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From the archives

Women Who Won The Right to Vote

- Features - Sexual politics -

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WOMEN got the vote in the United States in 1920. The amendment to the Constitution granting women that right was the climax of a struggle it had begun almost a hundred years earlier. Suffrage leaders were ridiculed and persecuted while they were alive. Today they are either forgotten or contemptuously referred to as disappointed old maids who hated men. This concept of the woman's rights movement as a war against men by sexually frustrated women is even accepted by some modern psychiatrists. But it is historically inaccurate and a great injustice to a number of truly remarkable women.

The status of women in society began to change with the breakdown of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, women first entered trades. They were frequently partners in the husband's business; widows and daughters carried on the family business. There are records of women pawnbrokers, stationers, booksellers, contractors and even shipowners. In the seventeenth century there were three women to every man in the woolen industry and many women were employed in the silk industry. They also worked in the fields and the agricultural labor of women was an important factor in the new American colonies.

The "woman question" was discussed as early as the Elizabethan period but this talk did not develop into an organized movement. It was in 1792 that Mary Wollstonecroft wrote the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which, historically, marks the conscious beginning of the struggle for woman's rights. This book was a direct reflection of Mary Wollstonecroft's sympathies with the French and American revolutions, a demand that woman's rights be included in the rights of man for which the revolutionists were fighting.

It was in America, not England, that the woman question first developed into an organized movement rather than a subject of discussion in literary circles. This reflects the more advanced position of women in the American colonies, which was strikingly different from that of women in Europe. The laws of the colonies, modeled on those of England, gave women few legal rights. But the realities of pioneer life, particularly the scarcity of women and the appreciation of their skills, meant that they actually had a great deal of responsibility, engaged in numerous occupations that were supposedly "masculine" and consequently enjoyed rights and privileges, and a degree of freedom, unknown to women in England.

The Puritan concept of work further influenced the general attitude towards women's activities. In their moral code, work was something you could never get too much of and they did not disapprove of women working, on the contrary they encouraged it. It made no difference whether the woman was married or not; the more she worked the better, and the less likely she was to succumb to the temptations of the devil.

In the colonial period women could vote, and sometimes did vote, as the right to vote was based on ownership of property and not on sex. They were gradually disfranchised by laws prohibiting women from voting – in Virginia in 1699, New York 1777, Massachusetts 1780, New Hampshire 1784 and New Jersey 1807.

At that time men engaged in agriculture and women in home manufacture. Women made most of the products used by the colonists that were not imported. The preponderance of women in the earliest factories in the United States is due largely to the fact that their work was transferred from the home to the factory. This was particularly true of the first major industry, the spinning and weaving of cotton, and accounts for the prominent role of women in early labor

struggles, especially the fight of cotton-mill workers for the ten-hour day.

The woman's rights movement, however, did not grow out of the trade-union struggles of women. It was never closely associated with trade-union activities nor particularly interested in the problems of working women. This may seem contradictory unless you keep in mind that the woman's movement was primarily a fight for legal, not economic rights. The legal battle of the suffragists has been won, but in the Twentieth century women still face severe discrimination in wages and job opportunities.

The woman's rights movement did spring directly from the abolitionist movement. Every prominent fighter for woman's rights was first an abolitionist; and the two movements were closely allied for fifty years, although the "woman question" frequently caused division in the abolitionist ranks, as the Negro cause became more respectable and more popular than that of women.

Just how did the anti-slavery movement give birth to the struggle for woman's rights? There is a simple explanation for what may seem at first a surprising evolution. Women who started out to plead for the slave found they were not allowed to plead. They were ridiculed when they appeared on a speakers' platform, they were not accepted as delegates when they attended anti-slavery conventions. Within a short time, most of the women prominent in abolitionist circles spoke up for their own rights, too, although a formal organization advocating complete legal equality and suffrage was not formed for another twenty years.

The Early Leaders

A number of misconceptions about the pioneers for woman's rights are prevalent. In the first place, it is assumed that they were all women – women united in a war against men. The truth is men were in the forefront of the struggle for woman's rights, notably such spokesmen as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips. They were attacked even more viciously than the women and labelled "hermaphrodites" and "Aunt Nancy men."

Furthermore, none of the women in this movement were exclusively pre-occupied with sex equality and women's problems. They were, as I said, invariably abolitionists and frequently advocated a great many other reforms – the Utopian variety of socialism, trade unions, atheism, temperance, free love, birth control and easier divorce. Many of these causes were not too popular in the early part of the last century and this accounts to some extent for the common opinion that these women were freaks and probably immoral.

