

HOW THE WOMEN'S VOTE WAS WON IN THE WEST

By the end of 1914 almost every Western state and territory had enfranchised its female citizens, creating a new voting population of 4 million women: a remarkable achievement! This stands in profound contrast to the East, where few women voted until after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920), and to the South, where the disfranchisement of African-American men was widespread.



Why did this breakthrough happen earlier and spread so rapidly in the West?

Factors included:

- the unsettled nature of regional politics and western race relations;
- the cultivation of alliances between suffragists and other reform groups; and
- the sophisticated activism of western women, whose visually appealing campaign materials blossomed forth on banners, leaflets, and more.

Female suffrage challenged prevailing gender norms; eventually, however, suffrage agitation and socioeconomic changes stimulated public awareness and debate about women's rights, economic roles, class and race relations, and political reform.

As they prevailed, western suffragists pitched in to help their comrades in other western states and then moved east. No large suffrage parade was complete without delegations of western women voters.

BREAKIN' THROUGH: WYOMING'S TRAILBLAZING PATH TO WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Wyoming was the first United States territory to allow women the right to vote. Their initial path to suffrage was short, but the struggle to retain it lasted for over twenty years.

1869 Governor John Campbell signed the suffrage bill approved by the Wyoming territorial legislature. Esther Hobart Morris, who soon became the first female judge in U.S. history, is credited with helping its passage.

Lawmakers saw suffrage as a way to promote the immigration of women to overwhelmingly male Wyoming, hoping more women would elevate its public morality.

Racism also played a part; the Fifteenth Amendment was awaiting ratification, and some Wyomingites were unhappy that black men could vote while white women could not.

1871 Legislation to repeal suffrage passed, but was vetoed by Governor Campbell. The legislature's

attempt to override the veto came one vote short, after Amalia Post, a leading suffragist, successfully persuaded the final undecided legislator to oppose repeal.

In the subsequent years, women kept up the pressure to retain these hard-fought rights.



Delegates to Wyoming's 1889 constitutional convention eagerly included women's suffrage, and Wyoming shortly thereafter became the 44th state in the Union—but the first to grant women the right to vote.

WASHINGTON

WINNING, LOSING, AND REGAINING THE FRANCHISE: THE LONG ROAD TO VOTING EQUALITY

In 1910, Washington became the fifth state in the union to enact women's suffrage. The victory was a catalyst for other campaigns, but the path in Washington was not smooth. In fact, after narrowly missing several opportunities to secure suffrage, women in Washington won and lost the right to vote three different times before finally securing it in 1910.

1854

Proposal for suffrage for white women loses by one vote.

