

**Public and Political: Documents of
the Woman's Suffrage Campaign in
British Columbia, 1871 - 1917:
The View from Victoria**
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In 1871, the English colony of British Columbia entered the four year old Dominion of Canada. This event culminated the political unification of British territory in continental North America. In October of the same year, a less spectacular, but certainly no less interesting event occurred in Victoria, the capital of British Columbia. Susan Anthony, the American suffragist, spoke at the Alhambra Hall to an enthusiastic audience - the newspapers do not say whether it was predominantly female or male - on the subject of woman's suffrage. It probably was not the first time that the people of Victoria had heard of the suffrage issue because they gave her quite a good reception, despite her strong words. In her lecture Miss Anthony had said, "The present condition of women is similar to that of slavery before the War".¹ Not everyone, however, was pleased by her presence or her statements on the right of women to vote. One woman wrote a letter to the local newspaper, *The Daily Colonist*, in which she informed Miss Anthony that a "woman's true sphere is in submitting herself to her husband and religiously fulfilling the marriage vows the wise organizers of society have prescribed."² Thus the newspaper recorded the opening arguments in a debate that was to cover almost a half century of the new province's history. Only eight months later the same newspaper reported that woman's suffrage had gone beyond the Alhambra Hall into the provincial legislature where a bill for woman's suffrage had received the support of only two members.³ For the next fifty years, women, agitating for an improvement in their legal and political status, became public and political figures as they make history through reports, newspapers, petitions, government bills, speaking engagements, and, finally, a referendum.

Starting in the 1880's there are frequent reports of the struggle for woman's suffrage and woman's rights in general, but the earliest instance recorded of women taking part in municipal elections is a result of an 1873 bill which gave women property holders the vote.⁴ As a result of that right, Silvestria Theodora Smith, widow of Philip Smith, and her two women friends, voted for Mayor.⁵ It is obvious that women did not exercise that right in large numbers. *The Colonist* reported that the "contest [was] robbed of its fairest feature".⁶

In 1882, a group was organized that would have a profound influence on the woman's suffrage movement in British Columbia. The women of Victoria persuaded Frances Willard, head of the American Women's Christian Temperance Union, to visit their city and she helped them found the provincial W.C.T.U. on July 3, 1882.⁷ Mrs. Cecilia Spofford, one of the sponsors of the visit, was to be involved in the women's cause until her death in 1938.⁸ The W.C.T.U. thought that women who had the vote

would support their temperance crusade and other moral reforms. In 1883, women in Victoria presented the Premier with what may have been the first suffrage petition.⁹

In 1884, women failed to secure provincial suffrage after Mr. Drake's amendment to the franchise bill was defeated. In 1885, the W.C.T.U. presented the first of many of its petitions to the Legislature for woman's suffrage.¹⁰ Again Drake presented a bill to admit women to the suffrage, and it was rejected by a vote of 14 to 9. *The Daily British Colonist* expressed its disappointment that women did not receive the franchise by pointing out "that politics will [n]ever become a thoroughly respectable and honourable profession until females are permitted to have a voice in the selection of members of the house."¹¹

According to Elsie MacGill, author of *My Mother, The Judge*, there were at least ten or eleven attempts to have a suffrage bill adopted by private members before the turn of the century.¹² In 1891, M.L.A. Brown presented a suffrage petition from the women of Victoria and introduced a Bill for Female Suffrage in the Legislature (Bill 74). The petition had a thousand signatures, but this did not prevent the bill from being defeated on its second reading by a vote of 17 to 10.¹³

In 1894, Lady Aberdeen, on a visit to British Columbia, founded Local Councils of Women in Victoria and Vancouver. Two of the sponsors and most active members were Mrs. Cecilia Spofford and Mrs. Maria Gordon Grant.¹⁴ The Local Council was another organization whose history and membership would become entwined with that of woman's suffrage. For instance, Maria Grant was the first woman in Victoria to be elected to the school board. She first won election in March of 1895 and was returned again in 1899. She was jointly nominated as a result of cooperation between the Victoria Local Council of Women and the W.C.T.U.¹⁵ After her first victory she expressed the hope that she would do her job so well that at least two more women would join her on the board in the next election.¹⁶