It is not true that most of the feminist leaders were either libertines or embittered virgins. With the exception of Susan B. Anthony, the best known – Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Carrie Chapman Catt – were happily married. Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Stanton, founders of the movement, were mothers of large families. They did not marry weak husbands who were dominated by their crusading wives. The husbands were generally men of outstanding ability and achievement, enthusiastic supporters of the woman's cause. The only reason they were to some extent overshadowed by their wives was that the unusual activities of the wives attracted a good deal of attention.

Frances Wright was probably the first woman to speak publicly in this country and to advocate woman's rights. She was Scotch, coming to America in 1818. Brilliant and courageous, she was also one of the extremists, exactly the type who were slandered and laughed at but never ignored. Among numerous other activities, she founded a colony primarily intended to set an example of how to free slaves and give them economic independence. But she was an opponent of marriage and her colony became more famous for its open repudiation of this institution than for any service to the Negro cause.

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Opposition to marriage was common among the early advocates of freedom for women. They saw in it – quite correctly, in my opinion – an institution designed for the subjugation of their sex. In those days a married woman had no right to own property, her wages belonged to her husband and so did her children. The simplest way to avoid these evils was to stay single.

In spite of their audacity, these women frequently surrendered to local pressure. Mary Wollstonecraft gave birth to one illegitimate child; but when she became pregnant a second time by another lover, she found the struggle too difficult and married him. Frances Wright and her sister both married for the same reason – they were pregnant.

The sex question explains a lot about the notoriety associated with the first feminist leaders. As the movement grew and became more respectable, it attempted to dissociate itself from advocacy of “free love,” but was never completely successful.

About the same time that Frances Wright founded her well-publicized colony, Lucretia Mott became a Quaker minister. She is one of the most striking personalities in the woman’s rights movement. Of unusual intellect and breadth of vision, she studied intensively and was an active lecturer and organizer for fifty years. She supported trade unions when they were almost unknown and generally illegal, which was rare among abolitionist leaders, who seemed to think there was some kind of conflict between the two movements. She also raised six children and apparently enjoyed domestic activities like cooking and sewing, although you wonder as you read her biography how she found time for them.

She was at the meeting held in Philadelphia in 1833 where the first anti-slavery group was organized and from which the American Anti-Slavery Society developed. Although she spoke several times during the convention and played an influential role, it did not occur to her to sign the Declaration that was adopted. Samuel May, in his reminiscences, wrote: “Men were so blind, so obtuse, they did not recognize the women guests as members of the convention.”

Lucretia’s next step was to form a Women’s Anti-Slavery Society, but the women were so ignorant of parliamentary procedure that they found it necessary to get a man to chair the meeting – James McCrummel, an educated Negro. The brazen conduct of women in forming this society was attacked by clergymen as an “act of flagrant sedition against God.” While women were clothing and feeding the Negro on his way to Canada, “clergymen huddled in churches and wrung their hands, forecasting the doom of the American home and the good old traditions.”

Five years after the Women’s Anti-Slavery Society was organized, it held a convention in Pennsylvania Hall, a public building recently dedicated to “liberty and the rights of man.” While the delegates conducted their business, a mob surrounded the hall. Stones were thrown at the windows, breaking pane after pane, and vitriol was hurled through the gaping holes, while a cry rose, “Burn the hall!” Two or three hours after the women vacated the hall, it went up in flames.

That night Philadelphia was in an uproar. The mayor wanted to stop abolitionist activities and police protection was non-existent. The mob headed for the home of James and Lucretia Mott. There was a period of tense waiting inside the house while the yells and turmoil in the street grew closer. But as the minutes passed, the noise seemed to recede and gradually fade into the distance. The next day they learned that a friend had joined the mob and when they were within a block of the house, he flourished a stick and cried: “On to the Motts!” then led them up a succession of wrong streets. This was one of many similar incidents for Lucretia Mott, and her calm composure in a riot became legendary.

Sarah and Angelina Grimke, aristocratic women from the South, were among the earliest speakers and organizers of the abolitionist movement. I came across an interesting quotation from a speech by Angelina Grimke delivered before

a Massachusetts legislative committee in 1832:

“As a moral being I feel I owe it to the slave and the master, to my countrymen and to the world, to do all that I can to overturn a system of complicated crimes built upon the broken hearts and prostrate bodies of my countrymen in chains and cemented by the blood, sweat and tears of my sisters in bond.”

Evidently Churchill knew a good phrase when he saw it.

Begin Organizing

Factional struggles inside the abolitionist movement led Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to call a convention for woman's rights in 1848.