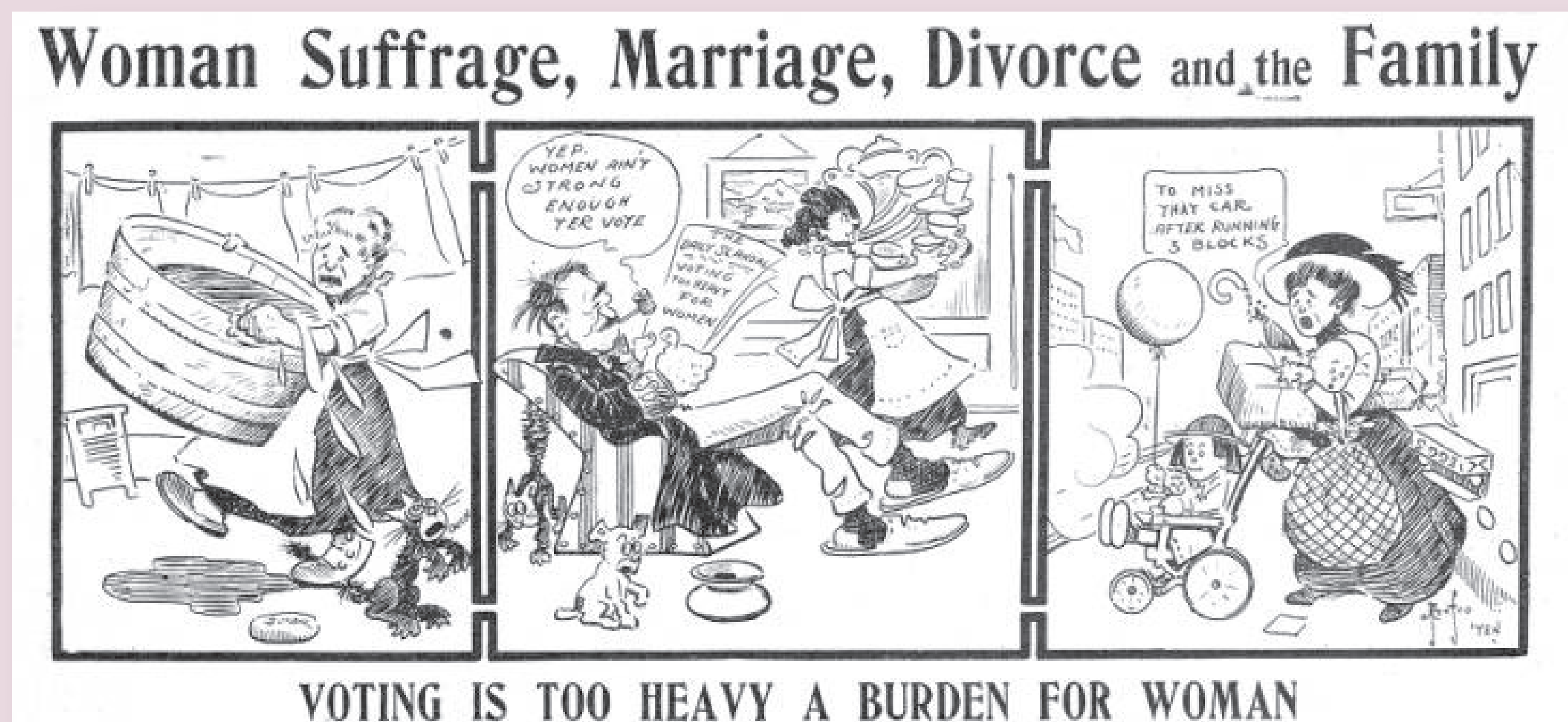
1883

Washington's Territorial Code is amended to permit women to vote, hold office, and be jurors.

1886

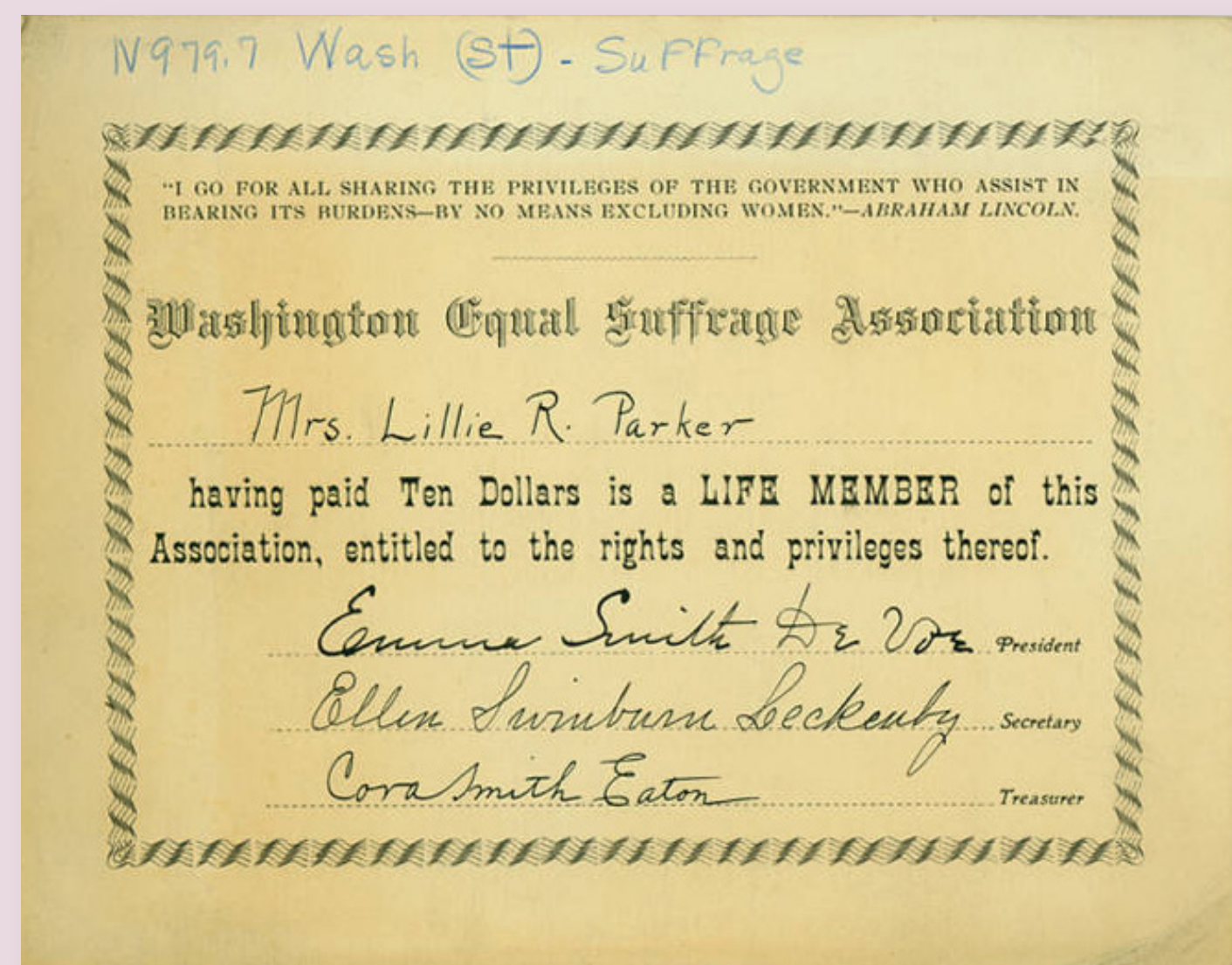
The 1883 amendment is upheld by the Territorial Supreme Court. Washington women cast election ballots.

