



Stillwater women exercising limited right to vote, 1908



ORGANIZING FOR THE VOTE

Leaders of Minnesota's Woman Suffrage Movement



More than two centuries ago the Declaration of Independence extolled the equality of men and assigned to them—but not to women—certain inalienable rights. From that time onward, individual women protested this partial citizenship, but their protests did not bear fruit for nearly a century and a half, when they finally won the right to vote. Now, in 1995, Americans celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

The campaign for woman suffrage began in 1848 when a group of five women, led by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, called the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The most contentious debate centered on a resolution stating that "it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to

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Why Did It Take So Long?

Wyoming, the first suffrage state, granted women the vote when it became a territory in 1869. Between 1890, when it entered the union, and 1896, Colorado, Idaho, and Utah passed amendments to state constitutions authorizing woman suffrage. After a hiatus of 14 more years, Washington broke the suffrage log jam, followed in quick order by California in 1911 and Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona in 1912. One year later,



Women parading for suffrage in Madison, Minnesota, wearing male establishment's coats and hats, about 1916

Illinois became the first state to approve votes for women in presidential elections only, an action that required legislative edict but not a change to the state constitution. By 1917 states began to fall like dominos, adopting suffrage amendments or, as in Minnesota on March 24, 1919, enacting legislation allowing women to vote in presidential elections. The consequent increase in the number of women voters attracted the attention of politicians.[°]

In 1919, more than 40 years after the federal amendment's introduction in final form, Congress finally succumbed. The House approved the measure for the second time (304 to 89), and the Senate did so for the first time (56 to 25), only 2 votes over the necessary two-thirds. Ratification took another 14 months, Minnesota joining in on September 11, 1919.^{**} On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment became the law of the land.

[°] National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Victory, How Women Won It—A Centennial Symposium, 1840–1940* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1940), 161–64; Scott and Scott, *One Half the People*, 161.

^{**} *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, 58, pt. 1: 635.

themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.”¹ Seventy-two years later, women gained voices and votes in governments under whose laws they were obliged to live.

Minnesota women were involved from the very beginning in the long suffrage struggle. These first-generation suffragists sought to win the vote by amending state constitutions. Lacking any organizational structure, women relied primarily on rhetoric to persuade citizens to sign petitions urging state legislators to support suffrage amendments. With the establishment of two national suffrage associations in 1869, followed by the sporadic formation of state and local groups, an organizational base began to emerge. Membership in these independent local societies, only loosely related to state and national groups, waxed and waned. In the 1890s, four western states achieved suffrage, but efforts elsewhere were frustrated by obdurate opposition from a variety of sources.

By the early 1900s, organizational efforts proved to be more effective. For one thing, traveling and communicating had become easier. Women had also acquired education and experience through the study groups and women's clubs that flourished after the Civil War. More worldly and informed, they had learned how to manage organizations. (Lucretia Mott's husband, James, had presided at the landmark Seneca Falls convention because women simply had no experience running meetings.)²

As the movement progressed into the twentieth century, second-generation suffragists across the country stood determined to bring the campaign to a successful conclusion. In Minnesota eight women, beginning with Sarah Burger Stearns and ending with Clara Hampson Ueland, personified the evolution and tactics of the suffrage campaign.

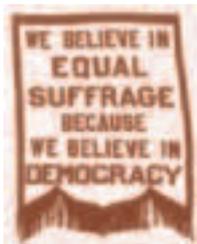
Minnesota's early supporters of suffrage had included some of the state's best-known women.

¹ Anne Firor Scott and Andrew MacKay Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight for Woman Suffrage* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 59.

² Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 75.

In the 1850s Harriet Bishop, St. Paul's first public-school teacher, had spoken of women's responsibilities beyond the confines of the home. In 1858 St. Cloud's crusading journalist, Jane Grey Swisshelm, had observed that "a woman *ought* to meddle in politics," and Dr. Mary J. Colburn had lectured in her village of Champlin on the "Rights and Wrongs of Women."³

By the 1860s the Minnesota legislature was besieged with petitions from disparate "friends-of-equality" groups who pressed for the enfranchisement of women. On one occasion in 1868, when a recommendation "to amend the constitution by striking out the word 'male' as a requisite for voting or holding office" reached the floor of the House of Representatives, it was greeted with laughter and quickly tabled. Such was the mindset of Minnesota legislators. By 1875, however, male voters approved a constitutional amendment enacted by the legislature giving women the right to vote in school elections. Two years later, male voters turned down an amendment allowing women to vote on the "whiskey question." In session after session, Minnesota's legislators defeated efforts to extend voting rights either to tax-paying women or to all women in municipal elections and on temperance issues.⁴



