Exponent], 1891).



on civil government, and performing poetic recitations or musical numbers. These were opportunities to publicly declare their belief in women's equality and the good they could do in their communities.

Speakers also responded to anti-suffrage arguments that women were not capable or desirous of voting and that they were already represented politically by the men in their families. At the first meeting of the Morgan County WSA, President Hulda Cordelia Smith remarked that she did not believe a woman "should be subject to laws she had no hand in making, nor ruled over by those not of her choice."<sup>40</sup>

WSA president Elizabeth Coombs argued similarly: "Women should not be taxed without having a voice."<sup>41</sup> Meeting with the Iron County WSA, Paulina Lyman said she "could not remember when she was first converted to woman's rights," but she "thought women could as well go to the polls to vote as to the Post Office, and did not think any homes would be neglected."<sup>42</sup>

Suffragists also worked to build and sustain support for women's political equality in their local communities. In Beaver, WSA members wrote a column in the local newspaper.<sup>43</sup> Sanpete County suffragists held social events to raise money and awareness, including a suffrage dance, a benefit concert for the local library, and a patriotic memorial service for George Washington's birthday.<sup>44</sup> The Sanpete and Beaver County WSAs and others decorated carriages with suffrage banners and marched in local 4th and 24th of July parades.<sup>45</sup> Yellow flowers had been a symbol of suffrage since the 1860s, so suffragists often wore them or used them to decorate meetings and rallies.<sup>46</sup>

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40. "Morgan County W.S.A.," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 3 (July 1, 1889): 21, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/37178/rec/413>.

41. Woman's Suffrage Association (Farmington, Utah) minutes, 1892-1895, CHL, MS 2621, p. 6, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=f13dac3d-647f-4c7f-bo34-0059a48f73f3&crate=o&index=9>.

42. "Woman Suffrage Column," *Woman's Exponent* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 1895): 24, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/32535/rec/541>.

43. Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association Papers, MSS SC48, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

44. "Manti," *Manti Home Sentinel*, February 6, 1892, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=5885457>; "Nephi," *Manti Home Sentinel*, April 9, 1892, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=5884520>; "Local Briefs," *Manti Reporter*, February 10, 1893, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=5882527>.

45. "Programme," *Manti Messenger*, June 29, 1894, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=4900763>; Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association Papers.

46. "Woman Suffragists," *Provo Daily Enquirer*, September 26, 1892, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6g174oh/1454039>; "A Grand Woman Suffrage Rally,"



Utah suffragists felt a connection to suffrage leaders who had joined them in protesting their disenfranchisement by Congress. They stayed connected with the national movement by sending delegates to Utah and national conventions and also through the news and articles the *Woman's Exponent* reprinted from other suffrage papers such as the *National Citizen and Ballot Box* and the *Woman's Journal*. The Beaver County WSA framed photos of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to hang in the Relief Society hall where they met.<sup>47</sup> American Fork suffragists went one step further with life-size photos of these leaders, also adding “the Susan B. Anthony of Utah, Sarah M. Kimball.”<sup>48</sup>

Utah suffragists celebrated suffrage leaders' birthdays. UWSA members sent Elizabeth Cady Stanton a silver-and-onyx ballot box when she turned eighty years old in 1895.<sup>49</sup> For Susan B. Anthony's eightieth birthday in 1900, the Utah Silk Commission sent her a length of black silk, which Anthony had made up into a cherished dress. She wrote to a friend that her enjoyment of the gift was “quadrupled because it was made by women politically equal with men.”<sup>50</sup> The dress is still displayed in her bedroom at the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, New York. When Anthony died in 1906, she bequeathed a gold ring to Emmeline B. Wells as a symbol of their friendship.<sup>51</sup>

The World's Congress of Representative Women in conjunction with the 1893 Chicago World's Fair provided another opportunity for Utah women to build bridges. As Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint women worked together to prepare exhibits for the fair, they healed some of the divisions created during the antipolygamy campaign and developed stronger ties with national women's leaders. Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, who spoke to great acclaim in one of the

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*Woman's Exponent* 21, no. 4 (August 15, 1892): 4, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/30890/rec/288>.

47. Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association Papers.

48. “American Fork W.S.A.,” *Woman's Exponent* 20, no. 20 (May 1, 1892): 7, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6qpomxg/23725824>.

49. “Elizabeth Cady Stanton,” *Woman's Exponent* 24, nos. 11–12 (November 1 and 15, 1895): 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6pc7gk/23726451>.

50. Quoted in Kathleen Barry, *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 342.

51. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells: An Intimate History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017), 420.

sessions, was described as “one of the brightest exponents of woman’s cause in the United States.”<sup>52</sup>

In July 1894, Congress passed an Enabling Act essentially inviting Utah to apply for statehood once more. Latter-day Saint suffragists had been preparing for years to ensure that equal suffrage rights for women would be included in Utah’s new state constitution. Susan B. Anthony also believed this was the best opportunity to secure women’s voting rights. In a letter published in the *Woman’s Exponent*, she warned, “Now in the formative period of your constitution is the time to establish justice and equality to all the people. . . . Once ignored in your constitution—you’ll be as powerless to secure recognition as are we in the older states.”<sup>53</sup> Wyoming and Colorado had become the first two suffrage states in 1890 and 1893, respectively, and Utah women were determined to make Utah the third. UWSA members worked to ensure that both political parties included planks in their platforms supporting suffrage for women and lobbied the 107 delegates elected to the upcoming constitutional convention.<sup>54</sup> Their “careful cultivation of grass-roots, bipartisan support throughout the territory” turned out to be crucial.<sup>55</sup>

### Utah’s Constitutional Convention

Utah’s constitutional convention opened on March 4, 1895, in Salt Lake’s newly completed City and County Building. On March 18, almost one hundred women of the Utah Woman Suffrage Association met in the City and County Building to draft a petition for equal suffrage. They filed into the convention hall to listen as delegate Franklin S. Richards submitted their petition to the convention and it was read aloud.<sup>56</sup> In the petition, the women reminded convention delegates of their pledges to support equal suffrage, described the benefits of women’s political

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52. “Woman’s Great Forum,” *The Chicago Record*, May 15, 1893, 1.

53. “Susan B. Anthony’s Letter,” *Woman’s Exponent* 23, nos. 3–4 (August 1 and 15, 1894): 169, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/17702/rec/526>.

54. Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 270–76.

55. Jean Bickmore White, “Woman’s Place Is in the Constitution: The Struggle for Equal Rights in Utah in 1895,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 368.

56. “Woman Suffragists,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, March 19, 1895, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6jm3hm3/11309680>; “Proceedings and Debates of the Convention Assembled to Adopt a Constitution for the State of Utah,” Day 15, March 18, 1895, <https://le.utah.gov/documents/conconv/15.htm>.

THE  
SUFFRAGE QUESTION

ADDRESS

OF  
HON. FRANKLIN S. RICHARDS

DELIVERED IN THE

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

MARCH 28

PUBLISHED BY

UTAH WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION

SPEECHES

OF

HON. O. F. WHITNEY

IN SUPPORT OF

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

DELIVERED IN THE

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF UTAH

MARCH 30TH, APRIL 2ND, AND APRIL 5TH, 1895.

PUBLISHED BY THE

UTAH WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION

Orson F. Whitney and Franklin S. Richards argued powerfully in support of women's suffrage in Utah's constitutional convention. Utah suffragists printed and distributed their pro-suffrage speeches. Church History Library.

participation, and reminded delegates that they were watching: “The women of Utah are by no means indifferent spectators of the drama that is now being enacted.”<sup>57</sup>

Despite suffragists’ carefully laid groundwork, the question of suffrage became the convention’s most hotly debated topic. Beginning on March 28, Davis County delegate Brigham H. Roberts argued against enfranchising women in the state constitution, claiming it might attract opposition and endanger statehood.<sup>58</sup> His speeches over the next few days breathed new life into anti-suffrage arguments and supported calls from some Utahns to submit the issue to voters as a separate question after statehood.