Eight years earlier, a fight had taken place over the election of a woman to a business committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The vote was favorable to the candidate, Abby Kelly; and the anti-woman group seceded from the organization and formed their own anti-slavery society. A world-wide anti-slavery convention had been called in London. Purged of its reactionary elements, the American Anti-Slavery Society elected Lucretia and two other women to their executive committee and chose her and Charles Remond, a Negro, as delegates to the London convention. Lucretia also headed the delegation from the Women's Anti-Slavery Society.

Another delegation – one hundred per cent male, of course – was sent by the newly formed organization. In London every effort was made to keep peace by persuading the women delegates to withhold their credentials, but Lucretia insisted that the responsibility for rejection must rest with the convention.

Wendell Phillips opened the fight on the convention floor by proposing that all persons with credentials be seated. He pointed out that the convention's invitation had been addressed to all friends of the slave and Massachusetts had interpreted this to mean men and women. Clergymen at the convention were particularly eloquent in their opposition to seating women. “Learned Doctors of Divinity raced about the convention hall Bible in hand, quoting words of scripture and waving their fists beneath the noses of disputing, brethren who did not know woman's place.”

The reactionaries won. Women were admitted as guests only and seated behind a curtain which screened them from public gaze. Garrison, the greatest figure in the abolitionist world, was scheduled to be the main speaker. On his arrival he climbed the stairs to the women's balcony, sat beside Lucretia behind the curtain, and remained there until the close of the convention.

It was on this trip to England that Lucretia met Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a young bride of one of the delegates. It was here that they decided to start a crusade for woman's rights on their return to America, although eight years passed before they were able to carry out their plans and call the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848.

This Equal Rights Convention, the first ever held in any country, was the official beginning of the suffrage struggle. The first day of the convention had been advertised as open to women only. When the women arrived at the Unitarian church they found they were locked out. A young professor climbed through a window and opened the door for them. On the spot, they decided to admit men, which turned out to be a fortunate decision for the suffrage cause.

James Mott was chairman of the meeting, as the women were still timid and did not know too much about

parliamentary procedure. The Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the convention was signed by 68 women and 32 men. The resolution called for complete equality in marriage, equal rights in property, wages and custody of children, the right to make contracts, to sue and be sued, to testify in court – and to vote.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton introduced the suffrage amendment. It was opposed by Lucretia Mott because she considered it too radical and thought it would arouse public antagonism and ridicule. Frederick Douglass seconded Mrs. Stanton's motion and made one of the most eloquent speeches in history for woman's equality and her right to vote. His speech inspired the women to overcome their hesitation and pass the suffrage resolution. Within a year a National Woman's Rights Association was organized and state and national conventions were held regularly.

Persecution and Abuse

The woman's movement was met with a storm of abuse, particularly from the clergy, although a great many men just considered it funny. Within a few years, as it gained momentum, it met more serious opposition. Opponents of suffrage were divided as to whether the population would decrease because women were unsexed or illegitimately increase because of the practice of free love.

A typical example of the anti-suffrage point of view appears in a book by Dr. L.P. Brockett, quoted at some length in Hare's biography of Lucretia Mott. It gives a picture of just what would happen if women were allowed to vote and declares it will be a gala day for the prostitutes, as "modest refined Christian women" would refuse to go to the polls in such company. Hare paraphrases the book:

"What a lesson of evil would be taught children on that day. Imagine the innocent offspring, clutching its mother as it stands in the presence of poor wretches, bedizened in gaudy finery, with bold, brazen faces, many of them half or wholly drunk and uttering with loud laughter, horrible oaths and ribald and obscene jests! What an impression the child would receive! And if the mother attempted to tell her daughter that these were bad women, the child might query: 'But mother, they are going to vote. If they were so very bad, would they have the same right to vote that you and other ladies have?' Unable to answer so precocious a question, the 'modest, refined Christian mother' would scurry home, leaving the polls to her male representatives and the women of the underworld."

"To drive home the lesson," says Hare, "the book is illustrated with a picture showing the refined woman at the polls completely surrounded by a vicious group of derelicts of both sexes. The picture vividly warns any woman who is on the verge of becoming a follower of Lucretia Mott, the type of men and women with whom she must associate if she votes. It also discloses the unintentional fact that the voting male is the uncouth immigrant, the bowery heeler, and the pimp; the same male hailed by opponents of female rights as woman's natural representative in affairs of government. One glance at the men in the picture convinces the reader that woman's benign influence in the home had gone awry, despite this best chosen argument of the anti-suffragettes."

Dr. Brockett also predicts that some disastrous changes will occur in the appearance of women:

"The blush of innocence, the timid, half-frightened expression which is, to all right-thinking men a higher charm than the most perfect self-conscious beauty, will disappear and in place of it we shall have hard, self-reliant bold faces, and in which all the loveliness will have faded, and naught remain save the look of power and talent."

