

Equal Rights for Washington Women

Washington State Historical Society
Women's History Consortium

EQUAL RIGHTS *for* WASHINGTON WOMEN

In 2010, the State of Washington celebrates the 100th anniversary of when most Washington women permanently achieved the right to vote or “suffrage” in 1910. Washington women had voted from 1883 to 1888, but their voting rights were revoked by the Washington Territorial Supreme Court. Washington’s victory in 1910 was a pivotal event in the campaign which culminated in the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 enacting women’s suffrage nationally. With their long-standing civic voice, Washington women have made their mark in Washington history while continuing the struggle for equal rights.

THE EARLY WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT



Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) was a primary organizer of the first Women’s Rights Convention and an author of the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848. Credit: Library of Congress



Catherine Beecher (later Nichols) (1800-1865) was one of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848. She came to Seattle in 1855 with her husband, Reverend David Beecher. They stayed in the Northwest for several years before returning east. She later came back to Seattle and was on the resignation note when women had the right to vote in Washington Territory in the 1870s. Credit: Museum of History & Industry, Inc.



Report of the First Women's Rights Convention, 1848
Credit: Museum of History & Industry, Inc.

In July 1848, seventy-two years after the American colonies declared their independence from England, a handful of American women called a meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, to declare independence from the “absolute tyranny” of men. Some 300 participants in the first Women’s Rights Convention — both women and men — debated the merits of a document they called a Declaration of Sentiments. Consciously modeled after the Declaration of Independence, the document declared that “all men and women are created equal.”

Just six years after the Seneca Falls Convention, in 1854, Seattle pioneer and legislator Arthur A. Denny proposed a bill in the first Washington Territorial Legislature “to allow all white females over the age of 18 years to vote.” Although it failed, Denny’s bill was the first of many attempts to enable women to vote in Washington. Washington women gained additional rights during the early years of the territory. By an 1869 law, women in Washington could share property equally with their husbands. By the early 1870s, they could vote in school district elections.



Arthur Denny (1822-1897)
Credit: Museum of History & Industry, Inc.

WOMEN ORGANIZE FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE

In an 1870 territorial election, Thurston County women Mary Olney Brown and her sister, Charlotte Emily Olney French, were among a handful of women who attempted to vote in Grand Mound, Littlerock, and Olympia.

They used the rationale that post-Civil War federal constitutional amendments had granted them voting rights as citizens. As the women attempted to cast ballots, an excited courier on horseback raced from the scene, yelling, "They're voting! They're voting!" The Olympia women voters were rejected but fifteen other women's votes were tallied in the election. However, their ballots did not permanently change women's voting rights in Washington.



Charlotte Emily Olney French (1829-1917)
(Courtesy of the Hagler Family)

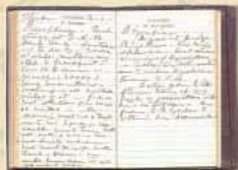


Mary Olney Brown (1821-1888)
(Washington State Historical Society)



Oregonian Abigail Scott Duniway (1824-1925), suffragist, newspaper publisher and writer, was instrumental in gaining voting rights for women in the Northwest. Duniway traveled to Washington in 1871 with Susan B. Anthony and actively campaigned for the women's vote. She led the 1878 constitutional convention in White Plains and was a pivotal advocate in Washington's 1882 women's suffrage victory. Although sometimes controversial in her approach to the women's rights campaign and at odds with national organizers, she was an pioneering voice. (The Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon; "Their Common Citizens," 1910)

In 1871, noted eastern suffragist Susan B. Anthony, accompanied by Oregonian Abigail Scott Duniway, embarked on a two-month tour in Washington Territory to help mobilize local suffragists. Anthony spoke before the legislature in Olympia and succeeded in getting a suffrage bill introduced, although it failed to pass. However, she joined with local men and women to establish the first Washington Territorial Woman's Suffrage Association devoted to achieving women's voting rights.

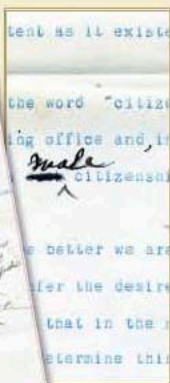


Susan B. Anthony's Diary October 17, 1871 on her trip to Puget Sound
(Library of Congress)



Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906),
pictured in 1871.
(Washington State Historical Society)

VICTORIES & DEFEATS



Women won the right to vote in 1883 when the Territorial legislature enacted women's suffrage, but victory was fleeting.