The fundamental reason for denying women the vote was the presumption that politics was not their work. The demand for the vote subverted the widely held notion that a woman's place was in the home; it fell to men to bear the burden of the public domain, a burden that many men (and some women) thought inappropriate for women. People of this persuasion feared that suffrage would replace

male authority with female autonomy, change women's role within the family structure from subordinate to equal, and open the door for women to move from the domestic sphere into the public arena.⁵

In addition to these anxieties about family values, other political concerns prompted male decision makers (and men in general) to oppose suffrage. Despite the reassurances of Southern women to the contrary, lawmakers in the South feared that suffrage would jeopardize white supremacy. In eastern states such as Massachusetts, the male hierarchy of the Catholic church opposed woman suffrage and actively led the opposition. In midwestern states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, where brewers and liquor interests occupied a preeminent economic position, wets feared the temperance inclinations of women.⁶

Women did not form their own suffrage organizations until 1869, when the Fourteenth Amendment enfranchised African American men but excluded women. Disagreements over what was called "the Negro's hour" severed the abolitionist-suffragist alliance. Women who had relied on antislavery groups to support suffrage now had to promote their own cause. More accepting of the "Negro's hour," Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell, formed the American Woman Suffrage Association. Angry about women's exclusion, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton created the more militant National Woman's Suffrage Association. The passage of time and the influence of younger suffragists brought about the merger in 1890 of the two groups into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).⁷

In Minnesota in 1869, Sarah Burger Stearns and Mary Colburn formed independent suffrage societies in Rochester and Champlin. Other local

³ Jane Grey Swisshelm, *Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858–1865*, ed. Arthur J. Larsen (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1934), 34n; Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N. Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1886), 3:650, 651.

⁴ Stanton et al., *History* 3:651; Minnesota, House of Representatives, *Journal* (hereafter *House Journal*), 1868, p. 47, 1875, p. 426; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 24, 1868, p. 2; Minnesota, Senate, *Journal* (hereafter *Senate Journal*), 1875, p. 210; Minnesota Secretary of State, *Legislative Manual*, 1985–86, p. 44. For these defeats, see, for example, *House Journal*, 1877, p. 327, 431–32, 1895, p. 161, 203, 221, 1897, p. 378, 560; *Senate Journal*, 1877, p. 352, 439, 1895, p. 508, 749; *Legislative Manual*, 1985–86, p. 44.

⁵ Theodora P. Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs, 1860–1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 21; Ellen C. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 46–47; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 75–76.

⁶ Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 12–26, 141, 167; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 271, 296–98.

⁷ Quote from abolitionist Wendell Phillips in DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 59; Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 56–57.

organizations also sprang up, mostly in the south-eastern area of the state. Not until 1881 did 14 women—including Harriet Bishop, Sarah Stearns, and Julia B. Nelson—meet in Hastings to establish the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA). Membership grew to 124 in the first year and doubled in the second, probably representing individuals who lived in communities without local societies. The MWSA's strategy was to increase its membership and influence by sustaining existing societies and establishing new auxiliaries. These auxiliaries deferred to the MWSA for leadership at the legislature and responded as requested with letters, petitions, and attendance at gatherings.⁸

Elected as first president of the MWSA was Sarah Burger Stearns. Born in New York City in 1836, she grew up in Ann Arbor and Cleveland, where she attended a suffrage convention at the age of 14. Following her graduation from a state normal school in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and her marriage to Ozara P. Stearns, she taught in a young ladies' seminary. During the Civil War she enlisted as an active worker in the North's Sanitary Commission while her husband joined the Union army. Commission women performed a variety of tasks, raising \$30 million for food, uniforms, and medical supplies and competing with men for army contracts to manufacture military clothing. From these experiences, as historian Theodora Penny Martin observed, "Thousands of American women found sanction for work outside the home, discovered for the first time the satisfaction of formally organized cooperative achievement with others of their sex, developed the self-confidence that arises from success in new endeavors, and were imbued with a sense of self-respect for the part they had played in a cause of larger purpose."⁹