The suffrage workers encountered additional ridicule at this time due to the introduction of the Bloomer costume. It was rather strange in appearance, consisting of trousers partly concealed by a full skirt that fell six inches below the

knees. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony probably suffered greater martyrdom, because of this costume than for any other phase of their crusade, and after a few years they discontinued wearing it, feeling that it did more harm than good. Nevertheless, the outfit did give much greater freedom of action and was adopted by many farm women of the period and recommended by doctors for use in sanitariums. It was the first step toward the freedom of the modern dress.

Mrs. Stanton became one of the most active suffrage leaders and it was in this period that her life-long collaboration with Susan B. Anthony began. She was the mother of five boys and two girls, and whenever her schedule of lectures, conventions and meetings became too heavy, she would threaten to interrupt it by having another baby. Lucy Stone, now best known as the woman who insisted on keeping her maiden name, also became prominent in the 1850s. Lucy's use of her own name grew out of her original opposition to marriage. When she did marry, the unusual ceremony attracted considerable comment, none of it favorable. She and Henry Blackwell opened the wedding with a statement:

"While we acknowledge our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relation of man and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to, such of the present laws of marriage as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise and no man should possess. We protest especially against the laws which give the husband:

"1. The custody of the wife's person.

"2. The exclusive control and guardianship of their children.

"3. The sole ownership of her personal property and use of her real estate, unless previously settled upon her, or placed in the hands of trustees as in the case of minors, lunatics and idiots.

"4. The absolute right to the product of her industry."

They continued with the regular marriage ceremony, omitting the word "obey," but there was a popular feeling, especially since Lucy kept her own name, that they were not really married.

Many Negro women like Harriet Tubman, the extraordinary leader of the underground railway, and Sojourner Truth, also played an active role in the woman's rights movement. Tubman is reported to have been an amazingly eloquent speaker, but for reasons of personal safety the speeches were rarely recorded.

Not a Soft Occupation

Even a bare outline of the lives of these early women leaders arouses admiration. Lecturing for woman's rights was not exactly a soft occupation. Travelling was pretty rough then and the reception was likely to be rough, too. These women kept going at a remarkable pace in spite of large families and heavy domestic responsibilities.

Mrs. Stanton wrote most of her speeches after midnight while the children were sleeping – I don't know when she slept. Most of the women continued their work without let-up even when they were in their sixties and seventies.

Lucretia Mott was 83 when she spoke at the 25th anniversary of the suffrage association. They were middle-class women but many of them faced economic hardships. Lucy Stone went to Oberlin College – the first to admit women – and worked her way through, sweeping and washing dishes at three cents an hour. Her life as an abolitionist and woman's rights speaker was not exactly a cinch either. She lived in a garret in Boston, sleeping three in a bed with the landlady's daughters for six and one-fourth cents a night. Constance Burnett in *Five for Freedom* describes a fairly typical meeting at which she spoke. (She was the outstanding orator of the woman's movement, a real spellbinder.)

"Lucy posted her own meetings, hammering her signs on trees with tacks carried in her reticule and stones from the road. The first poster usually drew an army of young hoodlums who followed her up and down streets, taunting, flinging small missiles and pulling down her notices as soon as her back was turned ...

"For her ability to remain unperturbed through hoots, jeers and murderous assault, she had few equals. It was a common thing for her to face a rain of spitballs as soon as she stepped before an audience. Once a hymn book was flung at her head with such force it almost stunned her. On another night, in midwinter, icy water was trained on her from a hose thrust through a window. Lucy calmly reached for her shawl, wrapped it around her shoulders and went on talking.

"At an open air anti-slavery meeting on Cape Cod, the temper of the crowd seemed so dangerous that all the speakers, one after the other, vanished hastily from the platform. The only two left were Lucy and Abby Kelly's husband, Stephen Foster, a firebrand abolitionist of the same mettle from New Hampshire.

"Before either of them could get to speak, Lucy saw the mob begin its advance. 'They're coming, Stephen. You'd better run for it,' she warned him hurriedly.

"Stephen no more than Lucy ever ran from danger. 'What about you?' he protested, and with that the surging, yelling mass was upon them. Overpowered, Foster disappeared in the melée, and Lucy, suddenly deserted, looked up into the face of a towering ruffian with a club.

