

Woman Suffrage in Wyoming

BY T. A. LARSON

IN THE PREFACE to *Laws of Wyoming, 1869*, Territorial Secretary Edward M. Lee singled out one law for special attention: "Among other acts, a law was passed enfranchizing women; thus, by a single step, placing the youngest territory on earth in the vanguard of civilization and progress." Lee was of course right in focusing attention on this act, for Wyoming was the first United States territory, and later would be the first state (1890), to give women full rights to vote and hold office.¹ No other action of the 1869 Legislature, or of any other Wyoming Legislature, has received so much attention.

The question is often asked, why did woman suffrage come first in Wyoming? As might be expected, causation was complex, and the answer, if it is to be worth much, cannot be given in a few words. It was certainly not a bolt from the blue. Limited suffrage rights, for example in school elections, had been given to women from time to time in various parts of the country ever since 1776 when a few women had voted in New Jersey. Since the 1840's suffragettes had been campaigning vigorously in the East. A woman suffrage weekly, *The Revolution*, began publication in New York City in 1868. The *Cheyenne Leader* said in October, 1868: "There are few of our weekly exchanges that we peruse with more interest than we do the *Revolution*. . . . *The Revolution* is bound to win."

Woman suffrage amendments were proposed in both houses of Congress in 1868, and the American Woman Suffrage Association was organized in 1869. Woman suffrage bills had been introduced in several state and territorial legislatures. One house of the Nebraska Legisla-

ture had passed such a bill in 1856, and the Dakota Territorial Legislature had failed by just one vote to pass a woman suffrage bill in January, 1869. Clearly the conditions were ripe for a legislative victory somewhere. The Wyoming legislators had the option of jumping in at the head of the parade or of watching it pass by. Had they failed to act as they did in December, 1869, the honors would have gone to Utah Territory, whose legislators were right at their heels; Utah adopted woman suffrage in February, 1870.

Apart from the national pressures which promised a breakthrough somewhere very soon, certain conditions made it probable that victory would come first in a western territory. One factor was the scarcity of women. With only one woman in Wyoming over twenty-one for every six men over twenty-one (1870 Census), adoption of woman suffrage was less revolutionary than it would have been where there were as many women as men.

Western territories were desperately eager for publicity which would attract population. Free advertising was a common explanation in the 1870's and 1880's for Wyoming's action. The *Cheyenne Leader*, for example, said, when the act was adopted: "We now expect at once quite an immigration of ladies to Wyoming"; and it added in March, 1870, that this legislation was "nothing more or less than a shrewd advertising

¹ The Legislature was small, nine in the upper house, which was known as the Council, and thirteen in the House of Representatives. All legislators were Democrats. On final passage they voted 6-2 and 7-4. The Republican governor, John A. Campbell, after four days of indecision, signed the act, which reads as follows: "FEMALE SUFFRAGE, Chapter 31, AN ACT TO GRANT TO THE WOMEN OF WYOMING TERRITORY THE RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE, AND TO HOLD OFFICE. Be it enacted by the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Wyoming: Sec. 1. That every woman of the age of twenty-one years, residing in this territory, may at every election to be holden under the laws thereof, cast her vote. And her rights to the elective franchise and to hold office shall be the same under the election laws of the territory, as those of electors. Sec. 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage. Approved, December 10th, 1869."

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dodge. A cunning device to obtain for Wyoming a widespread notoriety."

In the 1890's the historian C. G. Coutant interviewed surviving members of the 1869 Legislature. He reported that "One man told me that he thought it right and just to give women the



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Anna E. Dickinson

right to vote.² Another man said he thought it would be a good advertisement for the territory. Still another said that he voted to please someone else, and so on."³

It was often said in the early days that the whole thing was done as a joke. Strongest support for this interpretation lies in an editorial in the *Cheyenne Wyoming Tribune*, October 8, 1870, apparently written by Edward M. Lee, who had been Secretary of the Territory in 1869:

Once, during the session, amid the greatest hilarity, and after the presentation of various funny amendments and in the full expectation of a gubernatorial veto, an act was passed Enfranchising the Women of Wyoming. The bill, however, was approved, became a law, and the youngest territory placed in the van of progress. . . . How strange that a movement destined to purify the muddy pool of politics . . . should have originated in a joke. . . . All honor to them, say we, to Wyoming's first legislature!

Since Secretary Lee, himself a champion of woman suffrage, worked closely with the legislators, his testimony is important, although he did not say that everyone involved was joking, and

William H. Bright, who introduced the bill, later denied that he had done so as a joke.