1888



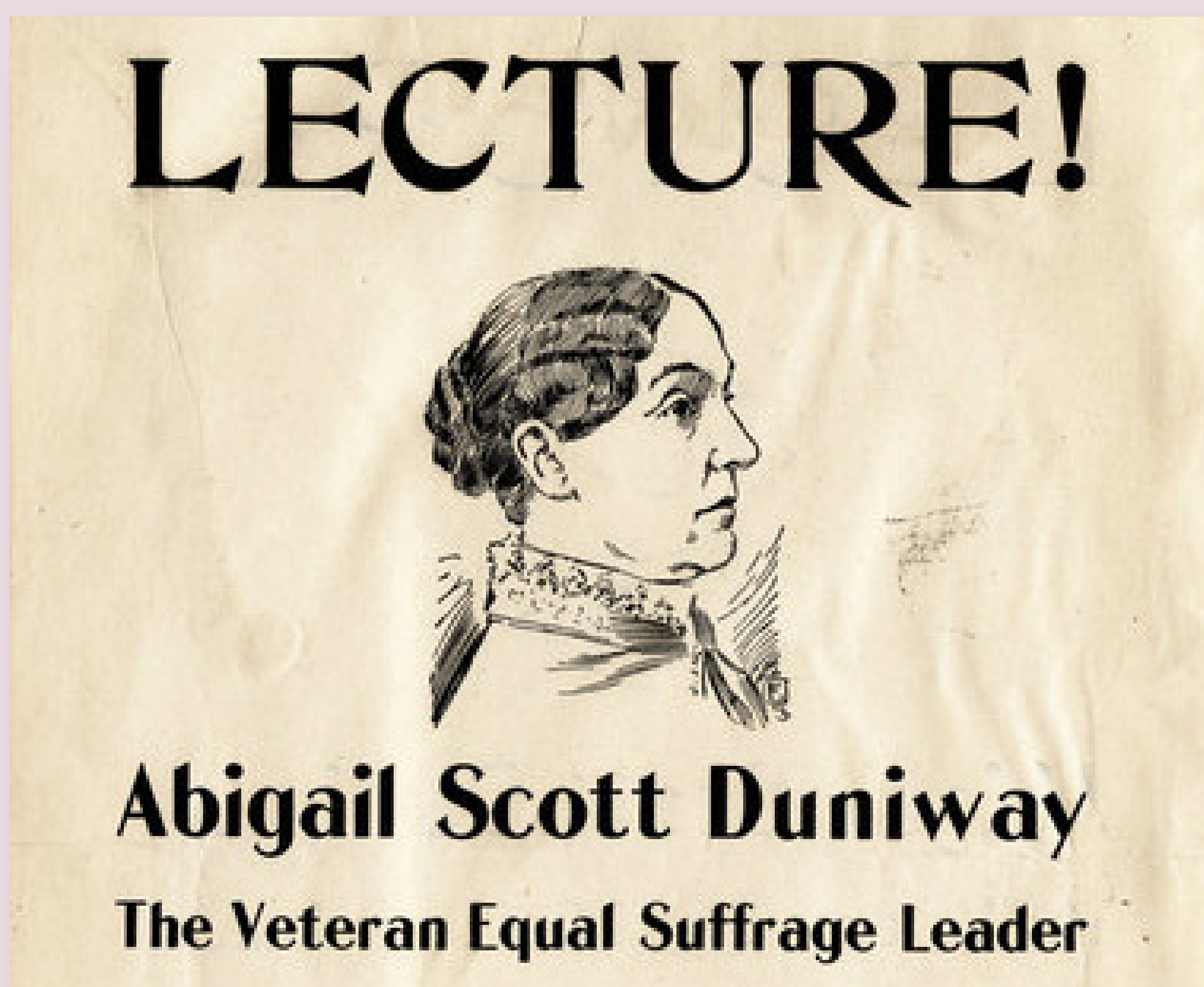
Women lose the right to vote because they are not the heads of their households.

1908



Suffragists, led by Emma Smith DeVoe and May Arkwright Hutton, persuade the legislature to consider another constitutional amendment.

