



THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN HOPEWELL VALLEY - PART ONE 1776-1916

by Joseph R. Klett

*This article was inspired by the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the federal constitution granting women voting equality in the U.S. It also stems from current efforts by The Hopewell Museum and HVHS, partnering together, to reimagine how we exhibit and interpret the myriad stories of life and change in Hopewell Valley. The material presented below represents preliminary research into the subject of how residents of our community were informed by local newspapers about developments in the Women's Suffrage Movement, and more specifically what these same sources tell us about local activities. For broader information about the movement statewide, the reader is directed to *Reclaiming Lost Ground: The Struggle for Woman Suffrage in New Jersey (1993)*, by Neale McGoldrick and Margaret Crocco. New Jersey State Library has posted a helpful "New Jersey Suffrage Timeline" based on this work at <https://libguides.njstatelib.org/votesforwomen/timeline>. References to events at the international, national, and state levels are generally given below only to provide context or if they were reported in the local news. This is limited by the extent of surviving issues of *The Hopewell Herald*.*

Surely the folks in Hopewell Township were paying attention in 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Frederick Douglass, and others organized the first American women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y. At this monumental meeting, the convention's "Declaration of Sentiments" called for the enfranchisement of women. For New Jerseyans the question at that time was actually one of *re-enfranchisement*. Under our state's 1776 Constitution, women could qualify to vote and many exercised this civic right. New Jersey was the only one of the 13 original states to allow this, at least prior to statutory restriction of suffrage to free, white males in 1807. As reports of the Seneca Falls meeting reached New Jersey, older residents of Hopewell Valley must have recalled that

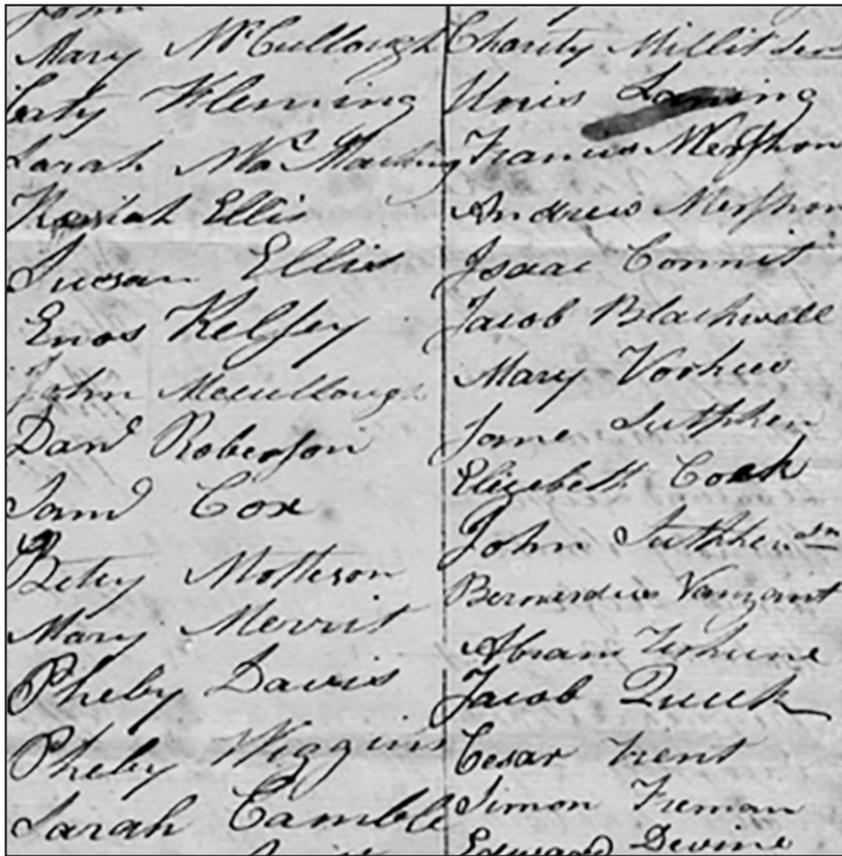


In November, 1913, these New Jersey suffrage delegates posed outside the headquarters of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Washington, DC. They headed next to the White House, where they lobbied President Wilson to support the suffrage amendment pending before Congress. Credit: Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/item/2016865053)

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The Hopewell Valley Historical Society was formed in 1975 by a group of citizens interested in preserving the heritage of Hopewell Valley. Today we are dedicated to collecting, preserving and disseminating that heritage. We achieve this through programs in the community and the publication of this newsletter.