A typical year around the turn of the century for woman's suffrage was 1897. First of all, an amendment to the Incorporation of Towns Bill, by Mr. Helmcken, was defeated in the Legislature.¹⁷ Secondly, the W.C.T.U. was busy circulating a petition.¹⁸ Finally, the temperance theme which would keep occurring in suffrage arguments was the substance of a letter written to *The Daily Colonist* by "Onward". "Onward" said that "any person would be compelled to wish for the vote of responsible women to balance the vote of irresponsible men, who are so often led by the saloon owners and who have not one noble idea or high interest in life."¹⁹ In 1898, the by now annual petition contained the signatures of 2500 people, 1200 of whom were voters.²⁰

In 1899 women almost received the vote. Ralph Smith, member for Nanaimo, moved the second reading of a bill to extend the franchise to women. He said he had checked the proceedings of the Legislature where he discovered that the question of woman's suffrage had come up three or four times in the past (this seems to be a low figure), but never before with this seriousness. The vote for a second reading was 15 "for" to 17 "against". Mr. Hall, who had wanted to vote for the bill, said he had mistakenly cast his vote against it. If he had voted as he wished, the speaker would have cast his vote for woman's suffrage.²¹ In connection with the attempt to pass this bill, a letter from "British Columbian" said that 25,000 women signed a petition asking for the right to vote, a figure which was very high considering that later petitions never

approached that figure.²² As the 19th century drew to a close, the Legislature, during the last decade alone, had voted five times on the questions of suffrage.²³

Pausing at the turn of the century, it is important to point out that the struggle for woman's suffrage involved the right to vote in several types of elections, the women received the suffrage for each of them on separate occasions. First, there was the vote for school trustees, which women received after they had lost their previous right to vote in municipal elections. Then there was the municipal franchise which women would fight for all through the first decade of the twentieth century. Finally, there were the provincial and dominion franchises which they would win during and right after the First World War. In speeches and reports it sometimes is unclear which franchise is being discussed. Suffragists might be going to the Legislature to fight for their provincial rights or since the Legislature made the election laws for the municipalities they might be trying to get or protect their local voting rights. It must be kept in mind that the municipal franchise was the right of tax and rate payers only. Universal suffrage was not accepted by property owners.

In 1902, the Legislature was again petitioned for woman's suffrage. It was refused but *The Daily Colonist* in an editorial said, "It is a pity that while the Legislature was at it, it did not extend the suffrage to women."²⁴ In 1906, J.H. Hawthornthwaite, member for Nanaimo, introduced a bill entitled An Act to Extend the Franchise to Women. It was again defeated. This is the first example of the McBride Government rejecting a suffrage bill. Hawthornthwaite noted the Liberal party's attitude toward woman's suffrage while speaking on behalf of his bill. He said, "Wherever [sic] brought up in the House the Liberals had given it careful attention and in most instances supported it."²⁵ In 1909, Hawthornthwaite made another of his attempts which resulted once again in a defeat for woman's suffrage.²⁶ However, during this period women did receive, then lose, the vote in municipal elections due to a mistake in drafting an amendment to the Election Laws.

In 1906, the Legislature amended the Municipal Election Act to read:

Householders shall mean and include any person of the full age of twenty-one who occupies a dwelling, tenement, hotel or boarding house, and who shall, unless exempt by statute or municipal by-law, have paid directly to the municipality rates, taxes or fees of not less than two dollars for the current year.²⁷