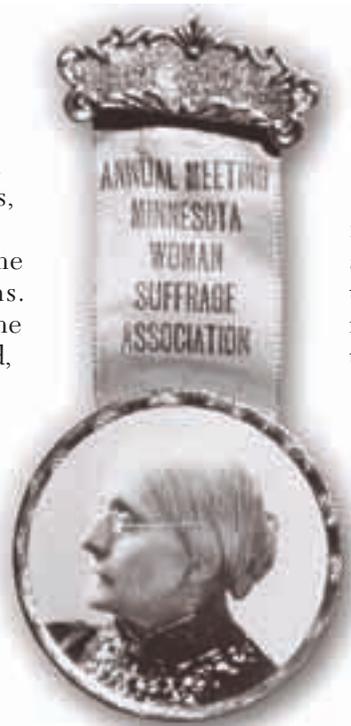
In 1866, the Stearnses moved from Michigan to Rochester, Minnesota, and on to Duluth in

1872. There Sarah organized her second suffrage society, the Duluth Woman Suffrage Circle, and served as its president from 1881 to 1893. Active in the Unitarian church, she also supported temperance and served as a school-board member for three years. The energetic Stearns also founded, as she described it, "a home for women needing a place of rest and training for self-help and self-protection," perhaps the state's first battered women's shelter.¹⁰

As the first president of the MWSA, Stearns established a pattern of leadership that relied primarily on speeches and petitions to shape public opinion. Her political acumen was evident in her role in the adoption of the school suffrage amendment submitted to voters in 1875. "No effort was made," as Stearns remarked, to "agitate the question, lest more should be effected in rousing the opposition . . . between the passage of the bill and the election in November." Hoping to gain "the votes of the intelligent men of the state," she requested support from the editor of the state's leading newspaper, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, just before the election. He obliged, responding that he "had quite forgotten such an amendment had been proposed." Stearns and company had earlier persuaded the political parties to print their ballots with the wording,

"For the amendment of Article VII relating to electors—Yes." Historian William Watts Folwell later wrote, "Opposers were thus obliged to unbutton their coats, get out their glasses, fumble for a pencil, and cross out 'yes' and write 'no.'" The amendment passed by a vote of 24,340 to 19,468.¹¹

Characterized in one newspaper article as "a power in the young community [Duluth] as well as in the state of Minnesota," Stearns was also said to have "possessed the tenacity of purpose, the dogged persistence of the true reformer; no dis-



Susan B. Anthony's portrait on delegate's badge worn by Clara Ueland, 1897

⁸ Stanton et al., *History* 3:651, 657.

⁹ Stanton et al., *History* 3:657n; Sarah Burger Stearns entry, Minnesota Biography files, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul; Martin, *Sound of Our Own Voices*, 16.

¹⁰ Stanton et al., *History* 3:650.

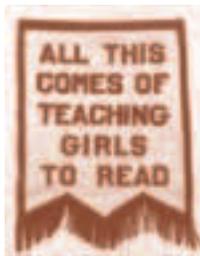
¹¹ Stanton et al., *History* 3:652–53; William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, rev. ed. (St. Paul: MHS, 1969), 4:334; *Legislative Manual*, 1985–86, p. 44.

couragements, rebuffs nor ingratitude seemed to downhearten her or swerve her from what she considered right." At a time when suffragists were dismissed, ridiculed, and mocked, they had to be made of stern stuff. Stearns passed that test (or perhaps lived up to her name). She organized local and state societies, orchestrated the first legislative success for suffrage, and bombarded the state legislature with petitions (in 1881 one urging woman suffrage on temperance issues contained 31,228 names representing every county in the state). She possessed a charismatic personality, invaluable in the early days of the suffrage campaign for attracting support. Stearns remained active until 1894 when her husband's illness took them to California. She chaired the Los Angeles Suffrage League in 1900 and worked until her death in 1904 on behalf of the cause.¹²

Dr. Martha Ripley, a resident of Minneapolis, succeeded Stearns and served as president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association from 1883 to 1889.¹³ Trained in medicine in Boston, she was close to Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell and was probably instrumental in bringing the prestigious convention of the American Woman Suffrage Association to the city of Minneapolis in 1885.