Governor John A. Campbell of Wyoming was reported to have said in Boston in 1871 that "no public discussion preceded passage." While the bill may not have been discussed much, the subject of woman suffrage was often discussed in the *Cheyenne* newspapers during the months preceding the Legislature's action. Much of the newspaper comment concerned the activities of Anna Dickinson, a nationally known suffragette. After reading about her in an Omaha paper, the editor of the *Cheyenne Leader*, Nathan A. Baker, proposed in June, 1869: "Let's try to get her here." Ten days later, June 17, Miss Dickinson passed through Cheyenne on her way to fulfill speaking engagements in California. The *Leader* reported that when the "celebrated lady" stepped out on the platform for a breath of air, she was "surrounded by a crowd of staring mortals. She sought refuge in a passenger coach. She was then subjected to an enfilading fire from the eyes of those who succeeded in flattening their noses against the car windows. . . . Anna is good looking. . . ."⁴

After it was announced that Miss Dickinson would lecture in Cheyenne on her way east, the *Leader* hailed her approaching visit as "quite an event in our city" and as "an opportunity to listen to one of the most entertaining and graceful of female orators." On September 24, 1869, Secretary Lee introduced Miss Dickinson to "some 250 people whom curiosity had attracted," according to the report in the *Leader* the next day. Governor Campbell was in the audience, but out-of-town legislators probably were not present, since the Legislature did not meet until mid-October. The editor of the *Leader* had little to say about Miss Dickinson's message, but he noted that "in person she is rather below medium height, and well formed; her face is rather of the oval type."

Another woman suffrage lecturer, Miss Redelia Bates of St. Louis, spoke in Cheyenne on November 5, 1869, just a week before William H. Bright announced that he intended to introduce a wom-

² This is the reason stated on various occasions by William H. Bright, who introduced the bill.

³ Letter from C. G. Coutant to Frank W. Mondell, no date, on file in State Archives and Historical Department, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

⁴ In several other articles in subsequent weeks, the *Leader* referred to Anna as "the female humbug," as one who lectured for the love of money and notoriety, and as "the pepper" of the women's rights movement as contrasted with "the vinegar," Susan B. Anthony.

⁵ Miss Dickinson was a prominent figure in the national woman suffrage movement. See Giraud Chester, *Embattled Maiden: The Life of Anna Dickinson* (New York,

an suffrage bill. The House of Representatives had voted to let her use its hall, which she did. The *Leader* had made only a few comments about woman suffrage since Miss Dickinson's visit in September, but in anticipation of Miss Bates's arrival, it reported that she was beautiful and talented and that she had enjoyed a successful tour through Colorado. Just how many paid the advertised price of 50 cents to hear Miss Bates is in doubt; the *Tribune* reported "a large and appreciative audience," the *Leader* an audience "though not large . . . select and appreciative." The *Leader* praised the lecturer's charm, asserting that "Her presence would make any home a Heaven," but it did not yet accept her argument. The *Tribune*, on the other hand, found her both charming and persuasive: "Miss Bates is exceedingly prepossessing in personal appearance. . . . Her arguments were unanswerable, except upon the basis of prejudice. . . ." Probably the *Tribune* review was written by Edward M. Lee, for he was financial backer of the paper and often wrote for it.

After Miss Bates's visit to Cheyenne, the *Leader* refrained from ridiculing woman suffrage during the legislative session. When William H. Bright introduced his bill, the *Leader*, under the heading "Interesting Question," assumed a position of neutrality: "It will be up for consideration tonight, at the evening session, on which occasion many of our citizens will doubtless find it convenient to attend." When the bill passed both houses, the *Leader's* comment was non-committal: "Ladies prepare your ballots."

While awaiting Governor Campbell's decision, the *Leader* indicated qualified approval: "Although we have not yet been fully convinced of the wisdom or necessity of the measure, yet we have something of a curiosity to witness its practical operation and results, and we hope, as we believe that Governor Campbell will approve the bill." Nathan Baker, editor of the *Leader*, was never an ardent supporter, but he had come a long way since Anna Dickinson first visited Cheyenne in June. And when the governor signed the bill, Baker showed that, while he had been overcome temporarily by the charm of Redelia Bates,

1951). Probably the greatest moment of glory for this "Queen of the Lyceum" was in 1864, when, at the age of twenty-one, she addressed the Congress of the United States, at its invitation, with President and Mrs. Lincoln present. On that occasion she talked for more than an hour on the conduct of the war, abolition, and in praise of the President. Redelia Bates, on the other hand, did not attain fame; she was not even mentioned in the six-volume *History of Woman Suffrage* by E. C. Stanton, S. B. Anthony, M. J. Gage, and I. H. Harper (Rochester, N.Y., 1881-1922).

he was still loyal to Miss Dickinson: "Won't the irrepressible 'Anne D' come out here and make her home? We'll even give her more than the right to vote—she can run for Congress!"

Unlike the *Leader*, the *Tribune* needed no conversion. It greeted passage of the bill with the accurate judgment that it "is likely to be THE measure of the session, and we are glad our Legislature has taken the initiative in this movement, which is destined to become universal. Better appear to lead than hinder when a movement is inevitable." The *Tribune* a week later hailed the governor's signature with the headlines, "WYOMING SUFFRAGE, Wyoming in the Van, All Honor to the Youngest Territorial Sister!"