The clause starting "unless exempt" opened up a loophole in the law that enabled any woman, not just a property owner, to register on the voting list in Victoria. A woman could pay the tax on the family's dog and be able to vote, or she could make the claim that since she was exempt by statute she was eligible to vote without paying any taxes.²⁸ As a result of this loophole 150 women were on the voters list in 1906.²⁹ Mrs. Spofford, who was then the provincial organizer for the W.C.T.U., was "one of the leaders of the ladies in their attempts to retain the suffrage".³⁰ In a speech on March 24, 1907, Mrs. Spofford said that the laws "needed the refining influence of the woman before they could be perfect....Then too, the influence of women in the government would be a purifying one."³¹ Nevertheless, women lost the right to vote in municipal elections which they had gained through the improper wording of the amendment. The Legislature amended the clause and took away their exemption.³² One of the reasons

given for disenfranchising women was that women who owned houses of prostitution would be able to vote in municipal elections and this could not be allowed!³³

The loss of the municipal franchise prompted Mrs. Spofford to write, "We have been presuming that the present is an age of most wonderful progression. Are we mistaken?"³⁴ A disgruntled Conservative shared the letter section for that day with her. He wrote, "If Mr. McBride and Mr. Bowser see fit to line up their forces on the side of the Property Owners' Association and the saloon as against the homes and moral well-being of our city, in this matter, they will have only themselves to blame if they find all the respectable men in the Conservative party getting out of it."³⁵

While the first seven years of the twentieth century appeared to be disastrous for the cause of woman's suffrage in the province, some hopeful movements were stirring among women's organizations. The Victoria Local Council of Women first passed a provincial Woman's Suffrage resolution in 1908.³⁶ On a national level, in 1910, the Council of Women officially supported suffrage and established a Standing Committee on Suffrage and Rights of Citizenship.

Helen MacGill claimed that, "From 1905 to 1910, inclusive, was a heyday of social and public welfare organizing in Vancouver."³⁷ The same was true for Victoria. Women's organizations were involved in hospital auxiliaries, nursing, charitable societies and a host of other good causes. However, the one subject which women in all organizations were happy to study was the law relating to the status of women in British Columbia. From pamphlets, prepared by Cecilia Spofford, Florence Hall and Helen Gregory MacGill on the status of women in British Columbia, one can read that a wife could be completely disinherited by her husband, that a child was the sole responsibility of the father, and that a girl of twelve could be given away in marriage by her father without the mother's consent.³⁸ Women had the dual frustration, therefore, of not being able to affect legislation that would change their legal rights and those of their children, and not being able to secure suffrage in order that they might, by their votes, influence the Legislature politically. From 1900 to 1910 they had experienced the frustration of failing to influence the Legislature. Since they knew from experience they would need the vote to change inequitable legislation, it is no coincidence that the first organization in British Columbia dedicated primarily to woman's suffrage was founded in conjunction with the Local Council of Women, in Victoria in December, 1910, with an initial membership of sixty.³⁹

The invitation for people to help found the Political Equality League was from Maria Gordon Grant, the Chairman of the Citizenship Committee of the Victoria and Vancouver Island Council of Women. It stated the aim of the League to be:

to secure the removal in British Columbia of the disabilities which rest on woman as a voter and citizen and to secure her political enfranchisement. The invitation includes both men and women, inasmuch as it is only by working side by side that we can build most effectively and successfully in the interests of our children, our homes and our Province.⁴⁰

Maria Grant was elected first President of the League. The purpose of the League was set forth in the first issue of *The Champion*, the monthly magazine of the new organization. It said, "We stand to emphasize the fact that *causes* of individual cases of

injustice can only be satisfactorily and finally dealt with by legislation in which women have a direct share."⁴¹ The women who founded the Political Equality League and *The Champion* were concerned with the vote as a means to an end, not an end in itself. They had found themselves powerless to affect changes in the law that would have improved the legal position of women in society; therefore, they concluded that, until they had the vote, they would not see reform legislation adopted.

The following year, May 1911, the first Suffrage Convention was held in British Columbia. The two main speakers were Mayor Taylor of Vancouver, who supported the women of the province, and promised that "anything he could do through the columns of the newspaper he represented to help on the propaganda work he was ready and willing to do",⁴² and Senator Cottrell from Washington State, who reported on the victory of woman's suffrage in his own state.