Sarah Burger Stearns,
Duluth suffragist



In 1890, Julia Bullard Nelson of Red Wing, who had served as MWSA vice-president with Stearns, became president, bringing to the state organization public-speaking skills and links to the growing universe of women activists. Born in High Ridge, Connecticut, in 1842, Julia Bullard and her family arrived in Minnesota in 1857. She attended Hamline University (then in Red Wing) and taught in

Connecticut and Minnesota for six years. In 1866 Julia B. (as she was called) married Ole Nelson, a Hamline classmate. Within two years, their young son died, and then Ole died, possibly from malaria contracted during the Civil War. Nelson found herself alone but not daunted.¹⁴

Nine months later, she set forth on a new adventure: teaching in freedmen's schools in Texas. An interval in Minnesota, prompted by her mother's ill health, found Nelson organizing and lecturing on behalf of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which Frances Willard had transformed from a single-minded anti-saloon crusade to a women's all-purpose organization with suffrage high among its priorities. After an interval teaching African American students, this time in Tennessee, Julia B. returned again to Minnesota in 1881 and attended the MWSA organizational meeting in Hastings. The lure of teaching drew her once more to Tennessee, but the issues of temperance and suffrage stayed foremost in her mind. She spent a spring vacation at a national suffrage convention in Washington, D. C., and was in the delegation that addressed the House Judiciary Committee on February 29, 1886. After speaking about salary inequities between male and female teachers, Nelson concluded, "If it [the law] puts woman down as an inferior, she will surely be regarded as such. . . . If I am capable of preparing citizens, I am capable of possessing the rights of a citizen myself. I ask you to remove the barriers which restrain women from equal opportunities and privileges with men."¹⁵

In 1888 Julia B. returned to Minnesota to stay. In the period of her presidency of the state association (1890–96), she also served as superintendent of franchise for the WCTU. In linking the two organizations, she enhanced their work for suffrage. Nelson made an essential contribution in

¹² Mrs. W. S. Woodbridge, "Tells Lifework of Duluth's Pioneer Clubwoman and Suffragist," unidentified clipping, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth; *House Journal*, 1881, p.181; *Senate Journal*, 1881, p. 58, 229; *Duluth News Tribune*, Jan. 26, 1904, p. 4.

¹³ Stanton et al., *History* 3:657; Ethel Edgerton Hurd, *Woman Suffrage in Minnesota: A Record of Activities in Its Behalf since 1847* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Woman Suffrage Assn., 1916), p. 17, says 1888 but Nelson in Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902), 4:772, says 1889.

¹⁴ Julia Wiech Lief, "A Woman of Purpose: Julia B. Nelson," *Minnesota History* 47 (Winter 1981): 303–04.

¹⁵ Lief, "Woman of Purpose," 304–07; Stanton et al., *History* 4:79.

securing, as she reported, “thousands of signatures to the petitions for the franchise” that were sent to every legislative session, where she could be found pleading, prodding, and peddling propaganda. She took advantage of the fact that the WCTU, as she believed, was “better organized” than the MWSA and provided an operational base with a much broader member network and the means to publicize the cause.¹⁶

Dependable, energetic, and articulate, Julia B. had worked for the National American Woman Suffrage Association over the years as a paid lecturer. In 1913 she attended her last national suffrage convention and was a member of the delegation that called on President Woodrow Wilson seeking his support for votes for women. She died a year later but not before one last suffrage tour in North Dakota. In 1917 when a Woman Citizen’s Building was erected on the Minnesota state fairgrounds as a permanent suffrage headquarters, Jullia B.’s legacy of \$100 to the MWSA was used to build a memorial fireplace in her honor. It was a fitting tribute to the many suffrage fires lit by Nelson’s leadership for more than 20 years.¹⁷



Julia Bullard Nelson, suffragist and temperance activist, about 1903

the University of Minnesota and practiced medicine in partnership with her daughter, Annah. Hurd was a mainstay of the Political Equality Club of Minneapolis, founded in or after 1868 and the largest and most enduring of local suffrage societies. She twice served as president, the second time for its final six years. In one breathtaking sentence she provided a vivid description of their efforts:

We have written letters, letters of protest, letters of gratitude, pleading letters, licked postage stamps, traveled miles and miles with petitions, given out thousands and thousands of sheets of literature, joined in public parades, in fact we have done all the drudgery consequent upon the forwarding of a great reform; we have done all this year after year,

month after month, day in and day out with no thought of self or fame, or recompense; we have given voluntarily and freely of our incomes, our time, our energy, asking no return save one, the granting of the privilege for which we struggled.

Hurd helped to broaden the suffrage base in Minnesota by founding the Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association in 1907 and the Workers’ Equal Suffrage League in 1909. She also served as a director and officer of the MWSA for more than 20 years (1898–1919).¹⁸

Even though Hurd’s involvement extended well into the twentieth century, she possessed the characteristics of the earlier generation of suffragists, many of whom were professional women. Because they dared to be physicians, ministers, or attorneys, they were scorned and often described as sexless spinsters—even if they were not. If they were at times somber as they went about their business, it was with good reason. Younger suf-



Like Stearns and Nelson, Ethel Edgerton Hurd, born in 1845, had been a schoolteacher after her graduation from Knox College in Illinois. Marriage to a railroad man took her to Kansas, where she became active in the suffrage movement, and then to Minnesota in the 1880s. Following her husband’s death, she earned a medical degree in 1897 from

¹⁶ Stanton et al., *History* 4:773.