Seeing women as moral reformers, the saloon lobby feared a vote for women was a vote for prohibition of the sale of alcohol. In the span of five tumultuous years, the suffrage law was upheld, overturned, reinstated and overturned again. Women lost the vote, but not their voice, and for the next 20 years, fought to regain their rights.

Hoover v Todd, 2 Wash. Terr. 559 (1888) Territorial Supreme Court Decision. Justice hand-wrote the word "male" before crossing it in their decision, overturning the 1883 legislative action empowering women to vote in Washington Territory. (Photograph by author)

When Washington Territory approached statehood, women hoped to persuade delegates to include the right to vote in the new constitution.

Women flooded the constitutional convention with petitions when it convened on July 4, 1889. Questions abounded: Should the issue be decided by the legislature or the people? Should women be permitted to vote in municipal elections? School elections? Only the right for women to vote in school elections was included in the constitution. The constitution was ratified by a territory-wide vote on October 1, 1889 and Washington was admitted as a state on November 11, 1889. However the separate general women's suffrage proposal lost by 19,000 votes.



Clara Bewick Colby (1846-1918) campaigned in Washington with local suffragists in 1870. She was the editor of *The Women's Tribune*. (Photo: Mary Colby)



Edward Feltz (1821-1912), legislator and delegate to the 1889 Constitutional Convention, was a longtime opponent of women's right to vote. (Photo: Museum of History & Art)



State Constitutional Convention Resolutions petitioned the Convention to include women's right to vote in the new Washington State Constitution. (Photograph by author)

WASHINGTON WOMEN WIN THE VOTE



Three Women from a "Three Brigade" march present their first for Women suffrage. (Washington Historical Society)

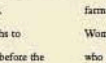
All right Votes for Women pin and Votes for Women ribbon. (Washington Historical Society)

Suffragists redoubled efforts in 1898 campaigning for a state constitutional amendment enabling women to vote.

The results were closer than in 1889, but the amendment still lost by 9,882 votes. Suffragists faced widespread opposition, as the anti-vote cut across ethnic, economic and political lines.

In February 1909, Washington's legislature again put a constitutional amendment for women to vote before male voters. Suffrage leaders had twenty months to educate voters and build support before the November 1910 vote.

Under the banner "It's a matter of justice," they assembled a statewide grassroots organization and engaged in sophisticated media tactics.



Coalition building was critical and suffragists enlisted labor groups, men's organizations, trade associations, churches and local farmers' organizations such as the Grange. Women worked to persuade the only people who could vote – their husbands, fathers and brothers.

On November 8, 1910, the amendment passed overwhelmingly – 52,299 voted in favor of ratification versus 29,676 against – a convincing, nearly two-to-one margin.

Every country approved the amendment. Not all women gained the vote. Most Native American women, immigrant Asian women, and those who could not read and speak English were all still barred from the ballot box until citizenship and other restrictions were lifted later in the 20th century.

Washington became the fifth state – following Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho – to permanently enact women's suffrage. At a post-election banquet, May Arkwright Hutton gave partial credit to "the broad-minded ideas of the men of Washington, who stand for a square deal in all things."



Joh. Emma South DeVine (1868-1927) influential organizer of the successful 1910 campaign for women's suffrage in Washington (Washington Historical Society)

Joh. May Arkwright Hutton (1865-1925) an important 1910 campaign leader, credited her husband's in Spokane. (Historical Museum of Spokane, 1994)



"Little Sun Women Washington" (The Pacific News, 24 Jan. 11, 2 March 1910, National Archives)

THE BATTLE CONTINUES FOR EQUAL RIGHTS



ERA Yes logo, Stop ERA logo. (Washington Women's)

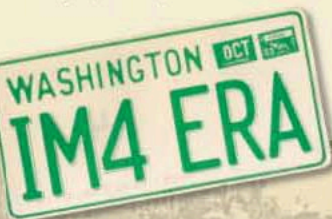
Through the efforts of women's groups including the National Organization for Women, American Association of University Women, and the League of Women Voters, Washington voters passed an Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution in 1972. Facing opposition from groups such as HOW (Happiness of Women) and the League of Housewives, the amendment, narrowly passed. Materially advancing sexual equality, the legislation mandated changes to over 130 state laws relating to discrimination in insurance, credit, child support, and labor.

Many women in the 1960s and seventies pursued equal rights as "Second Wave Feminists."

They championed equal rights amendments at both the state and national levels. They worked to bring equality in funding for women's athletics and they pursued equal pay laws for state employees, among other causes.