Before turning to the last triumphant years of struggle for woman's suffrage one must ask the question, why now? After a fifty year struggle, involving dozens of petitions, hundreds of meetings, and endless delegations why did the final six years lead to success? Some speakers credited the woman's war effort; contemporary writers suggested that the change in woman's relationship to the home led to her wanting the vote. A writer for *The Champion* said:

Most of the domestic activities which made home tolerable for women of an earlier day are now done far more efficiently and speedily outside the home: the making of clothes, the stocking of the cupboard, baking, cooking, even the mild domestic excitements of mending and knitting, the making of unnecessary tablecovers, cushions, anti-macassars, and the thousand and one other things with which women formerly occupied their fingers and saved themselves from thinking have disappeared.⁴³

Castell Hopkins in *The Canadian Annual Review* (1912) points to the rise of an industrial society. He said:

The pressure of enormous economic changes, the vast modern movements of population, the revolution in the social life and position of women, the elimination of the old-time religious code of manners and customs, the practice of equality in sex-relationships and the influx of women into myriad occupations and competitive lines of business were bound to have an influence in the new nations as well as in the old.⁴⁴

However, the fundamental reason was that the state had become involved in the regulation of many activities that women conceived of as their proper sphere so they felt the need to influence, in their turn, the decisions of the government on matters that so directly affected their interests. The women who wrote for *The Champion* made it clear that they understood this. They said:

As a matter of indisputable fact...politics have invaded the home, and women, if they would defend and safeguard their homes, must invade

politics...*Working Women* need the ballot to regulate conditions under which they work...*Housekeepers* need the ballot to regulate the sanitary conditions under which they and their families must live.⁴⁵

Turning from the specific grievances of the women in British Columbia, one soon learns that the methods used to gain woman's suffrage here were not unusual. Women repeated here the non-militant methods that had been tried and tested in other parts of the world. However, it is interesting to see the methods of persuasion that the Political Equality League used to spread the idea of woman's suffrage to women and men in British Columbia. First of all, they published their own newspaper, *The Champion*, which put B.C. suffragists in touch with women's rights around the world. Constant reference was made to the successful experiments in woman's suffrage in Australia and New Zealand. Writers pointed out repeatedly that the rate of infant mortality in New Zealand had gone down dramatically after women received the vote. News of the struggle in England always found a place in the columns of *The Champion*. Articles from the English magazine *Votes for Women* were reprinted while Christabel Pankhurst and Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence provided articles and interviews. Of course, the English suffragettes were no strangers to Victoria: Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst lectured during December, 1911, in Victoria,⁴⁶ and Miss Miller and Barbara Wylie also spoke in Victoria.⁴⁷

The columns of *The Champion* provide us with valuable information on how women undertook social change publicly at the grass-roots level. The cover of the magazine had one suggestion for propaganda. It said, "Read and pass on to a friend"; of course the hope was that every woman would bring her friends into the movement. Periodic subscription drives were held with prizes for the person who sold the most subscriptions.⁴⁸ The editors of *The Champion*, Dorothy Davis and Maria Grant, persuaded the C.P.R. to take on commission 650 copies of the magazine to sell on the trains in the province.⁴⁹

