

The Woman's Suffrage Movement: Dayton, Ohio (1890-1920)

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Through the Eyes of Pioneers

What was the Women's Suffrage Movement?

The Woman's Suffrage Movement was a social-political movement led mainly by women who wanted suffrage (i.e. the right to vote) for women. These women (and men) were viewed as pioneers and activists, who had a new and different vision for women in the United States. They saw the need for change, and let out a call to action that was heard across the United States.

The stories and experiences of women from Dayton, Ohio open the door for us on the Women's Suffrage Movement and activists at the local level. The seven women presented here chronicled their involvement in the movement: Hallie Q. Brown, Katharine Kennedy Brown, Martha McClellan Brown, Charlotte Reeve Conover, Jesse Leech Davisson, Louise Achey Kennedy and Katharine Wright (Haskell). Through their local activism, suffragettes like these, shaped and advanced the larger national transformation; in the process, their work challenged notions of citizenship that focus only on the vote event as the secured the vote for American women.

How did these women participate in the Women's Suffrage Movement?

They participated through the attendance of meetings, the distribution and creation of literature on the subject such as leaflets, pamphlets, articles, etc., and by attending marches both locally and nationally. They also went out into the community and tried to engage with their fellow citizens and garner more support for the cause. One way they did this was through polling voters (i.e. qualified males) to see where they stood on the issue of women's suffrage and to find out whether or not they could count on their vote that election year. An example of this call to action can be seen

below in a quote from a general membership letter from Harriet Taylor Upton, President of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association to Ohio suffragists on what they could do to help with the cause:

If you live in the country divide your community into districts and see that some woman interviews every voter in that district. The rural telephone makes this work less laborious than formerly. If you live in a city, gather together a number of women, divide your city into precincts and assign a woman to each one. She in turn may divide her district into streets or even blocks and thus lighten the labor.

What was the experience like for these women in their community as they tried to garner support for their cause? It was not always an easy time for these women, as they faced opposition to their cause just like many other women in other areas of the country. They had to remain strong in the face of adversity and stay positive. They were often reminded of this in leaflets and other literature sent out by the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association. For example, Harriet Taylor Upton in the same general membership letter writes:

Be patient with all who do not agree with you. Never lose your temper. We can afford to be pleasant. Talk to everybody as if he or she believed. Never admit a man or woman is opposed.

While their experiences of women suffragists may not have always been positive, the outcome of their battle ultimately was, and on August 18, 1920 the 19th Amendment was passed. It states:

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.

Did you know?

After the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, the cause of women's suffrage transformed into one of voter education. The battle for suffrage had been won, but now there was a new challenge. Educating half of the population on how to be responsible voters and what their rights and duties were as voters. In Dayton, Ohio, the Woman's Suffrage Party of Montgomery County evolved into the Women Voters of Dayton and Montgomery County.

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