ERA Yes button, Equal rights button. (Washington Women's)



FIGHT FOR NATIONAL RIGHTS

First proposed by suffragist Alice Paul in 1923, the campaign for a national Equal Rights Amendment was revitalized in the 1970s. Congress passed the amendment to the Constitution in 1972 and sent it to the states for ratification. Washington ratified in 1973, one of 35 states to do so. But that was three short of the number required and the deadline for ratification expired in 1982. The ERA has been introduced in every Congress since 1982 but not re-authorized for submission to the states for ratification.



Washington ERA Rally. (Washington Women's)

TITLE IX



Washington State University vs. University of Southern California
Women's Basketball, 2009. (Photo by Don Witzberg/Photo 121 Services)

Young women's lives changed dramatically in 1972 when they gained equal access to athletics and academic programs in high school and college via Title IX, an amendatory section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Title IX law has been renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act to honor the Hawaii congresswoman who championed its passage. The law states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance." Washington State enacted similar language for state-funded school activities in 1975.



(L to R) Washington State University graduate Jo Walkburn '84, Sue Dumas '82 and Karen (Rae) Tronardo '80 were part of the *Rae v. Washington State University* case to regular funding for women's college sports.
(Courtesy of Patsy Mink and Washington State University)

Despite enactment of Title IX, room for improvement remained in sports-funding equity. In 1979 students and coaches at Washington State University filed suit under the state's ERA amendment in *Rae v. Washington State University*. The plaintiffs' strategy was to improve support for women's college sports by including men's football in determining parity funding. Although they lost the suit at first, the decision was reversed on appeal in 1987 when the state Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, increasing funding for women's sports in all four-year state colleges and universities.

Today, WSU, like most state universities, boasts a successful women's athletic program, competing in nine sports in the Pac-10 Conference.

WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM, 1929
(Photo Archive in WSU Digital Library, Manuscript, Archive, and Special Collections, WSU Library)



ELECTED WASHINGTON WOMEN

After the state enacted women's suffrage in 1910, Washington women began to run for office in ever-increasing numbers. Over 230 women have served in the Washington legislature since 1913.

Elected in 1912 and serving in the 1913

Washington House of Representatives, Frances C. Astell from Bellingham and Dr. Nena J. Croake from Tacoma were the first two women to serve in the state Legislature. Raba Hurn from Spokane was the first woman to serve in the state Senate in 1923. Josephine Corlies Proctor, elected in 1912 as Superintendent of Public Instruction, was the first woman to serve in a statewide office.

In the mid 1960s, women of color began holding office as well. While Representative Marjorie Pitzer King (appointed 1965) was Washington's first black female legislator, Peggy Mazie became the body's first elected African-American woman in 1971. Representative Velma Victoria was the first Filipina American (elected in 1992.) Senator Marganita Prentice (elected to the House in 1988 and the Senate in 1992) was the first Latina.

For almost 25 years Washington has been a leader in electing women to the state legislature. From 1993 to 2004 Washington led the nation in the percentage of female state legislators. In 1999 and 2000 Washington boasted the highest percentage of female legislators in the nation's history, with 41 percent women. In 2009, women comprised approximately one-third of the state's legislators.



State Representative
Frances C. Astell
(Puyallup State Archives)



State Representative
Dr. Nena J. Croake
(Puyallup State Archives)



State Representative
Peggy Mazie
(Peg Mazie)



Governor
Diane Lee Ray
(Puyallup State Archives)



Governor
Cassa Gregoire
(Office of Governor Chris Gregoire)



U.S. Senator
Patty Murray
(Patty Murray)



U.S. Senator
Maria Cantwell
(Patty Murray)

Washington women have served as Superintendent of Public Instruction, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Commissioner of Public Lands, and Insurance Commissioner. Nine women have served on the state supreme court over time. Washington women have also held elected positions on local

school boards, local courts, special purpose districts, city councils, county commissions and councils, and as county executives throughout the state's history. In 2009, eight of the federally recognized tribes in Washington had women chairpersons.

Washington elected its first woman governor, Diny Lee Ray, in 1976 and its second, Chris Gregoire, in 2004. In 2005, it became the first state to have a woman governor and two women U.S. Senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, in office at the same time.

Note: Washington's women legislature celebrated in January, 1979, when they boasted a national-wide high of 41% women in the House and Senate.
From left to right from top: Senator Tracy Elds, Senator Jeanne Kohl-Waller, Senator Darlene Fierley, Representative Carolyn Edwards, Senator Karen Peters, Representative Kelly Linder, Representative Helen Sommers, Senator Sue Rog, left to right: Senator Karen Kaiser, Representative Ida Ballarunas. Second row right, left to right Representative Loretta Rudolph and Senator Marilyn Rasmussen... (photograph by Alan Brown, The Seattle Times)