1871



Susan B. Anthony and Abigail Scott Duniway embark on a speaking tour of the Northwest and return for the first convention of the Washington Equal Suffrage Association. In response, Washington legislators pass a measure declaring that women are not allowed to vote in the Territory until Congress passes suffrage for women.

1889

Washington gains statehood.

1898

Proposed suffrage amendment is rejected by Washington voters. The proposal loses by fewer than 10,000 votes.

1909

The proposed 1908 amendment is approved in both Washington legislative houses.



1910

Washington ratifies the amendment. Every county in the state votes in favor of women's suffrage, and Washington becomes the fifth state to enfranchise women.

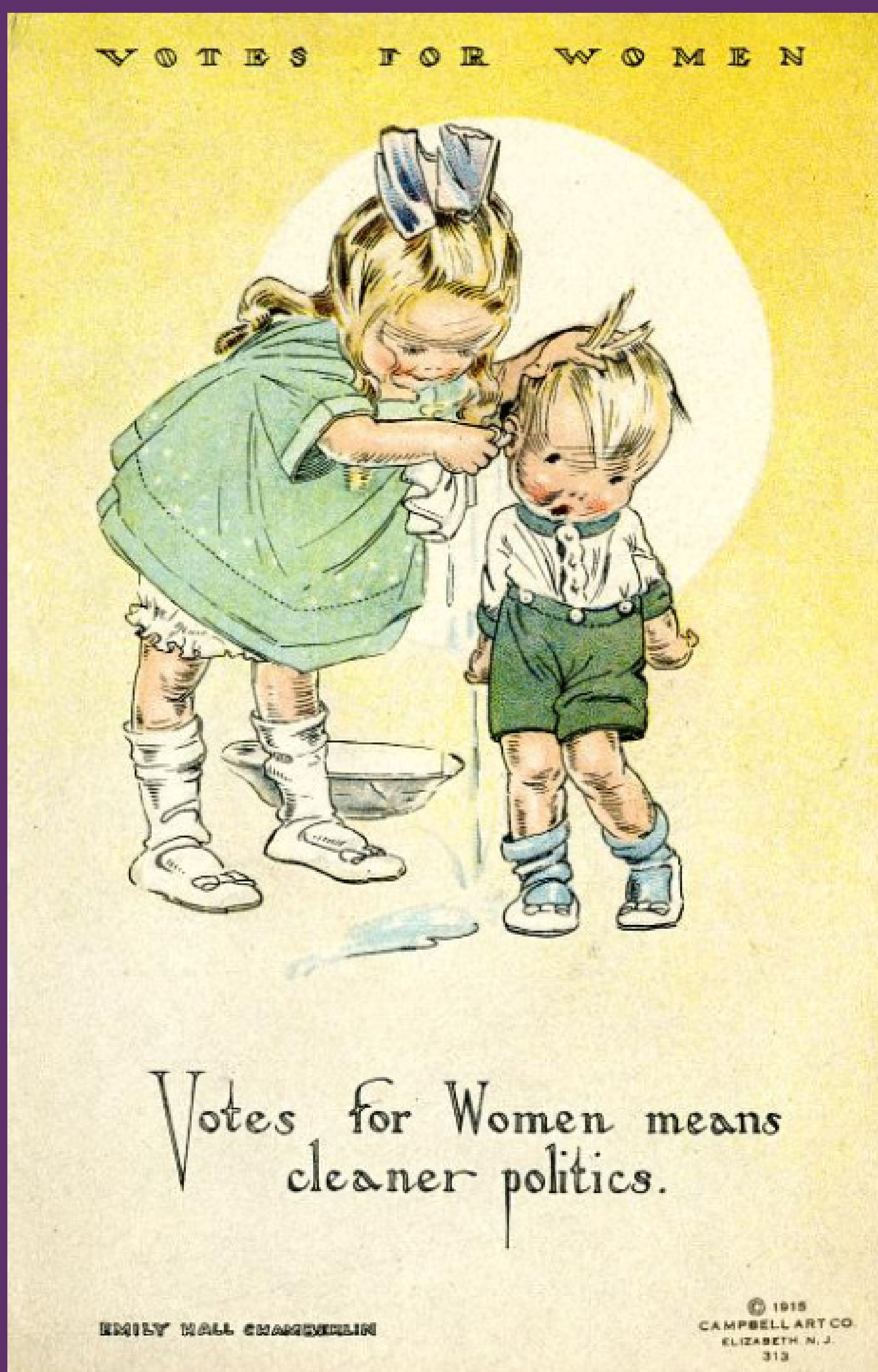
WINNING CALIFORNIA

THE 1911 SUFFRAGE VICTORY

California suffragists lost their campaign for the vote in 1896. To win suffrage in 1911, they had to navigate a tense political and social landscape.

Both wealthy, elite women in San Francisco and working-class unionists in Los Angeles campaigned for suffrage in California in the 1900s. They differed on the best way to gain support.