Petitions began circulating across Utah on both sides of the issue, with the UWSA canvassing door-to-door in many places. Orson F. Whitney and Franklin S. Richards were the most outspoken suffrage supporters in the convention. Whitney argued, “It is woman’s destiny to have a voice in the affairs of government. She was designed for it. She has a right to it. This great social upheaval, this woman’s movement that is making itself heard and felt, means something more than that certain women are ambitious to vote and hold office. I regard it as one of the great levers by which the Almighty is lifting up this fallen world, lifting it nearer to the throne of its Creator.”<sup>59</sup> Franklin S. Richards maintained that “if the price of statehood is the disfranchisement of one-half of the people . . . , it is not worth the price demanded.”<sup>60</sup>

In the end, pro-suffrage arguments and petitions carried the day. Convention delegates voted to include an equal suffrage clause modeled on Wyoming’s. The Utah suffrage clause stated, “The rights of citizens of the state of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this state shall enjoy equally all civil, political and religious rights and privileges.”<sup>61</sup> Utah’s male electorate overwhelmingly approved the proposed constitution in November’s

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57. March 18, 1895 constitutional convention proceedings, <https://le.utah.gov/documents/conconv/15.htm>.

58. The First Presidency was appalled at Roberts doing this and publicly slapped him on the wrist for it, and his constituents tried to recall him.

59. March 30, 1895 constitutional convention proceedings, <https://le.utah.gov/documents/conconv/27.htm>.

60. March 28, 1895 constitutional convention proceedings, <https://le.utah.gov/documents/conconv/25.htm>.

61. Utah State Constitution, Article VI, Section 1, [https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Article\\_IV/Article\\_IV,\\_Section\\_1.html?v=UC\\_AIV\\_S1\\_1800010118000101](https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Article_IV/Article_IV,_Section_1.html?v=UC_AIV_S1_1800010118000101).

election with 31,305 votes in favor and 7,687 votes opposed.<sup>62</sup> Congress also accepted the constitution, and President Grover Cleveland signed a proclamation making Utah the forty-fifth state on January 4, 1896.

### Suffrage State

Utah became the third state with suffrage rights for women citizens when it entered the Union. Suffragists celebrated across Utah, and Susan B. Anthony telegraphed her congratulations: “We all rejoice with you that Utah is a State with her women free and enfranchised citizens.”<sup>63</sup> Seven women ran for state office in the 1896 general election, and voter turnout was high. In one of the most closely watched races, seven men and three women (five Democrats and five Republicans) ran for the five open Utah Senate seats representing Salt Lake.

After the Republican-leaning *Salt Lake Tribune* endorsed Angus Cannon, the *Salt Lake Herald* responded on October 31 by endorsing his wife, Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, on the Democratic ticket as “the better man of the two. Send Mrs. Cannon to the state senate as a Democrat and let Mr. Cannon as a Republican remain at home to manage home industry.”<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Cannon won more votes than all the Republicans, including her husband and Emmeline B. Wells, and became the first female state senator in the country.<sup>65</sup> In that 1896 election, Sarah E. Anderson of Weber County and Eurithe LaBarthe of Salt Lake County were elected state representatives, and eleven other women were elected to county offices: Amelia Graehl (Box Elder), Bessie Morehead (Cache), Tryphenia West (Iron), Lottie Farmer (Juab), Mamie Wooley (Kane), Delilah K. Olson (Millard), Mary F. Shelby (Rich), Margaret A. Caine (Salt Lake), Maude Layton (Sevier), Emily Dods (Tooele), and Ellen Jakeman (Utah).<sup>66</sup>

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62. “The Constitution,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 4, 1895, 1, <https://news-papers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6ko8ops/1856789>.

63. Clipping from the papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, cited in Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 328.

64. *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, October 31, 1896, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6st8ws1/11353132>.

65. “A Legislative Landslide,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, November 4, 1896, 10, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6q2568p/11389760>.