"'This gentleman will take care of me,' she suggested sweetly, taking his arm, and too astonished for words, he complied. Reasoning calmly with him as he steered her out of the violence, she won his reluctant admiration and his consent to let her finish her speech. The platform was demolished by then, but he conducted her to a tree stump, rounded up the rest of the 'gentlemen' and preserved order with raised club until she was through talking. Lucy gave the whole gang a piece of her mind, not neglecting to collect twenty dollars from them to replace Stephen Foster's coat, which in their gentlemanly exuberance they had split in two."

The Alliance Ends

During the Civil War there was little activity in the woman's movement. All of the women were devoted to the abolitionist cause and enthusiastically entered into various types of war work. But the end of the war brought the end of the fifty-year alliance between the woman's cause and the Negro movement.

The split took place when Negro men got the vote. The Republican Party and the Negro leaders were both pressing for passage of the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution to enfranchise Negro men. The Republicans were not particularly interested in Negro rights but they wanted votes. The Democrats, who opposed the Negro vote, now gave lip service to woman suffrage in order to annoy the Republicans and hypocritically charge them with hypocrisy.

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Negro leaders argued that this was the “Negro’s hour” and it was a matter of practical politics to push through the vote for Negro men while it had a chance of ratification. Adding woman suffrage to the amendment would inevitably result in its defeat. Negro and abolitionist leaders insisted that they were devoted to the woman’s cause and would continue to fight for universal suffrage after Negro men got the vote.

Many of the women were embittered by what they considered a sell-out. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in an argument with Wendell Phillips, said: “May I ask just one question, based on the apparent opposition in which you place the Negro and woman? Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?”

For fifty years these women had fought for the abolitionist cause and they felt that they had won the right to be included in the suffrage amendment. They would not agree to being left out on grounds of political expediency. They got little support and the 15th amendment was passed, giving the vote to Negro men only.

At the American Equal Rights Association convention in 1869, a formal split occurred; with the majority, the more conservative grouping, supporting the Boston abolitionist wing. Among the majority were Julia Ward Howe and Lucy Stone, who formed the American Woman Suffrage Association. The radical minority, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, organized the National Woman Rights Association. For twenty years these two groups remained separate.

As I have indicated, the principal cause of the split was the division of opinion over supporting Negro suffrage while the question of woman suffrage was postponed. I’ve read some eloquent statements on both sides of this argument. Negro leaders like Frederick Douglass, the first man to speak up for woman suffrage in this country, felt that the Negro cause was jeopardized by the women who selfishly advanced their own demands instead of waiting until it was more “practical” to advocate suffrage for women, too. Women felt this attitude was a great injustice on the part of the abolitionists, showing ingratitude to the women who had fought so long and so courageously for the Negro cause.

In Lucretia Mott’s biography there is a description of the Centennial Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence:

“The newly enfranchised citizens appreciated what had been done for them – by their sex. Women on the sidewalks watched them carry banner after banner emblazoned with the names of Garrison or Phillips or Douglass. They searched in vain for a tribute to Lucretia Mott, or the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or any other woman of the anti-slavery conflict.”

Both the Negro and the woman’s movement were greatly weakened by the split in their ranks and it was another fifty years before women got the vote. In several accounts of this split written by men in sympathy with the Negro side of the argument, the women were held responsible for the delay because extremists in their ranks insisted prematurely on suffrage.

Historically there is not much point in speculating about what would have happened if the Negroes and women had stuck together – how long this would have delayed Negro suffrage (if at all) – and whether or not woman suffrage would have been won at an earlier date. Most Negro men were enfranchised in name only, and even to this day millions have not been able to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Personally I can’t help sympathizing with the women who felt they had been deserted and betrayed. It’s unfortunate that the reform movement was split as a result but I’m not sure this was entirely the fault of a few women “radicals.” There were heterogeneous elements in the Equal Rights Association, many of whom felt that their cause, Negro emancipation and enfranchisement, had been won, and it is probable that this conservative element would have broken away in any case.

The history of the woman's movement from, this point on, divorced from the other reform struggles for which the women originally fought, becomes a bit dull. It is more bourgeois in character, exclusively concerned as it is with the vote.

The Struggle for the Vote

Immediately after the passage of the 15th amendment, Susan B. Anthony decided to test the new law, which was worded in such a way that it might possibly be construed to include women. In Rochester, N.Y., she and twelve other women armed with a copy of the Constitution demanded the right to vote. The election inspectors were so startled by this move that the women were allowed to cast ballots. They were promptly arrested for voting illegally. Susan was fined \$100. She refused to pay the fine, hoping that she would be imprisoned and the case could be carried to the Supreme Court. But the judge was a shrewd politician and did not order her arrest. The fine has not yet been paid.

