

Title:

Marching Towards Empowerment



A.

"Beautiful" was the word most often used by witnesses to the Woman Suffrage Procession that took place in Washington D.C. on March 3, 1913. People remembered it as both a political marvel and a brilliant spectacle: an astonishing procession of divisions of hundreds of women in coordinated color costume, organized by profession, organization, and state. There were floats showing women in American history, banners and flags, and women's bands. Six golden chariots symbolized the first six states to approve Votes for Women. Over 5,000 participants, both women and men, had come from around the country to, as the Official Program announced, "march in a spirit of protest against the present political organization of society, from which women are excluded".

March 3 had been strategically chosen by Alice Paul as the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, when the capital would be full of people, and the procession was met less than a mile from the Capitol by an unruly and unsupportive mob. Women were jeered, tripped, and shoved and many heard "indecent epithets" and "barnyard conversation". Some women resorted to their hatpins to defend themselves and before the afternoon was over troops were called in to control the crowd.

Undeterred, much of the procession completed the route to the steps of the Treasury Building where an allegorical tableau was performed extolling the virtues of Charity, Liberty, Peace and Hope. An astonished president-elect Wilson arrived to little fanfare at the railway station a few blocks away, prompting one of the incoming president's staff to ask, "Where are all the people?" "Watching the suffrage parade" was the reply.

Women had been struggling for the right to vote for more than 60 years. The parade and the ensuing renewed national attention proved to be a galvanizing point for the Votes for Women movement.



B.

New Heights for Women

By the turn of the 20th century, social and political opportunities for women had increased dramatically and women's dress had become central to the discussion of women's suffrage. Some critics denigrated women's rights activists for their slovenly dress and unattractive footwear, while other anti-suffragists took the opposite tack, arguing that the suffragettes' acquiescence to fashion, such as the wearing of "French heels" was a sure sign of their lack of reason. Many suffragettes attempted to strike a balance between these two extremes by wearing moderately high-heeled footwear. These button boots illustrate this tension. The menswear detailing borrows a sense of authority from the male wardrobe while the high sinuous heels and dainty pointed toes counter the arguments that new freedoms could only be gained at the loss of femininity.

C.

Through the **Equality League of Self-Supporting Women**, Harriet Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, originated "parade as strategy" in New York. Parades were an effective means for suffragists to draw attention to the Votes for Women Cause and show strength in numbers. Their military-like precision and uniformity debunked the notion that women were flighty and unorganized. The banner hanging above was used by California and national suffragist Alice Park.



D.

Suffragist Soapbox Wooden box used by Alice Park to transport suffragist materials (and as a speaking platform) during the California Suffrage Campaign.



A new way of thinking about what it meant to be a woman and a citizen in the United States began to emerge in the decades before the Civil War. Reform groups proliferated across the States - temperance clubs, religious movements and moral-reform societies, anti-slavery organizations - and in many of these, women played a prominent role. At the same time, many American women were beginning to chafe against what historians have called the "Cult of True Womanhood": that is, the idea that the only "true" woman was a pious, submissive wife and mother concerned exclusively with home and family. After 1900 a new argument was made that women's superior characteristics, especially purity, immunity from corruption and concern with children and local issues, made their votes essential to promoting the reforms of the Progressive Era.



E.

With the West leading the way, women's suffrage in the United States was achieved gradually, at state and local levels, during the late 19th century and early 20th century, culminating in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which provided: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." It was some thirty years previously, however, that Wyoming had entered the Union as the first state to grant women full voting rights. The next eight states to grant full suffrage to women were also Western states: Colorado (1893); Utah and Idaho (1896); Washington (1910); California (1911); and Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona (1912).

Potential Quotes to Highlight:



"If we should meet a man who does not agree with us... then we shall just keep after him until he does."

Charlotte Baker 1911 stumping the back country
for women's voting rights

"the dreadful things we used to do and the dreadful clothes we did them in."

Miss Evelyn Sharp 1909

"Look back, to slavery, to suffrage, to integration and one thing is clear. Fashions in bigotry come and go. The right thing lasts."

Anna Quindlen

"Independence is happiness."
Susan B. Anthony

"Modern invention has banished the spinning wheel, and the same law of progress makes the woman of today a different woman from her grandmother."
Susan B. Anthony

The 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally ratified on August 26, 1920, granting American women the right to vote. On November 2 of that same year, more than 8 million women across the U.S. voted in elections for the first time, the single largest extension of democratic voting rights in our nation's history.



"We hold these truths to be self-Sentiments that the delegates created equal, that they are inalienable rights, that among happiness."

From the WM Collection:

Foot Powder Box

Suffragist Soapbox Wooden box used by Alice Park to transport suffragist materials (and as a speaking platform) during the California Suffrage Campaign.

Button Collection

Sash Collection

Susan B Anthony Letter

"The Suffragist" Magazine reproductions

Alice Paul Toasting Tennessee's Ratification of the 19th Amendment, August 1920: The leader of the suffrage movement's most militant wing, Alice Paul advocated "unladylike" tactics such as civil disobedience and hunger strikes. In 1920, she proposed an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, which has never been ratified.



Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, a group of abolitionist activists, invited by the reformers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, gathered to discuss the problem of women's rights. Most of the delegates agreed: American women were autonomous individuals who deserved their own political identities. evident," proclaimed the Declaration of produced, "that all men *and women* are endowed by their creator with certain these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of