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A section of Montgomery Township's 1801 voting list showing a considerable number of women.
Photo courtesy: New Jersey State Archives and the author.

not-so-distant time in their own local history when women who held real or personal property worth £50 proclamation (paper) money could cast ballots at public elections. An 1801 voting list from Montgomery Township in the holdings of the State Archives enumerates the names of many female voters in that neighboring municipality.

Hopewell Township's rosters during the 1776-1807 period (now lost) also must have included many eligible women. Exercise of the suffrage right would have been recalled by those early female voters who survived to 1848 or remembered by the relatives of those who had not.

During the seven decades that followed the Seneca Falls convention, the women's suffrage movement in the U.S. waxed and waned in public discourse. During the Civil War, the debate was largely deferred. Following the abolition of slavery in the U.S. in 1865 and the constitutional enfranchisement of black men in 1870, the question of equal voting rights for women came back to the fore. The New Jersey Woman Suffrage Association

had been founded in 1867 by Lucy Stone. In 1878, California Republican Senator Aaron A. Sargent, working with Susan B. Anthony, proposed to amend the federal charter once more by prohibiting the restriction of suffrage based on gender. The measure was defeated repeatedly by Democrat majorities in the U.S. Senate. It would take another half century to make this hoped-for constitutional change a reality.

We know from articles in *The Hopewell Herald* and the *Trenton Times* that Hopewell Valley's news-reading population was at least informed of state-level, national, and international developments regarding suffrage during this 50-year period. Before we delve into the news coverage, however, it is important to note that the suffrage movement was complex. First, it relied on hundreds and ultimately thousands of women and men to be *local* activists—to publicly demonstrate, write letters, keep the issue in the news, and bring about changes state by state. This was especially true in the eastern part of the country. Most of the western states

already allowed women to vote by the time the right was guaranteed nationally. Second, the movement's endgame *depended* on those who held the franchise in the East—that is, male voters and political officials—to embrace the value of granting voting equality to their wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and neighbors. Third, one might be tempted to guess most women favored equal suffrage rights from

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The author is Executive Director of the New Jersey State Archives, president of The Hopewell Museum, and a life member of the Society. He thanks colleagues Jack Davis and Doug Dixon for sharing their own findings.

The article that appears in this issue covers the years 1776-1916. In a forthcoming newsletter, Part 2 will discuss events of 1917-20 and provide more detail on the individuals involved in the pro-suffrage movement in Hopewell Valley.

Women's Suffrage Movement in Hopewell Valley (continued from page 942)

the start (just as we might forget that the movement depended on both sexes). This was simply not the case. There were many outspoken female anti-suffragists. Fourth, the campaign for suffrage was intertwined with the Temperance Movement and the call for prohibition of alcohol sales. And finally there is the fact that suffrage movement leaders in certain quarters employed exclusionary tactics to prevent women of color from participating prominently.

As to local news reporting, surely many items were copied (perhaps verbatim) from larger outlets in Trenton, New York, and Philadelphia. Nonetheless, Hopewell Valley readers were being educated about developments far and wide, at least sporadically. In 1882, for example, the weekly *Hopewell Herald* reported Congress's appointment of a Select Committee on Women's Suffrage in March, and then the slim defeat of a suffrage bill in the New York Assembly in May. Following Election Day in 1895, the *Herald* relayed a report of Massachusetts' defeated proposition to grant women suffrage in municipal affairs. "The hopes of the friends of female suffrage have been buried beneath an avalanche of ballots," the article declared.

In 1902, the *Herald* carried Elizabeth Cady Stanton's obituary, referring to her as "the first woman to advocate woman suffrage and one of the most active members of her sex in advanced thought ..." In 1905, the paper apprised Hopewell Valley residents of universal suffrage in Austria. An article from May 27, 1909, shows there was active discourse on the subject at home. On the same day, the *Trenton Times* announced that the regular meeting of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) at the temperance parlor on Main Street, Pennington, would feature a debate on the suffrage issue. Mrs. I. R. Clarkson would argue in favor, and Mrs. E. D. Wagner in opposition. In 1910, *Herald* readers learned of developments in Canada, England, and Portugal, with the paper's January 5th issue

reporting that "A Canadian statesman proposes to solve the woman suffrage problem by giving the ballot to all women who have babies."