66. “The Democratic Sweep,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, November 10, 1896, 6, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6wt018v/11420862>; “Iron County’s Vote,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, November 14, 1896, 5, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6gx5jk9/11410350>; “Card of Thanks,” *Round-Up*, November 13, 1896, 1,

These suffrage success stories were possible because of Utah women's organizations and turnout, as well as the decades of political experience they had already gained. But holding office and even casting ballots were not possibilities for all women who lived in Utah, since discriminatory U.S. citizenship laws barred Native American women and Asian immigrants from citizenship (and voting) because of their race. For the fledgling Black community in Utah, the situation was less defined. Black newspapers published in Salt Lake City in the mid-1890s provide some evidence of Black women's political participation through a "Colored Women's Republican Club" in the early years of statehood.

The Club held a meeting in August 1895, at a time when some people hoped Utah women would be allowed to vote on the proposed constitution (the territorial Supreme Court later ruled no). At that meeting, one of the speakers "emphasized the necessity for registering [to vote], and . . . to beware of statements made by certain registrars that colored ladies, as well as working girls, were not enti[t]led to register."<sup>67</sup> Although Black women had the legal right to vote, this indicates that they were facing additional difficulty when attempting to register to vote in 1895. And, of course, the fact alone that there was a "Colored Women's Republican Club" in addition to the "Women's Republican Club" says something about the color line.

But evidence suggests that Black women and men were engaged participants in the first years after statehood. Discussions of the "black vote" used numbers that clearly included female as well as male voters, and articles in *The Broad Ax* show that there were vigorous debates within the Black community about which political party they should support.<sup>68</sup> Some reports show that Black women such as Alice Nesbitt and Elizabeth Taylor, leaders in the "Colored Women's Republican Club," campaigned for Republican Party candidates and worked to turn out voters for their favored candidates.<sup>69</sup> This is consistent with the reportedly high voter turnout for Utah women in general—according to

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<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6r5ov5n/9332741>; "Official Vote of Tooele County," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 14, 1896, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6q258s7/12704866>.

67. "Rally of Colored Women," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 23, 1895, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6bz7grk/12940305>.

68. "Mr. Taylor Ratified," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, October 28, 1896, 5, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6bz7d1b/11383422>.

69. "Echoes of the Election," *Broad Ax*, November 12, 1898, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6dj688x/377580>.



one report, women's turnout was 96 percent in 1900, with men's turnout at 94 percent.<sup>70</sup>

### Working for National Suffrage

After regaining their own right to vote, many Latter-day Saint women continued to support the national suffrage movement, first through the NAWSA-affiliated Utah Council of Women, and later also through Alice Paul's Congressional Union and National Woman's Party. Their commitment to the cause, experience with voting, and high level of community support enabled them to play a unique part in the national struggle for suffrage. As the twentieth century progressed, a new generation of Latter-day Saint women rose to leadership in national organizations as the question of women's voting rights gained more urgency.

Although anti-suffragists argued that women did not want the vote and could not exercise it rationally, Utah women proved otherwise. Women's voter turnout was high, and politically active women influenced Utah families and communities for good. In February 1898, Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, then serving as a state senator, testified to the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee that Utah women's involvement in politics had not degraded their morality or caused them to neglect family duties. Instead, she argued, circumstances in Utah were "a complete vindication of the efforts of equal suffragists. . . . None of the unpleasant results which were predicted have occurred."<sup>71</sup>

In 1899, NAWSA leader Carrie Chapman Catt visited Utah and organized the Utah Council of Women (UCW) to succeed the UWSA. With Emily S. Richards as president, the UCW brought women from different faiths and political parties together to work for the enfranchisement of women across the country.<sup>72</sup> UCW members held national leadership positions in NAWSA, attended and spoke at national and international women's rights conventions, and supported national campaigns for women's suffrage. For example, in 1909, the UCW collected nearly

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70. Emmeline B. Wells, "The History of Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1900," reprinted in *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 47.

71. Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 4 vols. (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 4:319, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29870/29870-h/29870-h.htm>. Still, it would be twenty years before a House Committee would recommend the passage of a constitutional amendment for women's suffrage.

72. Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 352; "Noted Woman Suffragist," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 30, 1899, 8, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6v70v75/12854500>.





Utah and national suffrage leaders meet with Senator Reed Smoot in front of the Hotel Utah, August 19, 1915. *Left to right:* Marie Mahon of New York, Hannah S. Lapish, Emmeline B. Wells, Senator Reed Smoot, Lily Clayton Wolstenholme, Elizabeth Hayward, Margaret Zane Cherdrone, Lucy A. Clark, Mrs. J. H. Saxson, Mrs. A. D. Paine, Leila Tuckett Freeze, Ruth M. Fox, Mrs. Charles Livingston, Mrs. L. R. Tanner, and Mrs. M. B. Lawrence. Courtesy National Woman's Party at Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument.

40,000 signatures on a NAWSA petition for a federal suffrage amendment, one-tenth of the signatures gathered nationwide and three times Utah's assigned quota.<sup>73</sup>

As the twentieth century progressed, disagreements split the national suffrage movement yet again. After organizing the NAWSA parade in Washington, D.C., in 1913, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns broke away to pursue more direct agitation for the vote. They formed the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage, which became the National Woman's Party (NWP) in 1916. Utah suffragists continued to support NAWSA, but many influential women were also very active in the NWP, including Annie Wells Cannon, Margaret Zane Cherdrone, and Lily Clayton Wolstenholme.

NWP members hosted monthly meetings in their Utah headquarters on Salt Lake City's Main Street, attended national conventions, staged rallies and parades, and lobbied their elected officials to support the proposed

73. "Council of Women Has Busy Meeting," *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 2, 1909, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6nk4r4p/14005675>.

“Susan B. Anthony Amendment” in Congress.<sup>74</sup> Utah’s congressional delegation were strong suffrage supporters, and Senator George Sutherland welcomed NWP envoys when they delivered petitions on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in December 1915.<sup>75</sup> Sutherland introduced the amendment into the Senate, but it failed to pass yet again.<sup>76</sup>

Frustrated by the lack of progress, Alice Paul and the NWP decided to stage the first-ever protest in front of the White House. Beginning in January 1917, women stood at the gates six days a week holding signs urging President Woodrow Wilson to support a suffrage amendment. Most Utah suffragists thought the actions of these “Silent Sentinels” were too radical. When Utahns Minnie P. Quay and Lovern Robertson joined the picketing in November 1917, the Utah Woman’s Democratic Club condemned Quay and terminated her club membership.<sup>77</sup> Quay and Robertson were arrested and imprisoned in the Occoquan Workhouse in northern Virginia during the now-infamous “Night of Terror,” when guards used violence toward jailed suffragists.<sup>78</sup> Reports of the women’s mistreatment ignited public sympathy for their cause and helped induce President Wilson to declare his support for a suffrage amendment.

After decades of debate, Congress finally passed the Nineteenth Amendment in June 1919. That fall, Utah’s four female legislators played key roles during a special legislative session to ratify it. State Senator Elizabeth Hayward introduced the joint resolution for ratification, Representative Anna T. Piercey chaired the session in the House, and Representatives Dr. Grace Stratton Airey and Delora W. Blakely gave speeches on the floor.<sup>79</sup> Utah officially ratified the amendment on October 3, 1919,

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74. The amendment granting women the right to vote was colloquially known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. It was passed by Congress in 1919 as the Nineteenth Amendment and ratified by the states in 1920.

75. “Monster Suffrage Petition Presented,” *Evening Star*, December 6, 1915, 1, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1915-12-06/ed-1/seq-1/>.

76. “Senator Sutherland Presents Suffrage Amendment,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, December 8, 1915, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6w99k8q/23477267>; “President Promises Women He’ll Talk Over Suffrage with the Congress Later,” *Washington Herald*, December 7, 1915, 1, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045433/1915-12-07/ed-1/seq-1/>.

