Remember The Ladies
By Linda K. Huber

In March 1776 John Adams was serving as a member of the Continental Congress and helped write the Declaration of Independence. While there he received a letter from his wife, Abigail, in which she asked John to "remember the ladies." Abigail knew when the fighting was done and we had achieved our independence her husband would be involved in creating the laws governing the country. She wanted John to secure proper laws for women "lest we will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." Although the letter does not specifically reference the right to vote, that intent is clear. The journey for women to secure that right took another 144 years.

August 18, 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution which reads:

"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. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Looking back 100 years we find there were a string of societal convulsions occurring and the 19th amendment ratification was one of them. In the last years of World War I, the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic had a devastating impact on society. Shortly following the conclusion of World War I, the 18th Amendment (the "Prohibition" amendment) was ratified. Then in 1919 Congress at long last passed the 19th amendment. From a World War to the Spanish Flu pandemic to Prohibition, it is perhaps easy to miss the significance of that pivotal moment in history when women gained the right to vote. This article is meant to provide a brief snapshot on the movement, the main players, and the Ottawa County connections with major leaders in the movement.

<u>The Movement</u>

The crusade to secure the right to vote is about the right to vote at the federal level and in all U.S. states. Some individual states allowed women to vote in state elections, such as Wyoming. When did the movement begin? It is generally accepted that the formal recognition of the movement began with

the 1848 New York Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Following this 1848 convention several other major conventions were held with the express purpose to spread the word about and build support for giving women the right to vote.

Many women's suffragettes were also abolitionists and efforts supporting these two social reforms overlapped. Early abolitionists tied African American voting rights with the women's right to vote. However, when the 15th Amendment was proposed and ratified in 1870 it did not include women. This exclusion of women caused a division among the women's rights activists. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton refused to support the 15th amendment because women were excluded and instead opted to prioritize working toward a federal amendment for the women's vote. On the other side, Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe believed that once African American men were able to vote, women's rights would follow and therefore favored working state-by-state to gain those rights. These competing views caused Stone and Howe to form the American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA) with Anthony and Stanton to form the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). It would not be until 1890 when the two groups merged to form the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

The 19th amendment started gaining traction in 1915 when a suffrage bill was brought before the U.S. House of Representatives but was ultimately defeated. In 1917 a New York State referendum in favor of suffrage motivated President Woodrow Wilson to lend his support to the effort. A 1918 bill passed the House but failed twice in the Senate. Calling for a special session of Congress in 1919, a bill introducing the amendment was brought before the House and passed. Finally, on June 4, 1919, the bill was brought to the Senate and passed.

Within days of Congress' passage, a few states immediately ratified the amendment. Ohio was the fifth state to do so on June 16, 1919. Tennessee became the necessary 36th state to ratify the 19th amendment on August 18, 1920 making it the law of the land. Mississippi took quite a while to ratify the amendment finally doing so in 1984.

One cannot fully appreciate the efforts expended to achieve this monumental social reform. Let me quote from Carrie Chapman Catt, President of the National Woman Suffrage Association to help encapsulate these efforts:

"To get the word 'male' in effect out of the Constitution cost the women of the country 52 years of pauseless campaign…During that time they were forced to conduct 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get State constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into State constitutions; 277 campaigns to get State party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms, and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses. Millions of dollars were raised, mainly in small sums, and expended with economic care. Hundreds of women gave the accumulated possibilities of an entire lifetime, thousands gave years of their lives, hundreds of thousands gave constant interest and such aid as they could."

Major Players

Said to be the triumvirate for the women's suffrage movement at the national level were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone.

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906). Anthony grew up in Massachusetts in a politically active family to end slavery as part of the abolitionist movement. She helped create and produce a weekly publication *The Revolution* that lobbied for women's rights. Anthony was arrested and fined $100 (which she never paid) for illegally voting in the 1872 presidential election. She served as President of the NAWSA from 1892 to 1900 and helped write the three-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*. Anthony was the first woman to be have her portrait on a U.S. one-dollar coin in 1979.

(L) Susan B. Anthony, (R) Elizabeth Cady Stanton, photo courtesy of the Ohio History Connection

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902). From a privileged background, Stanton spent over 50 years in support of equal rights for women. She married journalist and abolitionist Henry Brewster Stanton in 1840 and had seven children. In 1848 Stanton helped organize the First Women's Rights Convention (aka Seneca Falls Convention). She helped write the *Declaration of Sentiments*, modeled on the Declaration of Independence. *Sentiments* identified women's rights and provided examples of how men oppressed women and was signed by 68 women and 32 men, including abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Stanton's advocacy for reproductive self-determination, liberal divorce laws and greater sexual freedom for women put her on the fringe side of the suffrage movement. With Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, Stanton wrote the three-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*. She was censured by the NAWSA for her volume *The Woman's Bible* highlighting the Bible's bias towards women and challenging its stance that women should be submissive to men.

