



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF LAWRENCE/DOUGLAS COUNTY

# Men's role in women's suffrage: a Kansas perspective

Presented by

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# TOPICS

- Kansas timeline
- Electoral patterns
- Kansas suffrage campaign 1911-1912
- The voters
- Supporting male organizations
- Endorsing male organizations
- Endorsing men
- Opposing men (and women)

# Women's suffrage was astonishing

- Men had always opposed it -- until they didn't.
- Women had no power to force it.
- Referenda were by secret ballot.
- A majority of men had to be convinced.
- Men controlled the press, pulpits, public halls, street corners, barber shops & saloons.
- All political parties & all money interests were worried about losing power.

# We can't be certain why a majority of men changed their minds

- But: Kansas egalitarianism was absolutely critical.
  - Declaration of Independence, abolitionism, founding of Lawrence, Underground Railroad, Bleeding Kansas, Civil War, 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Homestead Act, prohibition.
- Kansas set the leading example for national egalitarianism.
- Other motives:
  - Many men had daughters they cared about.
    - Bigger families then meant fewer men without daughters.
  - Some men couldn't lie to their wives about how they voted.

# Kansas role in US suffrage

- 1859-Kansas statehood. Kansas state constitutional convention defeated full suffrage, but granted women's property rights (1<sup>st</sup> state).
- 1861-Legislature granted suffrage in school district elections (2<sup>nd</sup> state).
- 1867-Full suffrage passed legislature (1<sup>st</sup> state). Referendum defeated. Black suffrage also defeated.
- 1875-Kansas Supreme Court voided school district voting.
- 1887-Legislature granted municipal suffrage (1<sup>st</sup> state).  
Woman mayor elected in Argonia (1<sup>st</sup> in U.S.).
- 1894-Full suffrage passed legislature. Referendum defeated.
- 1903-Legislature granted tax and bond suffrage.
- 1912-Referendum granted full suffrage (7<sup>th</sup> state, 1<sup>st</sup> non-Western).
- 1919-Kansas ratified 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (4<sup>th</sup> state).
- Various years-Kansas had highest share of woman legislators.
- 1978-Nancy Kassebaum was 1<sup>st</sup> full-term first-term woman Senator.
- 1991-Joan Finney was 1<sup>st</sup> woman governor to defeat an incumbent.

# Kansas significance

- Suffragists conducted some 873 campaigns across the country. (Source: Carrie Chapman Catt.)

A large majority lost.

- Out of roughly 12 campaigns in Kansas, 7 WON (counting legislation and referendum as 2 campaigns).
- Kansas scored many firsts.
- Kansas was seen as a progressive leader.
- Kansas was preceded in full suffrage only by western states with relatively few women.

Fewer women meant less political fallout. But Kansas had equal numbers of men and women.



# Kansas patterns 1859-1919

- Top politicians tended to be either sympathetic or open supporters.
- The legislature was more sympathetic than voters.
- Leaders & voters grew more favorable each decade.
- Press support leaned positive.
- Pastors were mostly positive, with some largely Catholic exceptions.
- Political parties got in the way. If one endorsed, another would oppose. Otherwise parties tended to be sympathetic.
- Liquor interests were the strongest opponents.
- Large national industries opposed, fearing labor laws.

# Kansas (male) voters

- 1861 - legislated.
- 1867 - 9,070 for. 19,857 against.
- 1887 - legislated.
- 1894 - 95,302 for. 130,139 against.
- 1912 - 175,246 for. 159,197 against.
- 1919 - legislated.

# Kansas Party support

- 1867 Both Republican and Democratic parties opposed
- 1887 Prohibition and Republican parties for; Democrats opposed
- 1894 Populists for; Republicans stood down; Democrats opposed
- 1912 Parties not asked to take a stand, but were supportive at rallies

# **Sitting Kansas governors endorsed every effort**

- 1861 - Gov. Charles L. Robinson
- 1867 - Gov. Samuel J. Crawford
- 1887 - Gov. John Martin
- 1894 - Gov. Lorenzo D. Lewelling
- 1912 - Gov. Walter R. Stubbs
- 1919 - Gov. Henry J. Allen

## As of 1898:

“It is extremely rare to find a prominent man in Kansas, except certain politicians, who openly opposes woman suffrage. With a very few exceptions the most eminent cordially advocate it, including a large number of ministers, lawyers and editors.”

Susan B. Anthony, *History* Vol. IV, p. 517

# The 1911-12 Campaign

- Endorsers
  - Every women's organization
  - Nearly every other organization
  - Most newspapers
- Active Male Supporters
  - Men's League for Women's Suffrage
    - The Governor and other leading politicians were members
  - Good Government Club of Topeka

# 1911-12 Opponents

- Scattered women in most towns
- Scattered newspapers
- Out-of-state liquor interests allegedly spent \$1M! but were ineffective due to lack of saloons and zero organized local support.
  - \$1M is like \$15M today, for only 1/3 the electorate
  - Suffragists spent only \$16K
- Last minute scurrilous propaganda was predicted by spies & effectively countered
- Theodore Roosevelt refused his support

# Female opponents

- The Kansas female opponents we know about:
  - Did not form organizations
  - Spoke out in letters to editor or statements in meetings recorded by suffragists
  - Apparently liked traditional roles because it gave them control over their lives
  - Were strong women who saw themselves as powers behind the throne.



# Liquor interest opponents

- 1867, 1887, 1894: saloons and liquor interests were main centers of opposition
- 1881- Kansas passed prohibition of saloons (not of liquor!)
- Thereafter numbers of saloons gradually declined as women lobbied for enforcement

# Lessons?

- Egalitarian principles took on moneyed interests plus fear plus traditional roles -- and won.
- It took 6 decades in Kansas, 7 decades in the U.S.
- Male conscience was the arena, not the enemy.
- But no battle is won forever.
- Today 1/3 of all new Kansas voter registrations are being suspended, victims of a rising new antiegalitarianism.
- This time around, women and men will help secure each other's suffrage.

**END**

Comments or questions? Contact:

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