

“Arizona Woman Suffrage Movement Summary”

In 1883, Murat Masterson, a Mormon attorney from Prescott, introduced a bill in the Arizona Territorial Legislature to give women the right to vote. It had been thirty-five years since Elizabeth Cady Stanton made the first public demand for woman suffrage in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York. Little progress had been made during the intervening years in eastern states, but in the West, women gained the right to vote in the Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870) territories. Although Masterson’s bill failed, a woman suffrage association was started by Tucson resident, Josephine Brawley Hughes in 1890. Each legislative session, politicians rejected woman suffrage because a majority of members believed voting would corrupt and degrade women. Over the years, the coalition supporting the issue grew, as Mormon leaders like Rachel Berry joined the campaign arguing that women voters would pass laws to curb alcohol consumption and vice in the territory. Pauline O’Neill, widow of William “Buckey” O’Neill, and Frances Willard Munds, both former teachers who lived in Prescott, joined the movement and helped orchestrate support among labor union and socialist leaders. They brought Laura Gregg, a field organizer for the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to Arizona in 1909 to campaign in the territory.

Despite these efforts, delegates elected to the constitutional convention failed to support woman suffrage in the new state constitution. Most delegates, including convention president George Hunt, were reluctant to support a dangerous idea like woman suffrage because it might jeopardize statehood. But the new constitution gave voters the ability to put an amendment on the ballot, so in the summer of 1912, Hughes, Munds, O’Neill, and other women circulated suffrage initiative petitions. Laura Gregg had married Joseph Cannon, a labor leader she met on the campaign trail, and now the couple traveled to the mining towns and they were successful in obtaining the support of almost all the state’s labor unions. Rachel Berry was instrumental in rounding up the Mormon vote, and Munds and O’Neill convinced the state’s political party leaders to support suffrage. Anna Howard Shaw, president of NAWSA spoke in Arizona’s Major cities. In September of 1912, Munds hired a young graduate of the University of Arizona, Madge Udall, to be the campaign’s first paid worker, and then in October, the leaders of the Arizona Equal Suffrage Association brought their campaign to the Arizona’s first State Fair. Today’s presentation will give us a hint of what the conversation at the suffrage booth might have been like just weeks before the election.

Postscript: *On November 5, 1912, the male voters approved the woman suffrage amendment to the state constitution with 68 percent of the vote. In 1913, Madge Udall was Arizona’s standard bearer in a New York City parade to celebrate the new suffrage states of Arizona, Oregon, and Kansas. In 1914, Frances Munds was elected to the Arizona State Senate from Yavapai County and Rachel Berry was elected to the Arizona House, representing Apache County. Pauline O’Neill would represent Maricopa County in the House from 1915-1920. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified and all women in the United States finally won the right to vote.*