¹⁷ Hurd, *Woman Suffrage in Minnesota*, 29; Ueland to [?], Aug. 29, 1917, Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA) Records, microfilm edition, R[oll]2, F[rame]728, MHS; woman suffrage material, 1915–19, Luth and Nanny M. Jaeger Papers, MHS; Lief, “Woman of Purpose,” 314; Barbara Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors: Clara Ueland and the Minnesota Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (St. Paul: MHS Press, 1995), 157–58.

¹⁸ Hurd, *Woman Suffrage in Minnesota*, 10, credits Stearns with founding the Woman Suffrage Club of Minneapolis (later renamed the Political Equality Club) between 1868 and 1883. Early records of the organization were lost when a fire burned the residence of the secretary; Ethel Edgerton Hurd, “A Brief History of the Minneapolis Political Equality Club,” Apr. 15, 1921, p. 1, 23, Political Equality Club of Minneapolis Papers, MHS.

fragists regarded Hurd as one of the old “war horses” because she remained committed to the conservative tactics of the earlier generation, but she applauded and accepted the new leadership styles of women such as Clara Ueland, seeing in that leadership the prospects for victory. The more radical confrontational approach of other Minnesotans such as Emily Haskell Bright and Bertha Berglin Moller, however, were not acceptable to Hurd, a suffragist of the old school.¹⁹

Exemplifying the tactics and experiencing the frustrations of the movement’s early years, Stearns, Nelson, and Hurd also bore the brunt of public outrage, rejection, and ridicule that was especially intense in the early suffrage period. Of the three, Hurd was the only one who lived to see the day of victory on August 26, 1920.

In 1914, just 45 years after the schism that emerged in the aftermath of the Fourteenth Amendment, a second division of the suffrage house took place. A group of young suffragists, chafing at the slow pace of progress, took charge

of NAWSA’s somnolent congressional committee and brought it to life with daring initiatives such as parades, street speaking, and other noisy and notable activities. Uneasy with each other’s company, the two NAWSA factions split, the younger women departing to form the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage. In 1916 the same group of young leaders formed the Woman’s Party to represent female voters in the 12 enfranchised states. A year later the party and the union came together as the National Woman’s Party (NWP).²⁰

The NWP broke with suffrage tradition by engaging in partisan politics. It campaigned against all Democratic candidates in suffrage states and picketed the White House and the Capitol to protest the continuing refusal by the president and the Congress to recognize women’s right to vote. Such unconventional behavior seemed counterproductive to NAWSA suffrage leaders, who were trying to win the approval and votes of decision makers. When the picketers were forcibly fed following arrests, imprisonment, and hunger strikes, public sympathies swung their

¹⁹ Ethel Hurd to Anna Howard Shaw, Nov. 2, 1909, MWSA Records, R1 F75; Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 197–99.

²⁰ Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of the Woman’s Party* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1921), 27; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 132, 138.

Ethel Edgerton Hurd (front row, black dress), with Clara Ueland (front row, white dress), at a gathering of the Political Equality Club of Minneapolis, about 1915



way. Those who suffered these indignities received NWP prison pins fashioned as badges of honor for having been “jailed for freedom.”²¹

The division between the NAWSA and the NWP represented a classic case of disagreement over the most effective means to accomplish a common purpose. In this case, however, division proved to be not weakness but strength. The NAWSA and its state affiliates provided political organization and pressure, and their contributions on the home front during World War I (working for the Red Cross, promoting food conservation, and the like) helped to win the support of President Wilson and sway public opinion to their side. Although there were moments when relations between the two organizations were strained over tactics and claims for primacy, both parties realized, as Clara Ueland once wrote, “The main thing, and really the only thing, is that the work is nearly finished.”²²

Some Minnesota women, attracted by the newer organization’s verve and vitality, left the MWSA and joined forces with the Congressional Union or National Woman’s Party. Both Emily Bright and Bertha Moller, coming from very different backgrounds, followed this course. (Ueland, too, had been an early supporter of the Congressional Union, testifying before the U.S. House Judiciary Committee on its behalf in December 1915 and giving it credit for animating the MWSA. The adverse reactions of influential Minnesotans to the picketing, however, prompted Ueland to temper her enthusiasm.) The fact that leaders like Bright and Moller served both organizations valiantly and enthusiastically may explain why the division was civil and led to success.