San Francisco women used their political clout to put suffrage on the ballot. They involved budding suffragists in women's clubs and had them act as designated spectators at city corruption trials. With women as reform partners, male support for suffrage increased.



In Los Angeles, working-class women collaborated with labor unions, who saw them as allies.

The suffrage amendment passed the state assembly and senate, and suffragists turned to winning male votes. Class tensions made this complicated, but working women partnered with unions for support.

“ Now is the time for all good men to come not to the aid of their party but to the aid of woman suffrage. It is a cause that recognises no party, but a principle; therefore, men of all parties can support it. ”

— Shelley Tolhurst, Los Angeles suffragist, 1911



Suffrage lost in San Francisco, and passed state-wide by only 3,587 votes out of 246,487 cast. Women credited their victory to the value of unity — despite class divisions and party lines, they strategically overcame major political barriers.

ARIZONA A DANGEROUS AND RADICAL THING

The suffrage battle in Arizona was long and bitterly fought.

1883 The first bill supporting women’s suffrage was swiftly defeated in the territorial legislature on the grounds that it “would degrade women from their proper sphere.”

1903 Pauline O’Neill and Frances Willard Munds, leaders of the Arizona suffrage movement, persuaded Democrats in the Arizona legislature to propose a suffrage bill. The bill passed both houses, but the Governor vetoed it.

“*Women’s suffrage is
‘beyond the constitutional
limitations’ of a
territorial legislature.*”

— Governor Brodie



Frances Willard Munds



Madge Udall in a suffrage victory parade in 1913

The movement went dormant until 1909, when Arizona began preparations for statehood.

Munds and O’Neill lobbied politicians to include suffrage in the new state constitution, but they feared backlash from mining corporations, the saloon industry, and male voters. Munds and O’Neill then lobbied mine workers and Arizona’s labor movement themselves.

Munds convinced Labor party delegates that Arizona women, who were significant in the workforce, would support the party’s labor laws if the Labor party supported equal suffrage. But state leadership changed and left suffrage out of the Democratic platform.

1912 Munds began a women’s suffrage initiative campaign with a rally in Prescott.

Thousands signed the petition and in November 1912 suffrage was put to a vote. With endorsements from state politicians and labor unions already lined up, Munds urged both the Democrats and Republicans to include suffrage in their party platforms.

Rallies in mining towns; 20,000 badges and leaflets distributed at the State Fair; and a “Votes for Women” banner spanning Phoenix’s main road followed. When the votes were counted, 68% of Arizona’s male voters had supported the suffrage amendment—the largest popular vote ever cast for suffrage in the United States.

IDAHO & OREGON

Abigail Scott Duniway was a key player in the women's suffrage movement in Oregon, Idaho and Washington — organizing lecture tours across those states featuring national suffrage leaders. Duniway's colorful personality put her in the spotlight, but also hindered her goals. We now recognize that the efforts of many other women, in addition to Duniway's efforts, led to suffrage in Idaho and Oregon.

BALANCING ACT: IDAHO'S CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Idaho adopted women's suffrage early — passing a constitutional amendment in 1896. While brief, Idaho's suffrage campaign was complex. The intersection of the mining industry, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints immigrants, and pro- and anti- temperance campaigners made for a rich story replete with a heated state election, and an unusual court case.

Idaho's Women's Christian Temperance Unions sought the vote to achieve their goals, putting them at odds with male miners, who fought limits on liquor.

“ *Help us, to build a wall around this state—put out strong drink.* ”

—Henrietta Skelton,
1889 Idaho Constitutional Convention

Fearing the alignment of suffrage with temperance would cost women the vote, Abigail Scott Duniway rushed back from her lecture tour to address the delegates. She appealed in part to their prejudices against “foreign-born voters,” arguing that white, native-born women deserved suffrage. She did not prevail, so a state constitutional amendment was required.



Annette Bowman



Rebecca Mitchell

1895 The Idaho Senate and House voted to include a suffrage amendment on the November 1896 ballot. With time short, distances long, and limited transportation, the Idaho Equal Suffrage Association's work reaching voters was truly remarkable. However, suffrage workers were predominantly white society women, who often marginalized those who did not fit the idealized image.

1896 Suffrage passed, but many mining district voters, distracted by silver issues, did not vote on suffrage specifically, leading the state board of canvassers to object that suffrage had not received the requisite majority vote. Suffrage advocate Kate Green appealed to the Idaho Supreme Court, which unanimously ruled in favor of suffrage.

THE LONG OREGON TRAIL TO WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

“ *If the pioneer mothers could face all the terrors of the wilderness, their daughters need not faint away before a ballot box.* ”

—Portland women circa 1906

Despite being an early voice in the movement, it took Oregon six votes to pass the required state constitutional amendment (more than any other state), with victory being secured by only a narrow margin in 1912.