As World War I erupted in Europe in 1914, the national American conversation on suffrage heated up. So too did local discourse. Articles appear regularly in both the *Herald* and the *Trenton Times* starting in early 1915, giving us insights into area politics and players. This coincides with the approach of the 1916 presidential election. The Republican Party had supported women's suffrage since 1878. By 1916, both parties' platforms included pro-suffrage planks. The candidates—challenger Republican Charles Evans Hughes and incumbent Democrat Woodrow Wilson—each professed support for a federal amendment.

One of the first news items found in 1915 was of particular interest to the author since it revealed that his home on Broad Street in Hopewell Borough, next door to The Hopewell Museum, was a hub of activity for local suffragists. The *Times* reported on February 12 that a "mass meeting" would take place the following evening at the Carroll Robbins Elementary School in Trenton, where the city's Woman's Suffrage Campaign Committee would host several speakers. Among them was Montana suffragist Florence Leech. The article went on to say, "This afternoon Miss Leech will speak at a meeting at the home of Dr. George Van Neste, of Hopewell."

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House of Anna & Dr. George Van Neste on north side of East Broad Street, Hopewell, where Florence Leech spoke at a suffrage meeting. Credit: Early 20th century postcard (Hopewell Museum)

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Florence Leech, a 1912 graduate of the University of Montana, was a leader in Montana's successful suffrage campaign of 1914. She came to NJ to help with the fight here in 1915.

Credit: "Women in Montana Politics" at exhibits.lib.umt.edu

Her compelling address the previous evening was reported as follows:

Some people seem to feel that this idea of giving the vote to women is a visionary scheme of a few discontented women. Because we ask for the suffrage we are accused of being 'man-haters,' of wanting to supplant the men and to take all the offices away from them. One of your Assemblymen said last Monday night, at the time that the vote was taken on the suffrage bill, that he introduced the bill providing for a tax on bachelors in the hope that before another amendment could be submitted to the voters five years hence, all the suffragists would be married and this suffrage movement might be buried forever. The inference seems to be that we work for votes only because we have not won voters.

I wish I could introduce this Assemblyman to a few hundred suffragists that I have met since coming to New Jersey—fine, home-loving women and mothers, who realize that the ballot is a very powerful weapon to be used in protection of their homes. It so happens that every officer in the State Suffrage Association is a married woman, and so might not be greatly affected by the tax on bachelors.

Any one who speaks today of burying the suffrage movement is exposing an appalling ignorance of history, for suffrage is a matter of history now, not of prophecy. I live in that part of the United States where women do actually vote, and every one who lives there knows that suffrage is a success and that it has come to stay. In the West, we simply

take it for granted, just as you take man suffrage for granted. Last November the men of my native State, Montana, gave the vote to the women.

They tell us that they felt that giving a vote to the women who had come out there as their companions and had done their share in developing the State was simply giving them a square deal.

The thing that surprises me about the attitude of Eastern people [...] is that they act as if they were proposing something entirely new and original in woman suffrage. They allow themselves to be carried away by direful prophecies and surmises about what might happen if women get the vote. The truth of the matter is that other States and countries have done the experimenting and there is nothing uncertain about the effects.

Miss Leech's address to the women and men of Hopewell Valley gathered at the Van Neste house was probably similar. It is interesting to note that such local events were often accompanied by musical programs and dances (as was the case with the "mass meeting" mentioned above), and bake sales. The Hopewell audience was clearly inspired by the Montana activist. A day after her remarks there, the *Times* reported under the headline "Hopewell To Have Suffragists' Club" that about 50 women had attended and were now forming their own group. A committee consisting of Miss Marie Davie, Miss Marjorie Fetter, Mrs. W. Y. Young, Mrs. George Van Neste, and Mrs. Edward Jones would forward the organizational plans. Miss Leech would be in charge of the work during the month.

On April 29, the new "club" hosted pro-suffrage Assemblyman James Hammond at Columbia Hall in Hopewell Borough—now Hopewell Theater—in recognition of National Suffrage Day (May 1). Mrs. Anna Van Neste, her husband George, and Miss Kathryn Davis were the organizers. The *Times* reported afterward that "the cause of woman suffrage was advanced materially" at this gathering.

