

THE MANY THOUSANDS of photographs in the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society illuminate in varying degrees a host of subjects on the state's past. As currents ebb and flow, some subjects take on increased relevancy — such as woman's rights. On this and successive pages is a roundup of photographs, several unfortunately with sketchy information about their subject matter, showing women being "liberated" as to dress, working toward a right to vote, or engaged in occupations usually reserved for men. Although some of the photographs may appear amusing now, the women pictured were serious about their endeavors. Miss Ziebarth, who wrote the commentary for the pictures, is editorial assistant for this magazine — Ed.

MHS COLLECTIONS



# WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Marilyn Ziebarth

THE STATE LEGISLATURE ratified the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution on September 8, 1919, making Minnesota the fifteenth state committed to the national enactment that prohibited suffrage restriction on the basis of sex. Present at the "Jubilee Banquet" held that evening at the St. Paul Hotel were leaders of the Minnesota suffrage movement, including Clara Hampson Ueland, president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association, Senator Ole O. Sageng, the "father of suffrage in Minnesota," and Marguerite M. Wells, chairman of the committee that secured a state-wide petition with some 110,000 signatures supporting suffrage reform. Adorned with yellow boutonnières — symbols of the female suffrage movement — the gala group "thrilled and applauded," according to the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* of September 9, 1919, when addressed as "Fellow Citizens," "Fellow Voters," and "Voting Women of America." The celebration, it was noted, marked the culmination of a century of determined but seemingly Sisyphean efforts to gain equal access to the ballot box.

The advance in woman's status, of course, was not simply the success story of a small group of dedicated feminists. These crusaders were assisted by, as well as assistants to, the titanic transformation of the United States from an agrarian to an industrial society. This metamorphosis, particularly during the tremendous economic and social upheavals attendant to the Civil War and World War I, shook and cracked the material foundations that supported the myth that women were unfit for physical and intellectual activities outside the home. Feminists saw the cracks, and they probed and picked away at the superstructure of sexist social mores

which became increasingly unintegrable with the reality of an industrialized America in which 5,000,000 women made up 5.5 per cent of the labor force in 1900. With uncommon persistence and patience, these women campaigned for political equality, suffered setbacks, formulated new tactics, and began again. Many of them assumed that the millennium would come with enactment of full female suffrage in 1920; a few nurtured visions of full social and psychological revolution.

After a period of apparent dormancy pursuant to the Nineteenth-Amendment victory of 1920, younger, more militant generations of feminists are again in the news. The following pictorial "her-story" of the female suffrage movement in Minnesota, as well as of other aspects of woman's rights, offers the perspective that today's radical ideas may be tomorrow's accepted truths.

THE EIGHTEENTH and nineteenth centuries witnessed scattered and isolated protests against social and legal discrimination against women by outspoken critics such as Abigail Adams, educator Emma Willard, the abolitionist Grimké sisters, and Minnesota publisher Jane Grey Swisshelm. It was not until 1848, however, that the woman's rights movement gained self-recognition, leadership, and a program. In that year the first woman's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York.

Adopted at this gathering of several hundred women and men was a Declaration of Principles, drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others and modeled after the Declaration of Independence. "The history of mankind," it read, "is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man



"TURKISH DRESS" in Red Wing

toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." Fifteen-odd "facts" or sweeping grievances were then enumerated, and a list of ten resolutions followed, including one which read: "Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred rights to the elective franchise" (this was the one resolution not passed unanimously but only by a small margin). At the conclusion of the proceedings, sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signed their names to the declaration, and women across the country who had rebelled against the circumstances of their lives knew they were not alone in their discontent.

Perhaps inspired by the ringing words of the Declaration of Principles, a liberated woman of the late 1850s found courage to pose for a Red Wing photographer in a "Turkish dress." The style was advocated by Amelia Bloomer in her temperance-turned-feminist newspaper, *The Lily*, after Elizabeth Cady Stanton's cousin, Elizabeth Smith Miller, shocked the good people of Seneca Falls in 1851 by wearing a similar outfit in public. The pants suit, without burdensome petticoats and rigid stays, was defended by woman's

rights leaders as both practical and healthy. Such costumes had been seen as early as the 1820s in Robert Owen's New Harmony community, and they continued to be worn by pioneer women crossing the prairies long after their feminist sisters beat a tactical retreat from the new style. Made objects of ridicule by the press and their local communities, even militants such as Mrs. Bloomer came to believe that this small gesture had only a detrimental effect on the movement's primary goals of full legal status, including the right to control property and earnings, educational and occupational opportunities — and full enfranchisement.

ALTHOUGH a proposition to extend the electoral privilege to married women was briefly considered (and even more hastily dismissed) by the Democratic wing of Minnesota's state constitutional convention of 1857, it was not until 1875 that the first suffrage gains were made in the state. The legislature of that year was induced to submit to the public a constitutional amendment empowering the legislature to enable women to vote for school officers and measures and to hold school offices. Passed by the electorate and acted upon by the legislature, the change permitted Minnesota women to vote in the election of 1876, whereupon for the first time they dropped their small-size ballots into special boxes reserved for the occasion. A more comprehensive amendment in 1897 extended female suffrage to library affairs. The three women identified only as "Grandma Hoyt, Mother Livingston, and Ada Livingston" in the photograph below unhesitatingly exercised their limited rights in a Minneapolis election of about 1910.

VOTING on Minneapolis matters about 1910





LITERARY SOCIETY offered self improvement for seven women in St. Paul.

THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT continued as a discouraging two-steps-forward, one-step-backward affair. Despite concerted pressure from feminist spokesmen, the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified in 1868) was worded to force states, at the cost of losing seats in the House of Representatives, to grant suffrage to all *male* citizens, a term which hitherto had not qualified the constitutional definition of "citizen." Three years later women who had campaigned for the proposed Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in 1870) were informed by politicians supposedly friendly to the women's cause that political expediency required omission of the promised sex clause from that amendment which forbade any denial of citizens' rights on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Meanwhile, rank-and-file women who had already ventured outside their homes during the Civil War to serve as nurses, administrators, laborers, reformers, and abolitionist propagandists doggedly persisted in their struggle to be accepted as full political and intellectual equals of men. The more aggressive took to the soapbox and championed their cause in nationally-circulated papers such as *Woman's Journal* and *The Revolution* — organs, respectively, of the American Woman Suffrage Association led by Lucy Stone and

the more far-reaching National Woman Suffrage Association sparked by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Less public women such as these seven St. Paulites (from left, mistresses Alexander, J. A. Wheeler, H[enry?] C. James, D[aniel?] R. Noyes, H[enry C.?] Burbank, Henry Yale, and Charles P. Noyes; photograph c. 1885) formed self-improvement societies for discussion of literature, moral issues, and social problems. Emily Gilman Noyes (far right) later served as vice-president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association and charter member of the Minnesota League of Women Voters. Unrepresentatively advanced in her concept of woman's rights, she organized a woman's employment service in St. Paul and directed the fund drive for the Young Women's Christian Association building on Fifth Street. She also was successful in establishing a neighborhood YWCA branch to serve St. Paul black women and children.

Freed from domestic drudgery, educated and wealthy women campaigned for political and social rights denied them on grounds of intellectual and physical inferiority; less affluent members of the "weaker" and "sheltered" sex continued to labor at delicate tasks such as that performed by an Oklahoma woman of the late nineteenth century who hauled buf-



GATHERING fuel

WORKING at North Star Woolen Mills about 1910



NOON RECREATION at Sanitary Foods, Inc., included dancing to some ragtime on the piano.





WOMAN SUFFRAGE RALLY at Rice Park, St. Paul, in 1914

falo chips, used for fuel, across a treeless prairie. Many of her city sisters worked in factories such as the North Star Woolen Mills at 218 South Second Street in Minneapolis. In the spirit of early twentieth-century progressivism, factory girls employed by Sanitary Foods, Inc. of St. Paul were provided with facilities for amusement on their lunch breaks.

ESTABLISHMENT of voting requirements was left to the individual states by the founding fathers, and, consequently, women initially worked to change state regulations which denied females the vote. In a landmark event, Wyoming women, who had voted in the sparsely populated new territory since 1870, retained full enfranchisement when Wyoming became a state in 1890. By 1914, eleven new western states and the territory of Alaska had enacted full female suffrage laws.

However, the intransigence of the older states, particularly in the South and the industrial East, forced many women to look to a national constitutional amendment to nullify state suffrage restrictions. A national amendment had been introduced into Congress every year since 1878, and third party groups — the prohibitionists, populists, nonpartisan leaguers, socialists, and progressives — had one by one incorporated female suffrage planks into their platforms.

It was not until the 1910–1920 decade, though, that the movement gained real momentum, and even opponents recognized that at best they could only forestall the advent of national female suffrage. Citizenship pageants, one including the sad-faced “Statue of Liberty” pictured and probably sponsored by women of the Nonpartisan League, and rallies like the one held

PAGEANT “Liberty”



in St. Paul's Rice Park in 1914 attracted considerable attention and widespread serious thought to the proposal. Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., the White House was surrounded by some of its first sign-carrying pickets — "Silent Sentinels" asking "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?"

IN MINNESOTA, bills for extended or full female suffrage were regularly introduced at every session of the legislature after the turn of the century, but, predictably, they died in committee or failed to pass both houses. With the coming of World War I, however, women left their kitchens in droves for factories, hospitals, and the battlefields themselves. The importance of female participation in the national economy — as linemen, painters, factory hands, and workers at countless other traditionally male jobs — could no longer be denied. Sensing the inevitable, the Minnesota legislature passed a resolution early in 1919 asking the United States Senate to join with the House in proposing a suffrage amendment. In a special session that fall, the state legislature ratified the amendment finally submitted to it by Congress on June 4, 1919. The favorable vote was 120 to 6 in the Minnesota house and 60 to 5 in the senate. Anticipating the outcome, waiting Minnesota women crowded into the visitors' gallery, waving flags, cheering, and singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" before adjourning to the Capitol restaurant where "an old-fashioned chicken dinner" was served to legislators who had aided the cause.

Through laborious efforts the national amendment,

*UP a telephone pole*



*WIELDING a brush*

worded exactly as written by Susan B. Anthony forty years earlier, was ratified by the necessary three-fourths of the total states on August 18, 1920. Across the country women such as these voters at Stillwater helped elect Warren G. Harding president of the United States in the November election. No amendment having been made to the state constitution, the word "male" remained in Minnesota's voting requirements until 1960 — superseded, of course, by the national amendment.

THE PHOTOGRAPH of the plainswoman is through courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society; all others are in the Minnesota Historical Society collection.

*WOMEN VOTERS in Stillwater — 1920. Runk photo.*





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