“ *People who are drunk on prohibition have no more sense than those who are drunk with whisky.* ”

—Abigail Scott Duniway

1871 Duniway began publishing the only equal-suffrage paper in the Pacific Northwest, *The New Northwest*. Duniway, however, was autocratic, alienating younger activists and encouraging factionalism—favoring a stealth approach (“Still Hunt”) over efforts to mobilize widespread support (“Hurrah” campaigns). Additionally, Duniway's brother, Harvey Scott, editor of *The Oregonian*, was a vocal and powerful opponent of suffrage. Prohibition also divided many suffragists.

1912 After the death of Harvey Scott, a “Hurrah” campaign spurred the formation of a wide range of suffrage groups, including groups of women of color. Oregon's sixth vote on women's suffrage finally prevailed, as surrounding states had already enfranchised women.

ALASKA NATIVE WOMEN'S LONG ROAD TO SUFFRAGE

In 1913, the Alaska territorial legislature granted suffrage to women in the very first bill passed at its inaugural session. Governor John Strong proclaimed that: “[t]he women of Alaska were given the right to vote without asking for it,” but Alaska’s bill excluded Alaska Native women and men, whose path to the franchise would take several more decades.

1904 Congress gave all adult citizens in Alaska, including women, the right to vote in school board elections.

“*Alaska women are not the pampered dolls of society who drive men to the devil and drink, but they are brave and noble helpers in the development of a frontier country. . . . Alaskans are willing that they should vote and have no fear of the consequence.*”

—*The Daily Alaskan*, 1904

Women were anticipated to have a “moral uplift” effect. As expected, voting women later would help the temperance measure pass in a landslide.

1912 Congress enacted Alaska’s “Home Rule” statute, creating the Territory.

In the debate about including “the better half of the population,” House members noted that granting women the vote in California, Colorado, and Wyoming had not resulted in calamity.

“*Women are not making any worse a job of it where they have a vote than the men do where men alone vote.*”

—*Rep. Victor Berger, in comments made on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives*

1913 As its first official act the Alaska legislature unanimously voted to provide women the franchise.

The bill was a victory for white women only. While Alaska Natives had voted since the dawn of electoral politics, after Alaska became a territory only “citizens” were allowed to vote. Some insisted Alaska Natives deserved full citizenship. Others invoked overtly racist endeavors to protect “white man’s country” from the “Indians [who] outnumber us.”



1915 The territorial government conferred citizenship to “[e]very native Indian born within the limits of the Territory of Alaska,” willing to sever all tribal relationship, and also able to meet the onerous standard of proof.

1924 Congress conferred citizenship “on all non-citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States” but Alaska responded with a rigorous English literacy requirement which impacted Alaska Natives because segregated schools offered only a rudimentary education.



1970 More than fifty years after Alaska’s legislature adopted suffrage for women, voters struck the literacy test requirement, removing the last formal barrier to suffrage.



NEVADA'S CAMPAIGNS FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Nevada was the last of the Far West states to embrace the right of women to vote. Suffrage activity there went into high gear in 1914 and proponents made sure voters understood Nevada was late to the game. Male voters responded, extending the vote to Nevada women in November 1914, concluding a campaign as old as statehood itself.

1864 Nevada's statehood constitution only enfranchised white men. Amendments to remove the word "white" and "male" passed in 1869, but required a second passage vote in 1871.

1871 The amendments failed by a slight margin.

1895 A suffrage resolution passed both houses.

1897 The amendment failed again, this time by a tie vote.

1910 The suffrage movement regained momentum as a combination of women attending college and participating in clubs had taught women how to organize and to lobby government.

Felice Cohn wrote Nevada's suffrage bill in 1911 and led the lobbying effort to get it passed in 1911 and 1913. Anne Martin created the successful strategy that led to its passage—combining invigorated local suffrage leagues, parades, public speeches, and a news bureau.