Local opposition was about to be voiced loudly, however. On May 23, Claire Kulp Oliphant of Trenton delivered an *anti-suffrage* speech to over 200 people in Hopewell, giving "many interesting figures" and explaining "the success and failure of both sides of the suffrage question." Mrs. Oliphant had fervently opposed the pro-vote movement for years, and was affiliated with the New Jersey Anti-Suffrage League. In July 1915, the Hopewell

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Women's Suffrage Movement in Hopewell Valley (continued from page 945)



Columbia Hall, where a large Hopewell suffrage event was held in 1915. Built in the late 19th century, the structure was replaced in 1940 by the Colonial Playhouse (now Hopewell Theater). Credit: "Healthful, Historic Hopewell" pamphlet (Hopewell Museum)

Suffrage League sent a delegation to the regular meeting of Trenton's Woman's Suffrage Campaign Committee, which also featured a cake and pie sale. Then in September, the anti-suffragists met again in Hopewell, at Grange Hall, presenting Mrs. Frank J. Gooding of Westfield. Mrs. Gooding was referred to by the *Times* as "an eloquent speaker" who had recently addressed the Princeton College faculty and testified at the State House. The headline of a *Times* article on September 15 read, "Colored Girl to Preach Suffrage." It reported on street meetings in Trenton including one that would feature Miss Helen A. Holman, "a young colored woman of New York City, who will speak under the auspices of the Socialist county organization in conjunction with the State committees, which has arranged a tour through New Jersey ..."

By the fall of 1915, the question of amending New Jersey's state constitution to expand suffrage to all male *and female* citizens of legal age was on the ballot. Two weeks before Election Day, the *Trenton Times* interviewed the aged Enoch Armitage Titus of Glen Moore, Hopewell Township. Regarding this esteemed, rural nonagenarian, the capital-city paper announced on October 14 that "At 94, He Favors Woman Suffrage." Mr. Titus was a devoted member of Pennington Presbyterian Church. The *Times'* piece reported that he had considered the equal rights question from all angles and finally decided that "for religious, moral and social reasons, women

should have the right of the ballot." Old Enoch was surely pleased to read in the same paper a few days later:

Suffrage Meeting Is Well Attended – HOPEWELL, Oct. 16.—The suffragists held an interesting and well attended street meeting tonight at Broad Street and Greenwood Avenue, and the addresses which were given by Trenton speakers were listened to with a great deal of interest. The suffrage movement is a live issue here and those in favor of the movement are working diligently for the cause, and many of the antis have been converted during the present campaign. It is believed that at the election Tuesday Hopewell will give a large number of votes in favor of the amendment.

Enoch Titus might well have been encouraged by the overall results even though the amendment measure was defeated. According to election records in the State Archives, 40 percent of Mercer County's voters approved women's suffrage, and 42 percent favored it statewide. The tallies for Hopewell Valley are shown in the State's published returns: in Hopewell Borough, 62 in favor vs. 193 against; in Hopewell Township, 82 in favor vs. 225 against; and in Pennington Borough, 58 in favor vs. 97 against. The totals were closer in other parts of the county. In Hamilton, Hightstown, Lawrence, and West Windsor, the women's suffrage actually won the day. The *Times* reported that suffragists considered the outcome to be a victory:

In the report of the election returns so much stress has been laid on the majority against the amendment that few people realize that the suffragists got about 140,000 votes, and needed only 25,000 more to win. If any politician had been told two weeks ago that 140,000 votes would be cast for woman suffrage he would have thought the maker of the prophecy was crazy.

The "Suffrage Notes" column continued relative to the national scene:

The minority votes for suffrage this year were formidable not only in numbers but in quality. To a remarkable extent they included the flower of the men eminent for intelligence and public service, from President Wilson and Thomas A. Edison down.

Throughout November, the *Hopewell Herald* reported on a number of national items indicating the progress of the pro-suffrage movement. On the

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15th, Hopewell Valley readers were informed of the election of the nation's first congresswoman, Republican Jeanette Rankin of Montana, and her work on social causes. On the 22nd, the paper announced that the late Mrs. Frank Leslie's had bequeathed \$1.5 to \$2 Million to Carrie Chapman Catt, President of the New York Woman's Suffrage Association, to advance the cause of women's voting rights. Then on the 29th came report of the death of suffragist and social welfare worker Inez Milholland Boissevain, who had just completed campaigning on "the women's special train which crossed the continent" to elect Republican presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes.