Although it is manifest that Baker, who was young (twenty-seven) like most Wyoming men of the period, was attracted by Miss Dickinson (twenty-six) and Miss Bates (age unknown but young), he was repelled by Susan B. Anthony (forty-nine), whom he described in February, 1870, as "the old maid whom celibacy has dried, and blasted, and mildewed, until nothing is left but a half crazy virago." One must conclude that it was fortunate that Miss Dickinson and Miss Bates, rather than Miss Anthony, came to Wyoming to promote woman suffrage in the autumn of 1869.⁵

AMONG THOSE who joined the woman suffrage parade in Wyoming, William H. Bright is the neglected central figure. A Virginian, he had served in the Union Army (not Confederate Army, as is usually said); he was attached as a major in the office of Chief Quartermaster in Washington, D.C., in 1864. After the war he had a federal job for a time in Salt Lake City, and then in 1868 he took his family to South Pass City, Wyoming, where he opened a saloon and later worked as a miner. In Wyoming he was known as "Colonel," although his promotion beyond the rank of major cannot be verified. After his September, 1869, election to the Council (upper house) of the Territorial Legislature, his colleagues elected him president of that body, and he proved to be a conscientious, unassuming presiding officer. Late in the legislative session, he left the chair to introduce the woman suffrage bill.

One who introduces a bill normally gets credit for it, and this was true for Bright as long as he was around to defend himself. The *Cheyenne Leader*, two months after the act was adopted, gave Bright full credit for it and remarked that "Bright, of Wyoming, is already immortal." For

the next twenty years, he was generally honored as the person mainly responsible for establishing woman suffrage in Wyoming.⁶ Then gradually a legend emerged, according to which Bright had introduced the bill at the request of Mrs. Esther Morris, fifty-six-year-old wife of one of Bright's competitors in the South Pass City saloon business. In 1890 Mrs. Morris' son by her first marriage, Edward A. Slack, who had become an editor in Cheyenne, began calling her "Mother of Woman Suffrage." One can only guess how Bright would have reacted had he been told that Mrs. Morris was beginning to receive credit for instituting woman suffrage in Wyoming. Bright had left Wyoming in the early 1870's, was heard from in Denver in 1876, and then faded from the memories of Wyoming people, although his death in Washington, D.C., was reported in 1912.

The capstone of the Esther Morris legend was put in place in 1919 when an old man, H. G. Nickerson of Lander, came forward with a tale about a tea party which he said he had attended at Mrs. Morris' home in South Pass City in September, 1869. In a letter to a Lander newspaper, Nickerson recalled that at this tea party Mrs. Morris had obtained a promise from Colonel Bright that he would introduce a woman suffrage bill if he were elected. Nickerson's story might have been scouted but for the fact that it promptly received the imprimatur of Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, militant feminist at the University of Wyoming. To the satisfaction of most people, Miss Hebard was able to complete the transfer of credit from Colonel Bright to the "Mother of Woman Suffrage." In 1955, Mrs. Morris, who had died in 1902, was named the state's outstanding deceased citizen; and soon thereafter statues of her were placed in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., and in front of the state capitol.⁷ Nevertheless, on the basis of verifiable evidence, Colonel Bright must still be regarded as the leading actor in the drama.

The chief supporting actor may well have been Edward M. Lee, Secretary of the Territory. As a member of the Connecticut Legislature in 1867, he had introduced a woman suffrage amendment to the Connecticut Constitution. (The amendment failed to pass.) In Wyoming his devotion to women's rights was unexcelled. His daily contact with the legislators and the respect with which they regarded him are matters of public record, as are several enthusiastic suffrage articles which he published in the *Wyoming Tribune*. Possibly he wrote Bright's bill, as his relatives later insisted, since Bright was poorly educated and lacked experience in writing bills. Curiously

the archaic word "holden," which was used by Connecticut legislators in 1867, was used in the Wyoming suffrage act. In all other places where it might have been used in the Wyoming session laws of 1869, we find "to be held" rather than "to be holden." At any rate, Lee cannot be denied a place among the persons who might have been influential in encouraging Bright to introduce the woman suffrage bill.

Another person who might have influenced Bright was his attractive young wife, who was twenty-five in 1869 when he was forty-six. Contemporaries said that she was a firm believer in woman suffrage and that the Colonel adored her. The 1879 pamphlet, "Nine Years of Woman Suffrage in Wyoming," suggested that Mrs. Bright might have been the source of the suffrage measure. Ben Sheeks, member of the House of Representatives from South Pass City, knew Mrs. Bright and Mrs. Morris well. He wrote to Dr. Hebard at the University of Wyoming in 1920 that

Mrs. Bright was a very womanly suffragist and I always understood and still believe, that it was through her influence that the bill was introduced. I know that I supposed at that time that she was the author of the bill. What reason, if any, I had for thinking so I do not remember. Possibly it was only that she seemed intellectually and in education superior to Mr. Bright.