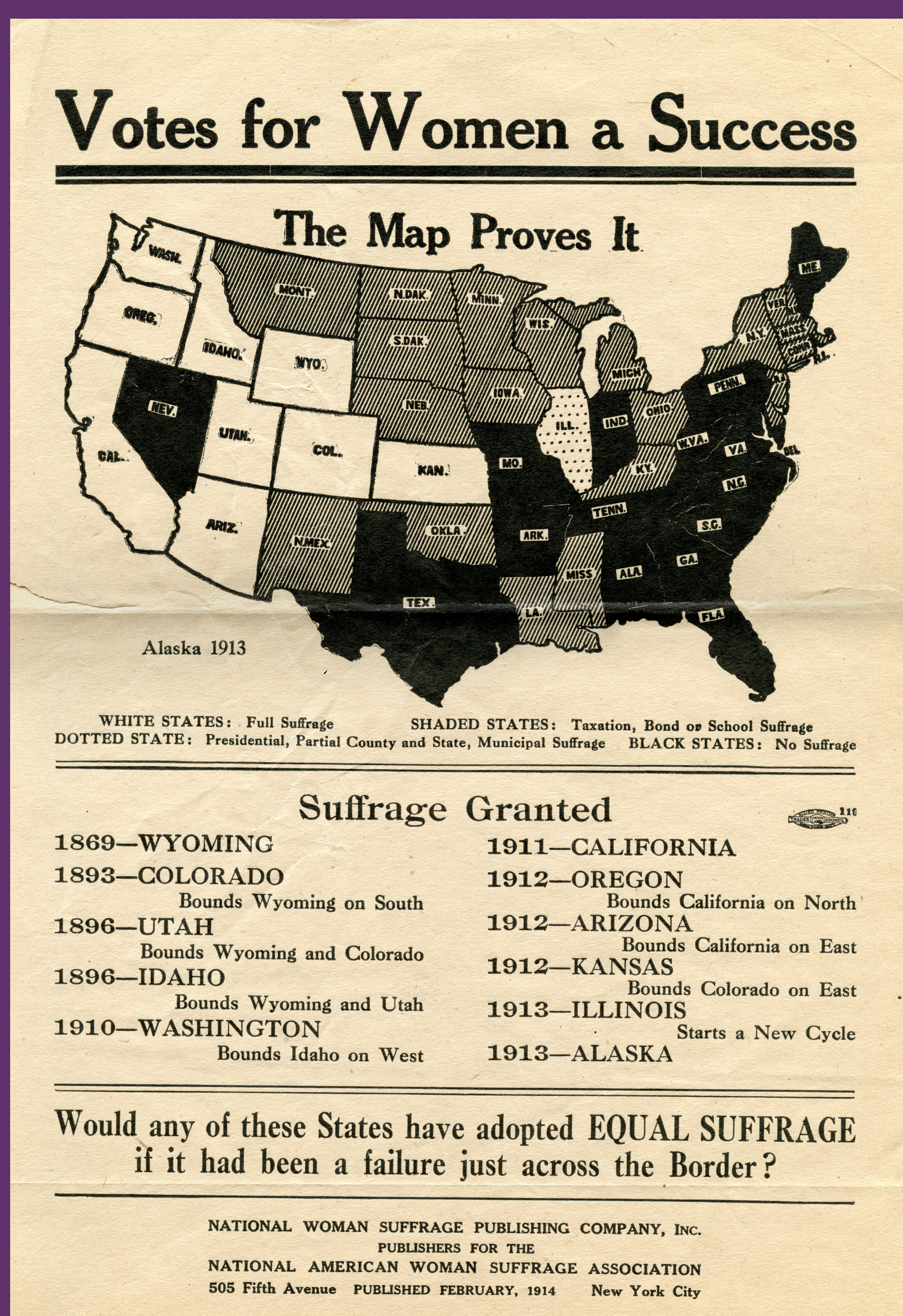
1913 The suffrage bill passed both houses, leaving ten months to persuade the electorate. Nevada's scattered population of 20,000 eligible male voters made this a challenge.



Unnamed driver (l), Mabel Vernon (c), Anne Martin (r).
(Courtesy, University of Nevada Reno)

It took several days for the results to be tallied from the November 1914 election, but the issue passed by a margin of 3,678 votes.

The suffrage campaign ended successfully in 1914 for a majority of women, but not all. Some women continued to face limitations to becoming citizens, and others faced obstacles to voting. As recently as 2016, tribes in Nevada continued to struggle to ensure their access to voting.



Pro-suffrage flyer. Nevada won the moniker as “the black spot” because it was the only Far West state on the map yet to pass full suffrage. (Courtesy, Nevada Historical Society)

“One would have to travel 100 miles all day from a county seat to a mountain camp...to reach seventy voters. In one case a three days trip was necessary to reach eighty voters.”

— Anne Martin

MONTANA EVOLVING TOWARD EQUALITY

It took Montana 25 years after statehood to amend its constitution to include women’s suffrage. Montana’s quest exemplifies the evolving arguments, strategies, and view of women that ultimately led men across the nation to share with women the right to vote.

With little support from women, suffrage failed at the 1889 and 1894 conventions. But in the mid-1890s, **extraordinary women united, including Maria Dean** (Montana’s first licensed female doctor) and **Ella Knowles Haskell** (Montana’s first licensed female lawyer).