Emily Haskell Bright’s interest in suffrage had been piqued as a young girl in Evanston, Illinois, when her mother took her to hear Susan B. Anthony, an occasion she described as having a great influence on her life. Emily married Alfred Bright in Milwaukee in 1887. He spent most of his career in Minneapolis as head of the Soo Line’s legal department and always supported suffrage even though Ella Pennington, the wife of his boss, was head of the Minneapolis Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.²³

With Bright’s children nearly grown by 1911, she began her active life in the suffrage movement. Her dynamic leadership as president of the Political Equality Club of Minneapolis (serving between Ethel Hurd’s two terms) attracted an influx of new members, thereby broadening the base of suffrage supporters. She became president of the MWSA in 1913, but the death of one of her children in the fall of 1914 caused her to decline another term. She later returned to the MWSA board of directors and also joined the National Woman’s Party. Bright served as a member of the party’s national advisory committee, and while never imprisoned, she proudly wore a prison pin to protest Wilson’s continuing recalcitrance on the issue of suffrage.

A newspaper article praised her “tact, executive ability and sterling worth” that “distinguished her as one of the few real leaders of the suffrage movement in this country.”²⁴

Bertha Berglin Moller, born in Sweden in 1888 and reared in Rush City, attended the Duluth Normal School and, like many suf-



*Emily Haskell Bright,
member of the advisory
committee of the National
Woman’s Party*



*Bertha Berglin Moller,
who was jailed for
demonstrating at the
White House*

²¹ The phrase is from Doris Stevens’s book, *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote*, ed. Carol O’Hare (Troutdale, Ore: New Sage Press, 1995).

²² Clara Ueland to Jessie E. Scott, Aug. 25, 1919, MWSA Records R7, F173.

²³ Brenda Ueland, “Clara Ueland of Minnesota” (privately published, 1967), 261, copy in MHS collections. Bright’s birth and death dates are unknown, although she was probably born in the 1860s; MWSA Records R17, F261.

²⁴ Minutes, Oct. 2, 19, 1914, Political Equality Club of Minneapolis Papers; Clara Ueland to Dear Secretary, R1, F211, and undated clipping, MWSA Records R17, F723.

frage women, began her career as a teacher. She came by her suffrage interest naturally, given her Swedish heritage and its enlightened attitude about women. Two of her uncles were Swedish parliamentarians and authors of legislation for women's rights. Berglin married Charles Frederick Moller in 1910 and in 1916 began organizing throughout Minnesota for the MWSA. Impressed by Moller's skills, president Clara Ueland appointed her to the board of directors and assigned her the responsibility of making sure that the Minnesota congressional delegation voted for the federal amendment. (In 1919, with Moller gone to the NWP, Ueland took on those congressional duties, and the delegation gave the amendment its unanimous support.)²⁵

Impatient with what appeared to her to be plodding progress in the national organization (and, by implication, in Minnesota), Moller after 1917 invested her energies in the activities of the National Woman's Party. She served as secretary (1918–19) of the Minnesota branch, but her most notable efforts stemmed from her demonstrations at the White House and the Capitol. She was arrested 11 times and served two short jail sentences in Washington, D. C., leading a hunger strike on one of those occasions. Moller is credited with persuading James M. Cox, the Democratic Party's presidential nominee in 1920, to help with the ratification drive for the Nineteenth Amendment in Tennessee. That same year, she led suffrage delegations from every state to lobby the Republican nominee, Warren G. Harding.²⁶

St. Paul suffrage organizations never flourished to the same degree as they did in Minneapolis until Emily Gilman Noyes stepped into a leadership role. Born in New York in 1854, she moved to Minnesota when she married Charles

Phelps Noyes. Emily came from a family steeped in idealism. Her father had risked his life during riots in Alton, Illinois, to shelter a radical abolitionist publisher.²⁷

Thanks to the prosperity of Noyes Bros. and Cutler, a wholesale drug business, Emily had time for community work. In 1912 she helped organize the Woman's Welfare League, which quickly became St. Paul's most influential force for suffrage. This organization's stated purposes were to protect the interests of women, to enlarge their opportunities in business and the professions, to examine the impact of industrial and social conditions on women and the family, and "as a necessary means to these ends to strive to procure for women the rights of full citizenship." National suffrage leaders encouraged state leaders to increase their political leverage by organizing suffrage units in congressional districts, counties, and legislative districts, and Noyes, who served as the league's first president, proved to be eminently successful. As one contemporary said, she was "always in the advance guard of thought and action." A vice-president of the MWSA as well, she brought the suffrage movement in St. Paul into the twentieth century by dint of her organizing skills and political acuity. Noyes was recognized for her achievements by being