Sheeks said he thought Esther Morris was too mannish to influence Bright.⁸

Although Esther Morris was no doubt an advocate of woman suffrage, it cannot be established that she influenced Bright or anyone else. She was not the usual type of reformer, since she campaigned for no public office for herself or

⁶ J. H. Hayford, editor of the *Laramie Sentinel*, in his newspaper columns in January, 1871, and again in January, 1876, claimed major credit for himself. In his weekly of Jan. 31, 1876, however, he backed down, after being challenged by three other editors. He accepted their conclusions that the honor and credit should go to Colonel Bright. In a letter to the *Denver Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1876, Bright, who was then living in Denver, had denied Hayford's claim to credit and had taken credit for himself.

In 1879 a pamphlet entitled "Nine Years of Woman Suffrage in Wyoming" was published in Boston. The unidentified author quoted a number of Wyoming people who described the progress of the experiment and generally judged it to be successful. Nothing, however, was said about causation, except for a report of an interview with Governor Campbell in 1871 in which it was said that "The measure is said to owe its origin to the wife of the president of the council." A copy of the 1879 pamphlet is in the possession of Mrs. Jack Meldrum of Buffalo, Wyoming.

John W. Kingman, associate justice of the Wyoming Supreme Court, 1869-73, and thereafter an attorney in Laramie, wrote in 1885 that Bright "was the author of the woman suffrage bill, and did more than all others to secure its passage."

others, wrote nothing except a few letters for publication, and made no public addresses except for brief remarks on four or five occasions. There is no evidence to suggest that she was in Cheyenne during the legislative sessions of 1869 and 1871. Governor Campbell never mentioned her in his diary for the years 1869 to 1875, although he mentioned many men and women with whom he dealt during those years. Hubert Howe Bancroft did not mention her in his *History of Wyoming* (1890). In short, the advice she is reputed to have given to Susan B. Anthony, "We don't want any agitation," is consistent with all that is known about her career.

One suspects that Edward M. Lee and Mrs. Bright had more influence on Colonel Bright than did Esther Morris, but the arguments in their favor cannot be accepted as conclusive without Bright's approval, which was never given. The evidence warrants giving major credit for woman suffrage in Wyoming to Bright and further credit to the other legislators who voted for it and to Governor Campbell. In the background were such advocates as Edward M. Lee, Mrs. Bright, Mrs. Morris, Mrs. M. E. Post, Mrs. Seth Paine, Mrs. M. B. Arnold, Judge J. W. Kingman, Anna Dickinson, Redelia Bates, and J. H. Hayford. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that innumerable men and women in the East had set the stage and that without their efforts there would have been no show in Wyoming in 1869.

MANY QUESTIONS remained to be answered in the next few years. Would women go to the polls?

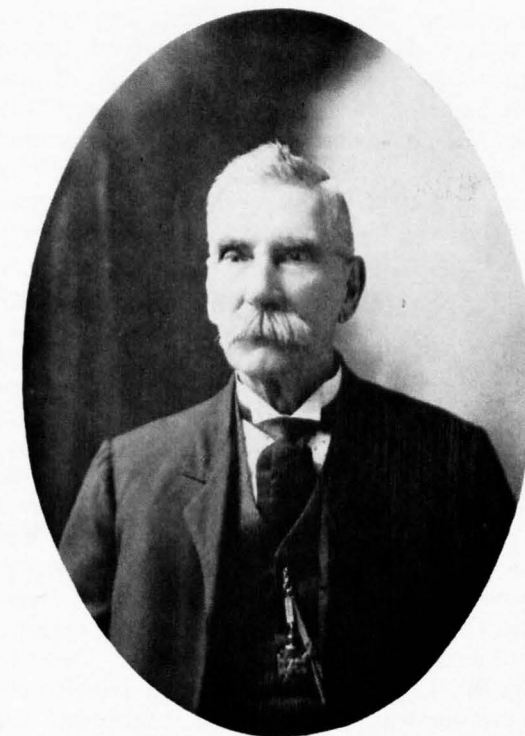
⁷ The promulgation and propagation of the legend of Esther Morris will be discussed at some length in my forthcoming *History of Wyoming*.

⁸ Grace Raymond Hebard "Woman Suffrage" file, University of Wyoming Library.

⁹ The Letterpress Book, Secretary of State, Wyoming, preserved in the State Archives, Cheyenne, shows that Secretary Lee transmitted commissions to Mrs. Caroline Neil, Point of Rocks, and Mrs. Esther Morris, South Pass City, on the same day, Feb. 17, 1870. Both had been recommended by Judge J. W. Kingman, and each was congratulated by Lee "upon holding the first Judicial position ever held by woman." The copy of Mrs. Neil's letter precedes that of Mrs. Morris in the pressbook, but Mrs. Neil was delayed in qualifying, first because of her English citizenship and later because of the nature of her bond. Although Mrs. Neil seems never to have been mentioned in Wyoming history books, she probably did serve, even though her docket cannot be found. The 1870 Census lists her as "Justice of the Peace," and she was mentioned as a justice in a few 1870 newspapers, for example, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 25. On Feb. 28, 1870, Secretary Lee transmitted a commission as justice of the peace to a third woman, Mrs. Francis C. Gallagher, South Pass City, but there is no evidence that she ever served in that office.