The last item to address before closing this installment is a debate in the *Herald* sparked by its editor, Edwin V. Savidge. He seems to have supported the suffragists or at least liked to promote the public discourse. The following editorial appeared, also on November 29th:

Woman suffrage has come to the front this year. The recent election enabled the women in a number of states to cast their votes on an equality with the men and, strange as it may seem to some men, the heavens did not fall. As a matter of fact,

the subject of woman's political rights looms so large that it is only a matter of a few years, in all probability, before it will be in operation in all the states. With both candidates in the recent campaign favoring it and both great parties regarding it sympathetically, the road to complete suffrage will from this time on be easy to travel.

On December 6, however, Savidge declared on the front page that "the cause of suffrage has received a serious setback" in light of 16 wins for anti-suffrage campaigns across the states. Two columns over, the following letter to him was published under the headline "Road To Woman Suffrage Hard One To Travel"

I was somewhat surprised to read in the last number of the HERALD a statement to the effect that woman suffrage in all the states is only a matter of a few years.

I beg to differ with you. Because a few political leaders, ambitious to stay in office, or to be elected to office, profess to advocate votes for women it does not follow, by any means, that the road to complete women suffrage from now on is an easy one to travel. The fact is that many people, both men and women, who formerly favored equal

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VOTES FOR WOMEN A SUCCESS

The Map Proves It

<p>SUFFRAGE GRANTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1869 WYOMING 1893 COLORADO 1896 IDAHO 1896 UTAH 1910 WASHINGTON 1911 CALIFORNIA 	<p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">White States, Full Suffrage; Shaded States, Partial Suffrage; Dotted State, Presidential, Partial County and State Suffrage; Black States, No Suffrage.</p>	<p>SUFFRAGE GRANTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1912 ARIZONA 1912 KANSAS 1912 OREGON 1913 ILLINOIS 1914 MONTANA 1914 NEVADA
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Would any of these States have adopted EQUAL SUFFRAGE if it had been a failure just across the border?

IMITATION IS THE SINCEREST FLATTERY!

National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company, Inc., 505 Fifth Avenue, New York

Pro-suffrage poster for 1915 state referendums in the East, showing the movement's recent progress in the West. The suffrage measure was defeated in New Jersey. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Women's Suffrage Movement in Hopewell Valley (continued from page 947)



Polemical 1915 anti-suffrage poster depicts a suffrage supporter as a crazed fanatic.
Credit: digitalcollections.nypl.org

suffrage have changed their minds during the last campaign and are now opposed to it.

Yours truly, B—

One of the local suffragists, "C.B.G.," could not resist contradicting this communication. She or he responded to it with great optimism in the next issue of December 13:

The press is a convincing indication of public opinion, and the sweeping statement of the united

press of the country evolved from the recent election results seems to warrant the statement of THE HERALD editor that Woman Suffrage in all states is but a matter of few years.

A differing critic of our editor for his expression in the last issue, inferring that a few political leaders, ambitious to stay in office are professing to advocate 'votes for women,' are but an unmeant but forceful admission of the growing power of Woman Suffrage and the value of woman's vote. And remembering, not sixteen defeats but millions of them, it seems from dishonest counts, purchased votes by vice interests, irregularities in ballot printing, delayed distribution of the same, limited campaign fund, lack of political experiences and the many many factors for delay, and remembering, also the President of these United States of ours advocates Woman Suffrage, that all the political parties deemed it of sufficient power to necessitate putting it in their party platform, the new states gained for complete suffrage and their deciding voice in future issues, are not suffragists warranted in gathering together as they have never before to rejoice and be glad?

All things are valued by comparison. We rejoice in the victories, mighty ones of the past year which grew out of our defeats. And we will continue to cry 'Suffrage is Coming.'

C.B.G.

~ TO BE CONTINUED ~

Part 2 will discuss events of 1917-20 and provide more detail on the individuals involved in the pro-suffrage movement in Hopewell Valley.

DO YOU KNOW...?



North Main St., Pennington, 1950's. Note the sign pointing to 9 different destinations! The building with the Bendix & Philco signs sold appliances at this time and no longer exists.
Credit: Mike Thomsen/HVHS

Question: The white building to the north (which now includes Emily's Café & Catering) started out as what kind of recreational facility?

Answer will appear in next issue.