*Emily Gilman Noyes,
organizer of St. Paul's
Woman's Welfare League,
an influential force
for suffrage*

named honorary president of the Ramsey County Suffrage Association and its successor, the Ramsey County League of Women Voters. In 1930, shortly before her death, she was one of six Minnesota women named to the honor roll of the National League of Women Voters at its convention in Louisville, Kentucky.²⁸

Another important St. Paul activist was Nellie Griswold, an African American born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1874. She and her family moved to St. Paul in 1883, and eight years later she graduat-

²⁵ Bertha Moller entry, Minnesota Biography files; Clara Ueland to Bertha Moller, Oct. 4, 1916, MWSA Records, R2, F243.

²⁶ Mary Dillon Foster, comp., *Who's Who among Minnesota Women: A History of Woman's Work in Minnesota from Pioneer Days to Date* (privately published, 1924), 219.

²⁷ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Sept. 10, 1930, p. 1; Rhoda Gilman to author, Apr. 1994.

²⁸ Foster, *Who's Who*, 358; *Minnesota Woman Voter*, Jan. 1930, p. 3.

ed from Central High School. In 1893, she married William Trevanne Francis, whom she had met when they both worked at the Great Northern Railroad. Francis served as president of the Baptist Missionary Circle, corresponding secretary of the Tri-State Women's Baptist Convention, and president of the Pilgrim Baptist Church Pipe Organ Association.²⁹

In 1914 Francis founded and assumed the presidency of the Everywoman Suffrage Club, an organization whose post-suffrage goals included promoting "political and economic equality and social justice to the Negro, co-operation between white and colored women and men, training of local colored women leaders and fostering the recognition of Negroes who have achieved success." She devoted her energies to other causes as well, joining the Woman's Welfare League, the Urban League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (her husband had been instrumental in organizing the local branches) and serving as president of the Minnesota State Federation of Colored Women. These associations and activities suggest the accuracy of Clara Ueland's observation that Francis's "ruling motive" was to "help her race." When young African American women could not gain access to St. Paul business schools, Francis, who had been a stenographer, held evening shorthand classes in her home. In 1921, after a lynching in Duluth, she wrote and helped persuade the Minnesota legislature to pass the first antilynching law in the United States.³⁰

Francis brought color, conviction, and courage to the suffrage movement in Minnesota. She organized African American women in support of suffrage, recognizing that all women should join

in securing the right to vote. Clara Ueland described Nellie Francis as a "star" whose "spirit is a flame" as she spoke and organized in the interests of her race and her sex. Francis left Minnesota in 1927 to accompany her husband to his new post as U.S. minister to Liberia. After his death two years later, she returned to family and friends in Nashville, where she died in 1969.³¹



Nellie Griswold Francis, African American activist and founder of St. Paul's Everywoman Suffrage Club

It was Clara Ueland who directed the final act of the suffrage movement in Minnesota. Like women leaders in other states who had acquired education and experience in making things happen, she was an articulate spokeswoman whose style was more managerial than charismatic.

The nine-year-old Clara Hampson, in the company of her widowed mother and older brother, moved to Minnesota from Ohio in 1869. Despite her poverty, she did very well in school and learned—probably in reaction to her dependent mother—to be self-reliant and creative. Like many suffragists, she embarked on a teaching career.

While still in high school she had met Andreas Ueland, a Norwegian immigrant, at a young-people's literary society. They were married 10 years later in 1885. Life proceeded conventionally. Clara had children, and Andreas, a probate judge at the time of their marriage, opened his own law office in Minneapolis and soon prospered.³²

Clara first ventured outside the home by joining the Peripatetics in 1893. This club—which still exists—was one of the numerous study groups offering middle-class women a means to inform themselves on a wide range of topics, usually relating to literature, the arts, and history. Moving from study to action, Ueland inspired the found-

²⁹ Judy Yaeger Jones, "Nellie F. Griswold Francis," in *Women of Minnesota: Biographies and Sources* (St. Paul: Women's History Month, 1991), 12.