Would they and should they aspire to public office? Would they make good officeholders, good jurors? How would woman suffrage affect politics, government, and public morality?

Two months after the suffrage measure was adopted, Mrs. Esther Morris, the housewife from South Pass City, was appointed justice of the



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William H. Bright

peace by county commissioners at the suggestion of Judge J. W. Kingman, district judge of the Territory, and with the approval of Acting Governor Edward M. Lee. The appointment gave her considerable fame, which was enhanced many years later by the tea party story. The fact that she served as justice of the peace in South Pass City, a town of only 460 population, 80 miles from a railroad, held accurate reporting to a minimum but invited apocrypha. During her 8½-month tenure in office, she handled some seventy typical justice of the peace court cases and showed that women were capable of doing such work.⁹

A second test of woman suffrage occurred in March, 1870, when women served on petit and grand juries in Laramie. Two of the Territorial judges persuaded the first six women summoned to overcome their desires to be excused. The

women who participated with men on petit and grand juries in Laramie in 1870 and 1871 and in Cheyenne in 1871 appear to have been more conscientious than were the men who served with them. These women, like Mrs. Morris, contributed to the success and reputation of the Wyoming experiment. Nevertheless, Wyoming opinion was divided on the subject of woman jury service. The principal objections were the disruption of home life and the added expense of providing two bailiffs and two sets of overnight accommodations. New judges after 1871 ceased putting women on juries on the grounds that jury service was not an adjunct of suffrage.

The women of Wyoming had their first opportunity to vote in September, 1870. Doubts as to whether many of the eligible 1,000 women would go to the polls were dispelled when most of them turned out. Newspaper editors argued over the impact of female participation. The Cheyenne *Leader* stated that the women divided their votes evenly between the two parties, thus increasing the aggregate vote but not affecting the final outcome. The only perceptible difference, said the *Leader*, was the maintenance of better order at the polls. The Laramie *Sentinel* and the *Wyoming Tribune*, on the other hand, contended that more women voted Republican than Democratic. The *Tribune* asserted that the successful Republican candidate for Delegate to Congress, Judge W. T. Jones, got some of the female votes because he was uncommonly handsome. The *Sentinel* concurred that the women had tipped the scales in favor of Jones. All of the editors agreed that the presence of women inhibited drunkenness and rowdiness at the polling places. "There was plenty of drinking and noise at the saloons," noted one observer, "but the men would not remain, after voting, around the polls. It seemed more like Sunday than election day."¹⁰

And so the women provided encouraging answers to questions about the experiment in woman suffrage. Meanwhile, the bonanza of free advertising was smaller than expected. Polygamy in Utah was attracting more attention than woman suffrage in Wyoming, and the Franco-Prussian War got most of the headlines in 1870. True, short notices about Wyoming suffrage activities appeared in many eastern publications in 1869 and 1870, but the advertising bonanza looms large only when the long-term accumulation is taken into account.

The woman suffrage weekly, *The Revolution*, used the headline "The Deed is Done" over its report of the passage of the woman suffrage act, quoted the text of the bill in full, and concluded

with the statement: "It is said [accurately] there is not one republican in the Legislature of the Territory!"¹¹ The *New York Times* gave brief front-page notice to the first use of women on a jury in Laramie. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on April 2, 1870, reported that "Mrs. Esther Morris, one of the new justices of the peace in Wyoming, is fifty-seven years old. On the first court day she wore a calico gown, worsted breakfast-shawl, green ribbons in her hair, and a green necktie." And on June 25, 1870, this same newspaper reported that "Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Neil continue to exercise their functions as Justices of the Peace in Wyoming. They are the terror of all rogues, and afford infinite delight to all lovers of peace and virtue."¹²

Two reasons why Easterners were not electrified by the news that Wyoming was experimenting with woman suffrage are spelled out in a comment made by *The Nation*, March 3, 1870:

The experiment is also being made in Wyoming Territory; but the women there are but a handful, and, it is said, leave much to be desired, to use a very safe and convenient Gallicism, on the score of character, so that their use of the franchise will hardly shed much light on the general question.

On the other hand, Mrs. M. E. Post of Cheyenne received much applause and considerable newspaper comment for her address at the National Woman Suffrage convention in Washington, D.C., in January, 1871.

Later in 1871, after two years of woman suffrage, Wyoming's second Territorial Legislature came very near ending the experiment. An attempt to override Governor Campbell's veto of the repeal measure failed by only one vote. However, only one member of the 1869 Legislature was back in 1871, not because of voter rejection, but because only two of the 1869 legislators stood for reelection. The one returning member was South Pass City attorney Ben Sheeks. He now became Speaker of the House of Representatives and spearheaded the drive to end the experiment, even as he had been its principal opponent in 1869.