In the twenty-five years following the Equal Rights Convention of 1848, women achieved many of their original demands. More and more states passed laws giving married women the right to custody of their children, to disposal of their wages and their property.

Curiously enough, the first and most successful advocates of these laws were men whose interests were threatened. In upstate New York wealthy Dutch fathers-in-law became indignant when their daughters' property was squandered by spendthrift husbands. The Married Women's Property Bill was passed largely through their influence. In one of the Southern states a similar bill was introduced by a man who wanted to marry a wealthy widow. Heavily in debt himself, he knew her property could be attached to pay his debts if they got married. When the bill passed she could keep her property and they could both live comfortably on her income.

The Territory of Wyoming was the first to give women the vote in 1869; Utah followed the next year; Colorado and Idaho a little later. Pioneers in the West, accustomed to women who could load a gun, ride a horse and run a homestead as competently as a man, were more easily persuaded than Eastern men that women are not frail or feeble-minded. Twenty years later when Wyoming applied for statehood, the fact that women voted there became a political issue. Wyoming declared: "We will remain out of the union 100 years rather than come in without woman suffrage."

Susan B. Anthony continued to campaign for another thirty years. Her final speech to a Woman's Rights Convention was made in 1904 when she was 86 years old. An incident reported in *Five for Freedom* gives some idea of her remarkable energy:

"During this year Susan delivered 171 lectures, besides hundreds of impromptu talks. She traveled ceaselessly. The journey home through the Rockies in January became rugged when her train ran into mountainous drifts. Tracks had been recently laid, breakdowns were frequent and waits interminable. Passengers had nothing to eat but the cold food they had the foresight to bring. Many nights were spent sitting bolt upright.

"Susan did get back finally, in time for the annual convention of her National Woman Suffrage Association in the capital.

"â€œYou must be tired,' they greeted her in Washington.

"â€œWhy, what should make me tired?' asked Susan. â€œI haven't been doing anything for two weeks.'"

"The restfulness of transcontinental rail trips in the 1870s was not apparent to others."

By 1900 the suffrage movement had become more powerful, but so had the opposition. The liquor interests, afraid that women would vote for prohibition, poured millions of dollars into campaigns to defeat woman suffrage. In state after state women lost out when the suffrage question came to a popular vote. The following circular published in Portland, Ore., is an example of how the liquor crowd worked:

"It will take 50,000 votes to defeat woman suffrage. There are 2,000 retailers in Oregon. That means that every retailer must himself bring in twenty-five votes on election day.

"Every retailer can get twenty-five votes. Besides his employees, he has his grocer, his butcher, his landlord, his laundryman and every person he does business, with. If every man in the business will do this, we will win.

"We enclose twenty-five ballot tickets showing how to vote.

"We also enclose a postal card addressed to this Association. If you will personally take twenty-five friendly voters to the polls on election day and give each one a ticket showing how to vote, please mail the postal card back to us at once. You need not sign the card. Every card has a number and we will know who sent it in.

"Let us all pull together and let us all work. Let us each get twenty-five votes."

This was signed by the Brewers and Wholesale Liquor Dealers Association. In this case the liquor interests were successful and woman suffrage was defeated. In spite of such defeats, the suffrage cause won more and more mass support. Jesse Lynch Williams gives a description of a suffrage parade which he watched from the window of a Fifth Avenue club:

"It was Saturday afternoon and the members had crowded behind the windows to witness the show. They were laughing and exchanging the kind of jokes you would expect. When the head of the procession came opposite them, they burst into laughing and as the procession swept past, laughed long and loud. But the women continued to pour by. The laughter began to weaken, became spasmodic. The parade went on and on. Finally there was only the occasional sound of the clink of ice in the glasses. Hours passed. Then someone broke the silence. "Well boys," he said, "I guess they mean it!"

In Albany, a representative from New York City said that not five women in his district endorsed woman suffrage. He was handed a petition signed by 189 women in his own block.

Turn to Militant Tactics

The split following the Civil War lasted twenty years. In 1890 the two suffrage organizations united as the National American Woman Suffrage Association. But in 1913 the movement split again, this time over the question of militant tactics imported from Great Britain.

The British suffragists started later than the American but once they got going, they really went to town. The militant suffragist movement in England, organized by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters in 1905, battled cops and hounded public officials. They chained themselves to posts or iron grillwork of public buildings and went on talking

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while the police sawed them loose. They climbed on rafters above Parliament and lay there for hours so that they could speak out at any opportune moment. Hundreds were arrested. In jail they continued to battle prison officials, went on hunger strikes, were subjected to forcible feeding.