³⁰ Nellie Griswold Francis entry, Minnesota Biography files; B. Ueland, "Clara Ueland," 399; Arthur B. McWatt, "St. Paul's Resourceful African American Community," *Ramsey County History* 26 (Spring 1991): 5; Earl Spangler, *The Negro in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison and Co., 1961), 100–03. Like most African Americans of the period, both Nellie and W. T. Francis were active in Republican Party affairs; Foster, *Who's Who*, 101.

³¹ B. Ueland, "Clara Ueland," 399; Jones, "Nellie F. Griswold Francis," 15. In 1920, only 8,809 African Americans resided in Minnesota, 0.4 percent of the total population of 2,387,125; United States, *Census, 1920, Population* 3:19.

³² Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 35–44.



Clara Ueland, gifted organizer and president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association

ing of the Minneapolis Kindergarten Association, which promoted the formation of kindergartens and a training program for teachers. With the integration of kindergartens into the Minneapolis public school system in 1905, the organization disbanded, and the training school was handed off to its proprietor, who established and directed for 48 years the famous Miss Wood's School.³³

³³ Martin, *Sound of Our Own Voices*, 81; Marguerite N. Bell, *With Banners: A Biography of Stella Louise Wood* (St. Paul: Macalester College Press, 1954), 47–48.

³⁴ B. Ueland, "Clara Ueland," 243–44; Minutes, 33rd annual convention, Oct. 16–17, 1914, MWSA Records, R15, F124, 135; *Minneapolis Journal*, May 3, 1914, pt. 1, p. 1, 3 14.

³⁵ Executive board minutes, May 5, 1915, MWSA Records R14, F603; *Senate and House Journal*, Extra Session, 1919, p. 1, 13.

In 1907 Ueland helped organize the Woman's Club of Minneapolis. Five years later she withdrew from the board because she had other things on her mind—suffrage for one. In 1913 Ueland organized the Equal Suffrage Association of Minneapolis to energize and politicize the local movement. In the spring of 1914, she orchestrated a parade of nearly 2,000 suffrage supporters in Minneapolis—an event that had a dramatic impact on changing attitudes and perceptions about women who wanted the right to vote. Later that same year, Ueland was elected president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association.³⁴

What a difference a leader can make! Following a succession of four presidents in four years and the organizational disarray suggested by that turnover, Ueland came to office with a considered set of priorities: to hire and support an efficient organizer; to magnify the association's clout by organizing in political districts; and to assign specific responsibilities to each board member. She was determined to improve the operations of the MWSA and to transform the suffrage organizations throughout the state into highly sophisticated mechanisms of persuasion, pressure, and action. In the five years of her presidency, she achieved her original objectives and more. By 1919, some 30,000 Minnesota women had taken a stand for suffrage by joining various local societies. Consequently it was no surprise that the state legislature finally enacted presidential suffrage in 1919, and, a year later, in a special session, Minnesota became the fifteenth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment.³⁵

Some 2,000 supporters paraded for woman suffrage in Minneapolis on May 3, 1914.



Ueland built her leadership with all kinds of support systems, appointing efficient staff in the office and in the field, attracting knowledgeable and energetic volunteers as directors, securing an adequate financial base, increasing political know-how, recruiting experienced women for press work and public relations, and presiding over the growing sense of comradeship among suffragists who believed that their goal was in sight. She was highly regarded not just by suffrage colleagues but by legislators, journalists, businessmen and women, and political leaders, all of whom recognized that her many talents, coupled with a generous and caring spirit, made her one of the most remarkable women of Minnesota.³⁶

Sarah Burger Stearns, Julia B. Nelson, Ethel Hurd, Emily Bright, Bertha Moller, Emily Noyes, Nellie Francis, and Clara Ueland: These extraordinary women, each with her own style and in her own milieu, guided the Minnesota suffrage campaign or influenced it in some significant way. The struggle for suffrage in Minnesota began as a stumbling overture lacking any form of sustained support except great enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work on the part of a few good women. It evolved to a more diverse organizational structure led by women with highly refined managerial and political skills. Clara Ueland's presidency was a fitting finale to a cause whose time was long overdue.

³⁶ For more on Ueland, see Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*. Ueland and Dr. Martha Ripley are the only two women recognized for their achievements with plaques in the state capitol or on its grounds.

The photos on p. 298 and 300 are from Who's Who among Minnesota Women: A History of Woman's Work in Minnesota from Pioneer Days to Date (privately published, 1924); on p. 301 (bottom), from the Minneapolis Journal, May 3, 1914, p. 14. The banners are from the Equal Suffrage Association of Minneapolis; jonquils were a pro-suffrage symbol. All items are in the MHS collections.

A pre-election gathering of the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, 1924





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