Lucy Stone (1818-1893). Stone earned a living as an antislavery and women's rights lecturer. She was an active abolitionist establishing the Women's National Loyal League to help pass the 13th amendment abolishing slavery. Two years after the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, Stone helped organize the first national American women's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts and the American Woman Suffrage Association focusing on winning women the right to vote at a state and local level. From 1872 until her death in 1893 she coedited with her husband the women's suffrage newspaper *Woman's Journal.*

At the Ohio level, there are several major players but here are six of note:

Harriet Taylor Upton (1853-1945). Upton was president of the Ohio Woman's Suffrage Association. She brought the headquarters of the National American Woman Suffrage Association to Warren, Ohio in 1903 where it would remain until 1910. She led efforts to get women's suffrage into the Ohio Constitution in 1912, failing with 57 percent voting against it. In 1920 Upton was the first woman to become a vice chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Florence E. Allen (1884-1966). Allen was a graduate of Western Reserve University and New York University's law school. She started her own law practice in Cleveland in 1914.

Florence Allen, photo courtesy of the Ohio History Connection

She was active in the Women Suffrage Party and in 1911visited 66 of Ohio's 88 counties fundraising and collecting petitions to put women's suffrage on the Ohio ballot. Allen was appointed assistant prosecutor of Cuyahoga County in 1919 and in 1922 she was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court. She was the first woman judge to serve on a federal court when President Franklin Roosevelt appointed her to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1934 where she served for 32 years.

Hallie Quinn Brown (1845-1949). Hallie was born to freed slaves. She graduated from Wilberforce University and completed advanced courses in New York and Paris. She taught in Dayton public schools, Central State University and Wilberforce and was dean of women at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Brown was a skilled public speaker on civil rights, temperance and women's suffrage. She helped found the National League of Colored Women in 1896 which joined other groups in becoming the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) serving as its president from 1920 to 1924.

Pauline Perlmutter Steinem (1864-1940). Steinem grew up in Germany and moved to Toledo in 1887. She was the first woman elected to the Toledo school board and was active in Toledo suffrage efforts becoming president of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association in 1908. In time for President Wilson's inauguration, she marched in the Washington, D.C. Women's Suffrage Parade. Steinem was the paternal grandmother of feminist Gloria Steinem.

Bettie Wilson (1850-1928). Wilson taught in the Cincinnati public schools for 40 years and was elected to the Hartwell school board in 1896. She was an officer in the Hamilton County Suffrage Association from 1910 to 1920 and twice ran unsuccessfully for the State House of Representatives.

Belle Sherwin (1869-1955). Sherwin was founder of the Consumers League of Ohio lobbying for fair wages and safe working conditions for women. After the Cuyahoga County Woman's Suffrage party disbanded in 1920, the Cleveland Chapter of the League of Women Voters was formed and Sherwin helped register 41,416 women to vote by October, 1920. She was president of the National League of Women Voters from 1924 to 1934.

Ottawa County Connections

In learning about these early suffragettes, I wondered what were the training grounds to help these women accomplish so much. Certainly one social construct was the local women's organizations providing a structure that made state and national campaigns possible. Two organizations of note are the Port Clinton's "Literary and Social Club" (LSC) and Lakeside's "Lakeside Federation of Women's Clubs" (LFWC).

Started in 1881, the Port Clinton Literary and Social Club (LSC) was originally known as the Ladies Social Club changing the name to reflect a more scholarly emphasis. The first public library in Port Clinton was founded by this group and that library is today known as the Ida Rupp Library. LSC was instrumental in helping to start other women's clubs in Oak Harbor, Elmore, and Genoa.

In 1894, two Lakeside residents worked with members from the LSC in creating a federation of women's clubs. Along with Sandusky, Catawba Island and Bryan the group become known as the Lakeside Federation of Women's Clubs (LFWC). By 1917, the LFWC included 30 clubs offering "opportunities for the study of modern problems in the woman's sphere."

Lakeside Chautauqua was visited by leaders and prominent members of both the national and state suffrage organizations: Susan B. Anthony spoke in 1895 blending together three speeches she gave at the May 1893 Columbian Exposition (Chicago's World Fair) on the topics of "Organization Among Women As An Instrument In Promoting the Interests of Political Liberty", "General Remarks to the Woman's Auxiliary Congress of the Public Press Congress", and "The Moral Leadership of the Religious Press"; Florence E. Allen spoke in 1923 to the regional conference of the Women's Christian Temperance Union on the topic of child welfare; and Pauline Perlmutter Steinem spoke in 1908 to the Lakeside Federation of Women's Clubs on "The Advancement of Women".

These seemingly innocuous ladies book clubs and garden clubs were the foundation stones for issue-oriented organizations such as the Women's Suffrage Association and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. By networking with women of similar backgrounds, they gained self-confidence and acquired the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to advocate for change in their own cautious ways.

Legacy

In the 1920 presidential election, only 36% of women eligible to vote did vote. It would not be until the 1980s that women would match men in voting numbers. In those 244 years since Abigail Adam's original admonition to John, laws have been enacted giving women a voice and representation thereby bringing fair justice for Abigail's plea to "remember the ladies".

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