Whereas the 1869 Legislature had been completely Democratic, a few Republicans turned up in 1871—just enough to keep the Democrats from overriding the governor's veto. All of the Democrats voted for repeal, mainly it seems

¹⁰ Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, III, 736.

¹¹ *The Revolution*, IV, No. 24 (Dec. 16, 1869), 377. I have used the Huntington Library file of this weekly.

¹² I have used the Huntington Library file of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

¹³ *Annals of Wyoming*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July, 1938), 127.

because a majority of the women were reputed to have voted Republican, while all of the Republicans predictably opposed repeal. "Am offered \$2,000 and favorable report of Committee if I will sign Woman Suffrage [repeal] Act," Governor Campbell noted in his diary; but he could not be bought.¹³ Laramie women submitted a petition praying for retention of woman suffrage. There was no petition from South Pass City; Mrs. Esther Morris apparently was following her usual policy of leaving it to the men.

Though their rights were saved, the women of Wyoming soon learned that the men, who were in an overwhelming majority, were not interested in having women engage in political activity beyond exercise of the franchise. After she had completed the partial term for which she had been appointed, Esther Morris was not nominated for election to a regular term. Only Edward M. Lee expressed public regret, writing in his *Wyoming Tribune* that he was sorry "that the people of Sweetwater county [new name for Carter County] had not the good sense and judgment to nominate and elect her for the ensuing term."

After 1871 there was never any serious threat to woman suffrage in Wyoming, as virtually all substantial citizens rallied to the cause. E. A. Curley, roving correspondent for the *London Field*, noticed, as others had, that woman suffrage tended to weaken the influence of the numerous young, transient, male "irresponsibles," because "The married man who has come here for permanent residence has, practically speaking, two votes against the one which the roving man is able to cast."¹⁴

Getting the right to vote did not mean immediate economic equality. In March, 1874, Herman Glafcke, the new editor of the *Cheyenne Leader*, complained that, despite the law about equal pay adopted in 1869, "For the same work much less is paid (even here in Cheyenne, where woman's labor is scarce) to women than is paid to men; and this too, when the work is as well done by women as by men." Women teachers, he said, received barely more than half what was paid to men. Furthermore, Governor John M. Thayer in 1875 told the Legislature that the 1869 statute which permitted the wife to acquire and hold real estate did not permit her to convey

¹⁴ Curley visited Wyoming Aug. 15–Oct. 30, 1874. The comment quoted here is taken from p. 74 of a booklet preserved in the Huntington Library: *The Territory of Wyoming, Its History Soil Climate, Resources, Etc.*, published by authority of the Board of Immigration, Laramie City, December, 1874, in the Appendix of which are reprinted Curley's *London Field* articles.

property without her husband's concurrence. Yet not until 1882 did the Legislature enable a wife to convey her separate property without her husband's approval.

Meanwhile the women had abandoned attempts to organize with a view toward nominat-



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Mrs. Esther Morris

ing members of their sex for public office after they found that they had no chance for election except to the position of county superintendent of schools. Only two women ran for the Territorial Legislature in twenty years; one received eight votes, the other five, when at least 500 votes were needed for election. Three women were nominated for the state constitutional convention in 1889, but they were not elected.

Thus, while Wyoming men gave women the right to vote and hold office in 1869, they did not make the women equal partners in political and economic affairs. Hubert Howe Bancroft's agents, who visited the Territory in 1885 to collect material for a history of Wyoming, interviewed eighty-four leading male citizens, but they did not interview any women. Most of the women, to be sure, did not complain about their subordinate position—apparently they did not

want it any other way—and they were no more willing to vote for women candidates for public office than were the men.

SATISFIED with the experiment so far, the all-male convention in 1889, with only token opposition, included woman suffrage in the state constitution, and thus made Wyoming in 1890 the first state to have "equality." National leaders of the suffrage movement were so thrilled that they included in the call to their 1891 convention the joyful tribute, "Wyoming, all hail; the first true republic the world has ever seen!"

Subsequently other states followed suit, one after another. Colorado soon elected women to its legislature, something Wyoming did not do until 1910. For a long time Wyoming would not elect women to any offices except those of county or state superintendent of schools. Not until 1950, long after many other states had adopted it, was woman jury service reinstated in Wyoming. The women may have been partly at fault for this delay, since they had made little effort to obtain participation on juries. During World War I, when the prohibition drive was making slow headway in Wyoming—slowest in the Rocky Mountain region—eastern dries asked what good woman suffrage had achieved in the state.