77. “Says Mrs. Quay Is Not a Democrat,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 31, 1917, 8, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6db8v59/14740757>. Lovern Robertson was not mentioned, probably because she was not a member of the Woman’s Democratic Club.

78. “Affidavit of Mrs. Minnie P. Quay,” November 26, 1917, Library of Congress; and “Affidavit of Mrs. C. T. Robertson,” November 28, 1917, Library of Congress.

79. “Suffrage Ratified by House, Now Goes to Chief Executive,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 1, 1919, 18, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6806d41/15101313>.



Envoys carrying a suffrage petition from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., gather with Utah supporters on the steps of the Utah State Capitol, October 4, 1915. Courtesy National Woman's Party at Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument.



Utah suffragists gather with gold, white, and purple flags outside the National Woman's Party state headquarters on Main Street in Salt Lake City, 1916. Courtesy National Woman's Party at Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument.

becoming the seventeenth state to do so.<sup>80</sup> Ten months later, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth and final state needed to ratify.

On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law, stating, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”<sup>81</sup> Women could no longer be kept from the ballot box simply due to their gender. Utah women celebrated this important step toward equality in the same year they celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their own first votes.

As previously mentioned, U.S. citizenship laws and state laws still prevented many women in Utah and the United States from voting because of their race or national origin. Native Americans were not considered U.S. citizens in 1920, and Asian immigrants were not allowed to apply for citizenship and gain voting rights at that time. Additionally, legal barriers in many states made it effectively impossible for African Americans to cast ballots.

In the face of these inequalities, many women and men in these marginalized communities continued to work for equal voting rights. Their efforts led to legislation like the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 that allowed Native Americans and Asian immigrants to gain citizenship and voting rights. Still, many states, including Utah, had laws that prevented people living on reservations from voting. Utah’s law was in force until 1957.

The landmark Voting Rights Act passed in 1965 as the result of a decades-long, nationwide civil rights movement. This law prohibited voting regulations such as poll taxes and literacy tests that had been enacted to keep people of color from voting. Like the Nineteenth Amendment and other suffrage victories, the Voting Rights Act passed because of the efforts of millions of ordinary people who persevered in the cause of equal rights for all. The voting rights anniversaries in 2020 offer an opportunity to remember their work and learn from their legacy.

## Conclusion

The story of suffrage in Utah shows that the suffrage movement was a long slog with setbacks, divisions, and many twists and turns along the

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80. “Governor Signs Suffrage Bill,” *Salt Lake Telegram*, October 4, 1919, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s66d71q0/20042731>.

81. United States Constitution, Amendment XIX, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27#toc-amendment-xix-2>.

way. Women's voting rights did not expand evenly to everyone at once, and they did not expand permanently. As the first substantial population of voting women in the United States, Utahns were the first to counter antisuffrage arguments with their own experience. They broke ground and paved the way.

Latter-day Saint women were active and engaged participants in the national suffrage movement. Their efforts laid the groundwork for women's voting rights to spread across the United States as they raised funds, circulated petitions, spoke at national and international conventions, and lobbied lawmakers. Their organization, articulateness, and dedication to the cause drew praise from national women's leaders and gave strength to the movement over three generations.

Suffragists sometimes argued that women should vote because taxation without representation was tyranny. They sometimes argued that women's influence was needed to clean up the dirty world of politics, or that women needed to be able to vote to protect the interests of their children. But at their core, work for suffrage was predicated on a belief that God had created women and men to be equal. Latter-day Saint women believed this, and they worked to open opportunities for women across the country to participate in government and public life. As Alvira Lucy Cox, president of the Sanpete County Woman Suffrage Association, wrote, "We who have accepted the new gospel of Equal Rights, must labor with untiring zeal for the redemption of the masses."<sup>82</sup> And labor they did, on a variety of issues that are still relevant to us today. We can draw inspiration from their dedication and resolve to become more engaged and make a difference in our own communities.

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82. "Equal Suffrage," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 7 (October 15, 1893): 50, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/17203/rec/511>.