A book written by one of Mrs. Pankhurst's daughters gives a colorful glimpse of the lively character of their protest. A poster, reproduced in the book, reads: "Votes for Women – Men and women, help the Suffragettes to rush the House of Commons, on Tuesday evening, the 13th of October." (In the subsequent trial there was a good deal of debate as to just what the word "rush" meant.)

The title of Chapter 20, June and July 1909, is followed by a brief summary:

"Attempt to insist on the constitutional right of petition as secured by the Bill of Rights, arrest of Mrs. Pankhurst and the Hon. Mrs. Haverfield, Miss Wallace Dunlop and the hunger strike, 14 hunger strikers in punishment cells. Mr. Gladstone charges Miss Garnett with having bitten a wardress."

Chapter 21, July to September 1909, gives this summary:

"Mr. Lloyd George at Lime House, 12 women sent to prison, another strike, hunger strikers at Exeter Gaol, Mrs. Leigh on the roof at Liverpool, Liverpool hunger strikers," etc. Some of the pictures have captions like "Lady Constance Lytton before she threw the stone at New Castle." "Jessie Kenny as she tried to gain admittance to Mr. Asquith's meeting disguised as telegraph boy."

Two American women, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, took part in the English demonstrations, were imprisoned and went on hunger strikes. They returned to this country determined to introduce some new methods into the now rather conventional woman's movement.

In 1913 Miss Paul organized a suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. Some 8,000 women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue. As the procession approached the White House, it was blocked by hostile crowds. "Women were spit upon, slapped in the face, tripped up, pelted with burning cigar stubs, insulted by jeers and obscene language." Troops had to be brought from Fort Meyer. Afterwards the suffragists forced a Congressional inquiry and the chief of police lost his job.

Alice Paul concentrated on passing a federal amendment which the older suffragists had more or less shelved while they fought local battles from state to state. Miss Paul followed the political tactics of the English movement. This was to hold the party in power responsible for the delay in granting woman suffrage and to campaign against all candidates of that party regardless of whether or not they supported suffrage as individuals. By that time women had the vote in a number of states and Miss Paul systematically campaigned against all candidates of the Democratic Party, in power at the time.

Conservative elements in the suffrage movement did not accept this tactic and Miss Paul and others were expelled in 1913. They formed a new organization which took the name National Woman's Party in 1916. This organization also followed the British policy of putting a lot of pressure on top officials. (It got so that the British Prime Minister and cabinet officials were afraid to speak in public and only appeared at bazaars and social affairs.) To get favorable action from Wilson, who saw numerous delegations but kept stalling, a picket line was thrown around the White House in January, 1917. It continued day after day. On Inauguration Day, in a heavy rain, 1,000 pickets circled the White House four times.

In April, war was declared but the picketing continued. In June patriotic mobs began to tear down their banners and maul the pickets. On June 22 police started arresting the women, who refused to pay their fines. Hundreds were sent to prison, including Lucy Burns and Alice Paul. A history of the National Woman's Party gives some details as to how they were treated:

"Instantly the room was in havoc. The guards from the male prison fell upon us. I saw Miss Lincoln, a slight young girl, thrown to the floor. Mrs. Nolan, a delicate old lady of seventy-three, was mastered by two men ... Whittaker (the Superintendent) in the center of the room directed the whole attack, inciting the guards to every brutality. Two men brought in Dorothy Day, twisting her arms above her head. Suddenly they lifted her and brought her body down twice over the back of an iron bench ... The bed broke Mrs. Nolan's fall, but Mrs. Cosu hit the wall. They had been there a few minutes when Mrs. Lewis, all doubled over like a sack of flour, was thrown in. Her head struck the iron bed and she fell to the floor senseless."

As for Lucy Burns, "They handcuffed her wrists and fastened the handcuffs over her head to the cell door."

Alice Paul's hunger strike lasted twenty-two days. The authorities insisted on an examination of her mental condition. The doctor reported: "This is a spirit like Joan of Arc and it's useless to try to change it. She will die but she will never give up."

In the meantime, speakers of the National Woman's Party were arousing the whole country against the treatment of the prisoners. Suddenly, on March 3, they were released. They were promised action on the suffrage amendment; but the following June, when Congress continued to stall, they started picketing again. Soon they were back in jail and on their hunger strikes.

The Senate finally voted on the amendment. It lost by two votes. The women transferred their pickets to the Senate.

Alice Paul started a "watch fire" in an urn in front of the White House. Every time President Wilson made a speech abroad that referred to freedom even in a passing phrase, a copy of the speech was burned in the "watch fire." Invariably, police arrested the women who burned the speech. Evidently reports reaching Europe of the "watch fire" embarrassed the President, for he cabled two Senators asking them to support the suffrage amendment.