Then, in 1924, the state once again advanced a claim to distinction in the women's rights movement by electing a woman governor. The Democratic Governor, William B. Ross, who had been elected in 1922 to a four-year term, died just one month and two days before the general election of November 4, 1924, necessitating the election of someone to fill out the last two years of his term. Special party conventions met in Cheyenne on October 14. The Republicans nominated Eugene J. Sullivan, a Casper attorney who had been mayor of Basin and Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Democrats nominated the deceased governor's widow, Mrs. Nellie Tayloe Ross, who had not been active in politics. She had taught kindergarten briefly before her marriage in 1902, but since that time had been satisfied to remain a housewife, busy bringing up two sons.

Sullivan campaigned vigorously for three weeks, while Mrs. Ross announced: "I shall not make a campaign. My candidacy is in the hands of my friends. I shall not leave the house..." A few small newspaper advertisements quoted her as saying that she would be "governed by the underlying principles by which he and I, side by

side, have sought to conduct our lives during our 22 years together." Mrs. Ross defeated Sullivan by more than 8,000 votes, polling more votes than Francis E. Warren, who won his seventh term in the United States Senate. The *Cheyenne Tribune-Leader* correctly appraised the situation: "Chivalry and sympathy were the factors of chief consideration..."

Although she was elected on the same day as Mrs. Miriam A. "Ma" Ferguson was elected Governor of Texas, Mrs. Ross was acclaimed first woman governor because she assumed office twenty days before Mrs. Ferguson. Partly because of this priority, Mrs. Ross received much favorable publicity outside the state during the next two years.

Mrs. Ross, like her husband, had to deal with a Legislature that was predominantly Republican (16-11 in the Senate, 45-17 in the House), and also like her husband she was the only Democrat among the five state elective officials. Predictably she did not dominate the many state boards on which she sat with the four Republicans, and predictably too she did not control the Republican Legislature.

In her brief opening message to the Legislature, Mrs. Ross dealt only with the subjects that she considered to be of "greatest immediate importance." She explained at the outset that she had been aided in preparing her message by extensive notes assembled by her husband for the message that he had planned to deliver. She reported proudly that during her husband's administration the valuation of railroads for tax purposes had been increased by \$11 million and that total state taxes had been reduced. She urged the Legislature to continue shifting the tax burden from small property holders to large ones. Recalling a coal-mine disaster at Kemmerer in which 100 persons had died on August 14, 1923, she asked for improved safety regulations. She called for increased state investment in farm loans to aid depressed agriculture. She repeated her husband's complaint that Wyoming had not kept pace with progressive states in restricting the working day for women, and she recommended ratification of the Child Labor Amendment which had been submitted to the states by the United States Congress.

Republican dries who thought their own candidate too wet had helped elect Mrs. Ross's husband in 1922. Appropriately Mrs. Ross announced that she stood "unequivocally for... thorough enforcement," and she proposed the enactment of a statute that would make it as great a crime to buy liquor as to sell it. Contem-

plating the awesome fact that thirty-five banks, almost one third of the total number of banks in the state, had failed in the past year, Mrs. Ross asked for a "sound banking law" and "some form of a guaranty provision."

The Legislature adopted new coal-mine safety regulations, adopted a new banking code, and enlarged the farm loan fund, but such actions were coincidental rather than indicative of Republican willingness to follow Democratic leadership. It also adopted a child labor law barring employment of children under sixteen in hazardous occupations—a law which stood virtually unchanged until 1963. Otherwise the legislation enacted by the 1925 Legislature showed little similarity to the governor's message.

Although she was elected "on trust," as she herself once put it, Mrs. Ross proved to be a good governor who gave the state a respectable, dignified, and economical administration. Intelligent, tactful, and gracious, she soon became a competent administrator and an effective public speaker. Appropriately, in 1926 her party nominated her for a four-year term, while the Republicans advanced Frank C. Emerson, state engineer, whose ouster both Mrs. Ross and her husband had tried to accomplish, but without success.

Considerations of sympathy, charity, and chivalry were no longer important by 1926. Moreover, many Republican women who had crossed party lines to vote for a woman in 1924 voted for Emerson in 1926. The venerable champion of woman suffrage, Mrs. Theresa A. Jenkins, who had delivered an oration at the statehood celebration in 1890, asked in an open letter during the 1926 campaign: "What has Mrs. Ross done to particularly deserve the votes of women? Has she ever, since coming to Wyoming taken any interest in Woman's Suffrage?" A prominent Casper Republican, Mrs. H. C. Chappell, declared in a public address: "I am not against a woman for governor, but I am against a woman who is not fitted for the office and who was elected through appeals and prejudices that have no place in politics..." Mrs. Ross's critics charged that she had not given other women a chance to demonstrate their capacity for public office, that she had appointed 174 men and only five women, and that she had not named any women to offices formerly held by men.

Republicans alleged that Mrs. Ross was merely a figurehead and that four men were really run-

¹⁵ In an interview in her home in Washington, D.C., in December, 1964, Mrs. Ross told the author that she had relied mainly on advice from O'Mahoney and Howell.

ning her administration: Cheyenne lawyer Joseph C. O'Mahoney, State Examiner Byron S. Huie, Attorney-General David J. Howell, and Interstate Streams Commissioner S. G. Hopkins.¹⁵

Frank Emerson was presented as a businessman and engineer who would bring development to the state. A typical advertisement asserted: "Wyoming has retrogressed while neighboring states progressed. What's wrong with Wyoming? Wyoming needs leadership. Frank Emerson can meet its need."

