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WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Though far removed from the centers of agitation for woman suffrage, LDS women were neither strangers to it nor indifferent about it. They were aware of efforts for a national suffrage act and of several unsuccessful congressional bills between 1867 and 1869 that urged adoption of woman suffrage in the territories. The first organized effort to secure woman suffrage in Utah occurred on January 6, 1870, when a group of LDS women met in the Salt Lake City Fifteenth Ward to protest a proposed congressional antipolygamy bill. Asserting their right to "rise up . . . and speak for ourselves," the women voted to demand of the territorial governor "the right of franchise" and voted also to send representatives to Washington with a memorial defending the free exercise of their religion (Fifteenth Ward Relief Society minutes, Jan. 6, 1870; *Deseret News*, Jan. 11, 1870). This preliminary meeting precipitated a mass rally of more than five thousand women in Salt Lake City a week later to protest publicly against proposed ANTI-POLYGAMY LEGISLATION. Spurred by congressional inaction on woman suffrage and no doubt impressed by this demonstration of female political acumen, the legislature of Utah Territory, with the approval of the acting non-Mormon governor, enfranchised Utah women a month later, on February 12, 1870.

The response of LDS women to their new political status varied. One comment expressed at a subsequent Fifteenth Ward RELIEF SOCIETY meeting was that women were already surfeited with rights. Another urged caution to avoid "abusing" their new political power. Sarah M. KIMBALL, president of the ward Relief Society, rejoiced in announcing that she had always been a "woman's rights woman" (Fifteenth Ward Relief Society minutes, Feb. 19, 1870; Tullidge, pp. 435-36). Imme-

diately thereafter, the Relief Societies initiated programs of instruction to educate women in the political process. In reviewing these events some years later, Eliza R. SNOW distinguished Latter-day Saint women from women activists elsewhere who "unbecomingly clamored for their rights." Asserting that Mormon women "had made no fuss about woman suffrage," she explained that they were given the vote only when God "put it in the hearts of the brethren to give us that right" (Senior and Junior Cooperative Retrenchment Association minutes, Aug. 8, 1874).

Mormon women did fuss in 1880, however, about extending their political rights to include holding public office, and they lobbied the legislature to amend the voting act accordingly. Though the legislature approved, the governor refused to sign the amendment. This action was followed by several attempts by local non-Mormons to disfranchise Utah women, whom they viewed as so oppressed by the Church patriarchy that they would vote as their husbands instructed. This, they argued, would further entrench Mormon political hegemony and perpetuate PLURAL MARRIAGE. These efforts were similarly unsuccessful.

An alliance of LDS and eastern suffragists was forged in 1879 when Emmeline B. WELLS and Zina Young Williams represented Mormon women at the national woman suffrage convention in Washington. From the time of the first congressional attempt in the 1860s to repeal woman suffrage in Utah as an antipolygamy measure, eastern suffragists had lobbied against each congressional effort to do so. Though strongly opposed to POLYGAMY, eastern suffragists were equally opposed to linking suffrage with attempts to eradicate polygamy. With help from prosuffrage congressmen, their effort delayed federal antipolygamy legislation and earned them a measure of condemnation for their support of the unpopular Latter-day Saints.

The Edmunds Act of 1882 withdrew the vote from polygamists, and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 disfranchised all Utah women. The false logic and injustice of disfranchising all women in Utah territory in order to attack polygamy were repeatedly asserted by the suffragists and other sympathizers. For Utah women, this withdrawal of rights after they had had them for seventeen years ignited their determination to regain the vote permanently with UTAH STATEHOOD.

In 1889 Utah women for the first time initiated a campaign to obtain the ballot. Within four



Susan B. Anthony (center first row) with a group of Utah women and other woman suffrage leaders, May, 1895. Sarah M. Kimball, behind Anthony; Emmeline B. Wells, on Kimball's left; Zina D. H. Young, second row, second from right. Courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

months of an organizational meeting in January 1889, the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah had fourteen branches. When President Wilford WOODRUFF officially ended plural marriage with the 1890 MANIFESTO, statehood was imminent, and Utah suffragists prepared to put woman suffrage into the law of the new state. By the time the constitutional convention convened in 1895, both political parties had agreed to support woman suffrage. Unexpected dissent in the convention, however, almost derailed passage of the measure, evoking high-flown rhetoric on both sides. B. H. Roberts, leader of the opposition, posed the traditional argument that women would defile themselves if they entered the "filthy stream of politics," while Orson F. Whitney countered that women would help refine the political process and bring their own special capabilities to the betterment of society (Official Report of the Proceedings

and Debates of the Convention, Vol. 1, pp. 469, 473, 505–513). Utah suffragists immediately gathered petitions and lobbied to hold delegates to their original pledge. The measure finally passed, and in January 1896 Utah became the third state to join the Union with equal suffrage.

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