In February, 1919, the Senate voted again and the amendment lost by one vote. In June it was finally passed. It still had to be ratified by the states and this meant a state-to-state struggle lasting another year. The women of the United States voted in the presidential elections of 1920.

I seem to have given most of the credit for final passage of this law to the National Woman's Party. The older suffrage organization continued its work during these seven years. It had a membership of almost two million as compared with a top membership of fifty thousand in the National Woman's Party. But it was this militant minority that gave the final push to the suffrage drive.

The Struggle Ahead

Since I have limited myself to the struggle of American women for legal equality, I have not attempted to describe their economic development in this hundred-year period, their entry into industries, office work, trades and professions, or their role in the trade-union movement. That story would require another article, but its close relationship to the growth of the woman's movement is obvious. As women achieved economic independence, their

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demand for the vote was taken more seriously. Laws change slowly and are generally a reflection of changes that have already occurred on the economic and social level.

Almost thirty-five years have passed since women got the vote. We are in position now to appraise what women achieved when they won the suffrage and what they did not achieve.

Many people are disappointed over the results of woman suffrage – for example, all those who believed that politics would be “purified” by the participation of women. Reactionaries insist that suffrage and the entry of women into industry have actually achieved nothing, that modern women are miserably unhappy, frustrated and hysterical and go insane at a faster rate than ever before. (All this because women are allegedly emotionally passive and have been forced against their true nature into competition with men.) The solution, if we are to believe them, seems to be to hurry back to what’s left of the home, which is something like going all out for the horse as a means of modern transportation. *Modern Woman – the Lost Sex* by a woman psychiatrist, Marya Farnham, is a good example of this reactionary trend.

Even people who approve of modern woman are disappointed at the results of the woman’s rights struggle. Purdy in his biography of Mary Wollstonecroft says:

“All that has been done for women in the last century and a half has not saved them from the tragedies that afflicted Mary Wollstonecroft, Eliza Bishop and Fanny Blood. Inherited poverty, brutal or indifferent parents, disease following overwork and neglect, reluctant or faithless lovers, incompatible husbands, the struggle to wring a living from an apathetic world – has not been ended by female suffrage or any other abstract benefits women have recently achieved.”

I can’t help wondering just how many problems they thought woman suffrage could solve. The vote was, a simple question of democratic rights and not a magic formula that could dissolve all the bitterness and frustrations of women’s daily lives. Men have been voting a hundred years longer than women and they’ve still got problems. That doesn’t mean they should give up voting. If Negroes suddenly achieved complete equality with whites, they would still face unemployment, the threat of war, reaction and all the other difficulties that confront every worker, regardless of race or sex. That doesn’t mean they should give up the fight for full equality.

I don’t doubt that women are unhappy. The legal equality and other democratic rights for which they fought so heroically are meaningless as long as their position in economic and family life remains basically unaltered.

The economic status of women is undergoing change. This is bringing about the first fundamental difference in women’s lives. Women now constitute one-third of the labor force and 25% of all married women are working. This is a revolutionary development that in the long run will mean a great deal more than the vote.

But the majority of women still face discrimination in wages and jobs. The average income of women workers is less than half that of men. They are also doubly exploited, as wage earners and as wives. A survey by General Electric revealed that the average work week of employed wives is 79 hours – 40 on the job and 39 at home.

This explains why women are not too enthusiastic about their so-called “emancipation.” Women workers are obviously not emancipated, any more than male workers, Negro workers, or any other section of the working class.

The structure of the family is also undergoing change, partly as a result of women’s changing economic position. Women are not as restricted in their sex and family relationships as they were when Mary Wollstonecroft first rebelled

against marriage.

I believe it is significant that the first women who fought for equality and woman's rights directed a large part of their protest against bourgeois family relationships. Only at a later date did they center their attention on issues like the vote. It may be that in our re-examination of women's problems we will return to their starting point. In the light of modern psychological and anthropological knowledge, we should study the relations of husbands and wives, parents and children, in a society that is founded upon the institution of private property and where marriage laws and customs reflect this basic concept of private ownership.

Both the economic and sex status of women is changing, but these changes are only the first steps toward a revolution in human relationships which will take place in the future. The fight for freedom is indivisible and no basic change can be achieved in a society where men, as well as women, are not free.

When women are really emancipated from the economic exploitation and emotional restrictions of our society, men too will be freed from the frustrations and unhappiness which the same system inflicts upon them. But this can only be achieved in the cooperative atmosphere of a socialist commonwealth where our personal relationships will not be an expression of the property forms of a competitive society.