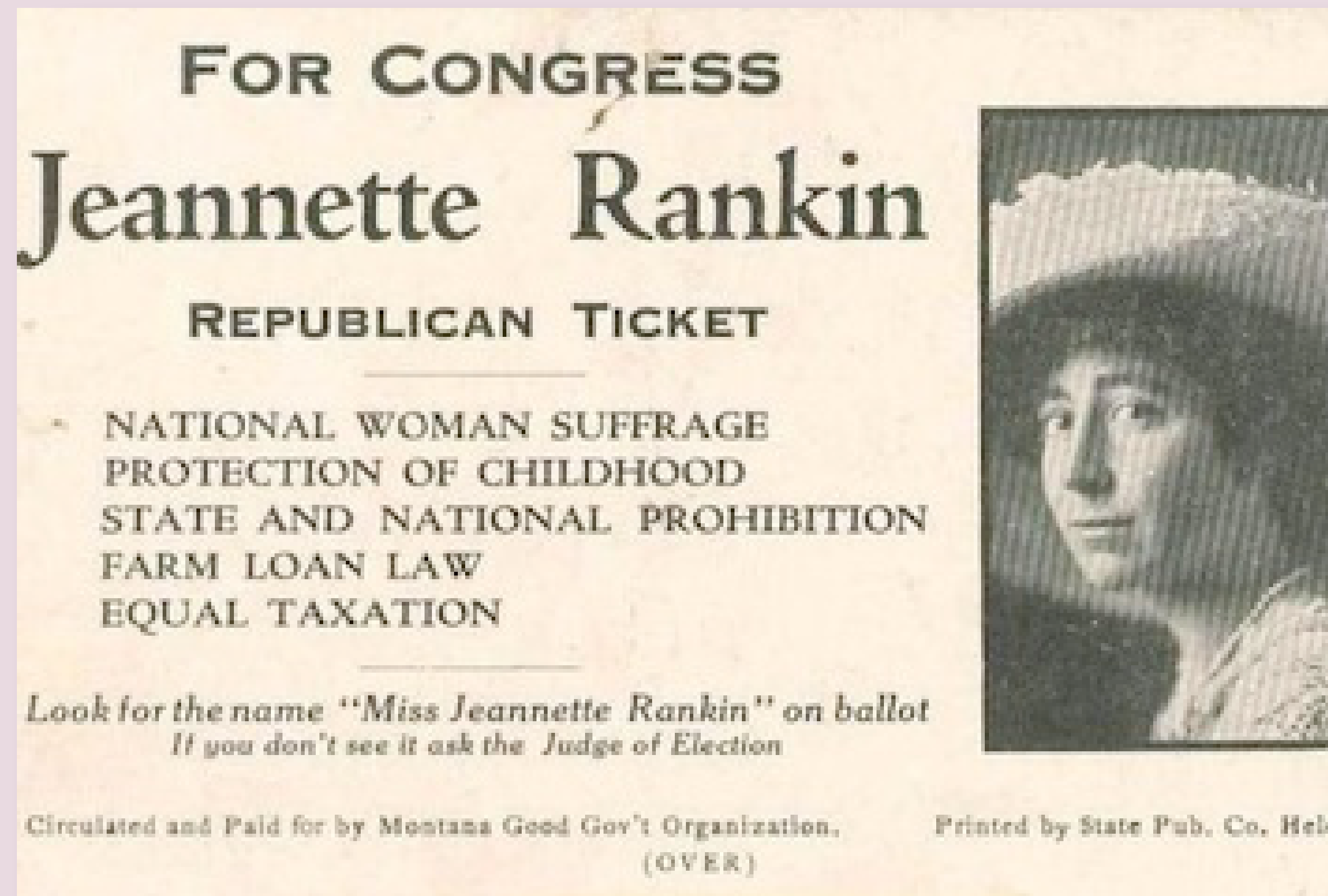
Suffrage did not pass in the 1895 legislative session either. According to the *Helena Independent*, winning suffrage in Montana would require “a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull all together.”



After one year, the Montana Woman Suffrage Association had 35 active clubs and around 300–400 members. At the 1897 legislative session, **petitions of support bearing 2,500 signatures reached the legislature**, but the bill failed, coming 5 votes short of the required $\frac{2}{3}$ majority.

1899 – 1909 Suffrage bills failed in each legislative session. Meanwhile, women developed more organizational and public speaking skills.

1910 Wyoming, Idaho, and Washington women already had the right to vote. Jeannette Rankin returned to her native Montana after having been an organizer during Washington’s suffrage campaign. What did $\frac{1}{2}$ of the population do to convince the other half to share power? Rankin answered, “[E]verything we could.”



1913 Suffragists intensified their efforts to succeed. The suffrage bill easily surpassed the required $\frac{2}{3}$ majority and Governor Stewart signed it. With the ballot issue going to the voters in November 1914, suffragists had nearly two years to win public support.

1913 – 1914 Rankin logged 9,000 miles campaigning throughout Montana; Maggie “the Whirlwind” Smith traveled 5,000; and Mary Long Alderson went 4,500 miles. Later known for her principled stand against two world wars, Rankin was not above sacrificing principle to pragmatism to win women the vote. She tailored her message to her audience, downplaying temperance and even appealing to prejudice against “the foreign-born” at times.

1914 Election Day —suffrage passed and 25 years after Montana’s constitution excluded women as voters, women of Montana had the vote.



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