Democratic advertisements defended the governor with statements that she had reduced the expenses of state government in all departments, had equalized the tax burden by increasing the share paid by corporations, and had upheld the state's water rights.

Among that year's Democratic candidates, Mrs. Ross easily ran the best race, but she lost by 1,365 votes. She lost not because she was a woman, but because she was a Democrat in a Republican state and because she could not avoid being blamed for the state's economic aches and pains. She never again sought public office in Wyoming. Her work for the Democratic National Committee subsequently brought her appointment as Director of the United States Mint; she served in this capacity for twenty years, 1933 to 1953. Still vivacious and charming, living in retirement in Washington, D.C., she exclaimed in 1964 with obvious sincerity: "I am very grateful for all that the wonderful people of Wyoming have done for me."

What is the status of women in Wyoming, "The Equality State," in 1965? The percentage of employed women is low because of the industrial pattern—the leading industries, oil and other mineral production, and agriculture and livestock, offer few opportunities for women. Perhaps this should leave more women available for election to public office, but if so they have not been utilized very often. There are only three women among the 61 members of the lower house of the state Legislature and only one woman in the state Senate. Mrs. Edness Kimball Wilkins, ranking member of the majority Democratic party in the House in 1965, was passed over for the speakership. After remarking that she was accustomed to stepping aside for the men, she conceded that Cheyenne lawyer Walter B. Phelan, who was elected speaker, was a better parliamentarian and a more aggressive party leader. Reminiscent of much that was said in the 1870's, a Republican woman declared that it would have been good free advertising had the position been given to a woman.

No woman in the state has ever won her party's nomination for a place in the United States Congress, and no woman has ever been elected or appointed district judge or supreme court justice. Among the five elected state officials in 1965 two are women: Mrs. Minnie A. Mitchell, auditor, and Mrs. Thyra Thomson, secretary of state. It is not intended as a reflection on their abilities to point out, however, that each was elected soon after her husband died in high elective public office.

It seems fair to conclude that while Wyoming is properly proud of its enlightened actions in 1869 and 1889, the voters, both men and women, have never construed equality to mean favoritism for women. The traditional view that a woman's place is in the home still prevails in Wyoming politics, whether the woman is single or married, and whether or not she has young children. And so the search for talented public servants tends to be confined to only one half of the population.

Book Notes

Guide to Military Posts of the United States, 1789-1895.

By FRANCIS PAUL PRUCHA. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964. xiii, 178 pp. Bibliography, illustrations, maps. \$7.50)

AMERICAN HISTORIANS concerned with 19th-century United States history tend to ignore the existence of the regular army except on those occasions when war, civil disturbances, or Indian troubles bring it into view. Father Prucha has now made this somewhat more difficult by having prepared a handbook and atlas of United States military posts covering the first century of the history of the Republic.

This book should be enormously useful. It contains a 36-page introduction sketching the history of the spread of the regular army, an alphabetical catalogue of more than 475 military posts, seven maps showing the location of these establishments, thirteen maps indicating the geographical distribution of troops at irregular intervals between 1817 and 1895, and many pictures of the posts. Three appendixes offer a list of forts erected for the Seminole Wars, a table showing the strength of the regular army 1789-1895, and material tracing the changes in territorial commands from 1813 to 1898.

Astoria or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains, by Washington Irving. Edited and with an introduction by EDGELEY W. TODD. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964. xlix, 556 pp. Appendix, bibliography, index. \$7.95)

THE UNIVERSITY of Oklahoma Press has brought out a new

edition of *Astoria* based on the text of the Author's Revised Edition of 1860-61. The book exhibits careful, even meticulous, editing and the high standards of workmanship for which the Oklahoma University Press is widely known.

Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea, by Richard Henry Dana, Jr. Edited from the original manuscript and from the First Edition, with Journals and Letters of 1834-36 and 1859-60, and notes by JOHN HASKELL KEMBLE with original illustrations by ROBERT A. WEINSTEIN, and illustrated from contemporary paintings, prints, and charts. (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1964. xxii, 270, vi, 271-552 pp. \$24.75)

Two Years Before the Mast was first published in 1840 and has since then gone through many editions and appeared in numerous translations, all stemming from this first edition. It has now been brought out in a handsome two-volume edition based on the 1840 edition, but it also includes material deleted from the original manuscript.

THE ELLIOTT COUES edition of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, originally published in four volumes in 1893, has now been brought out in paperback in a three-volume set at \$6.75. Although the Coues edition of the Journals has many faults (cf. Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, pp. 673 ff.), students of American history will rejoice that Dover Publications, Inc., has seen fit to make these volumes available in this inexpensive but entirely useful format.