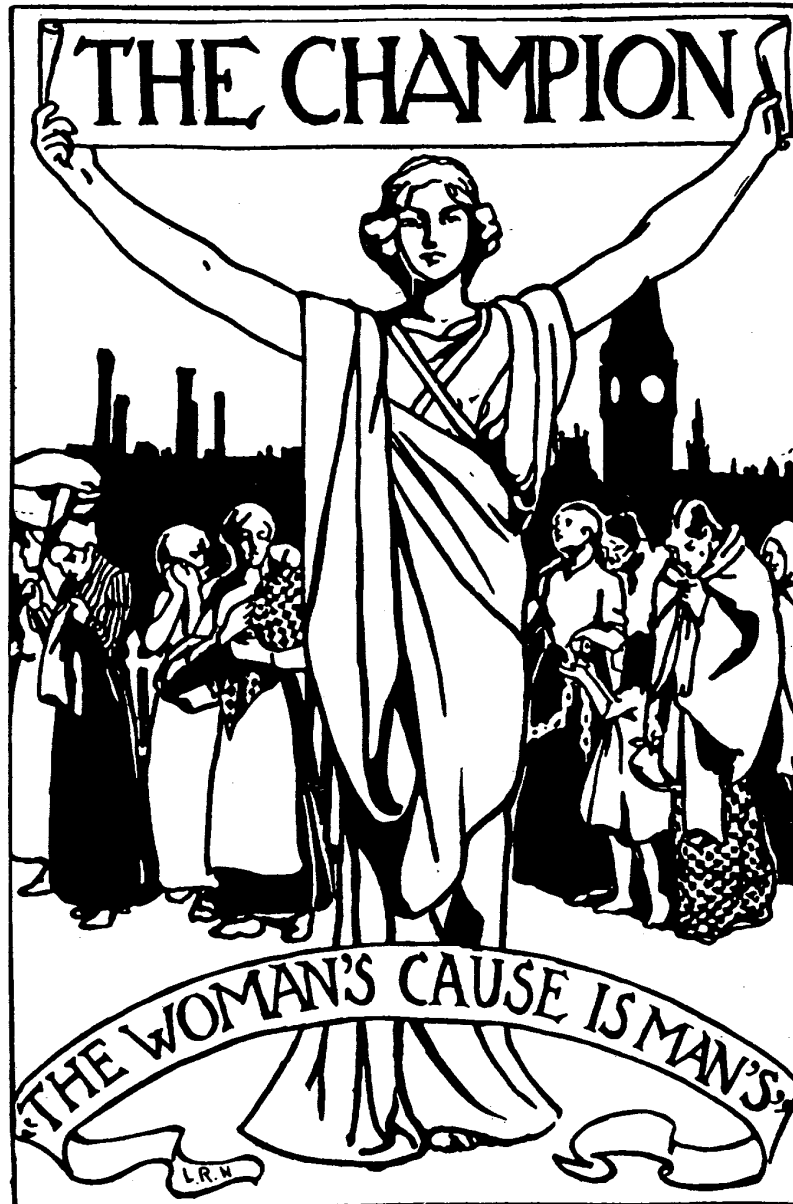
On a more personal level, the Political Equality League supported Dorothy Davis (later Mrs. Dorothy Bishop) as the organizer for the province.⁵⁰ She set out in September 1912, to tour the whole province. She stopped at more than twenty towns, sometimes organizing her own meetings while at other times speaking before socialist or W.C.T.U. meetings. From the number of branches formed in the towns she visited, obviously she had good success and met with receptive audiences.⁵¹ The League also supported Florence S. Hall (Mrs. Lashley Hall) as a provincial organizer.⁵² Thus the League had two women to make the necessary personal contacts to organize the less settled areas of the province.

Another method of advertising for suffrage was a booth at the local Fall fairs. A report of the Victoria Fair and Exhibition explained that "a staff of willing workers was kept busy all day distributing literature from the stalls, and, in other tents, selling *The Champion*, distributing badges, holding long arguments and short, and dispensing tea and coffee and cakes at a low charge to crowds of interested or hungry people."⁵³ Another tactic was the sponsoring of a float in the 1913 Citizen's Carnival of Victoria carrying the League's colours.

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No. 5

"The Woman's Cause is Man's"



By courtesy of "The Vote"

December, 1912

Price 5c. When Read, Please Hand to a Friend

On the float stood six young women in white, each at the door of her home, representing Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Canton - where women are citizens. At the back of the float were eleven beautiful girls, forming a chain of the States where women had been made citizens, each one triumphantly carrying her country's flag. On a pedestal stood Liberty, holding in her hands a wreath of laurel similar to those worn by the woman citizens. This she was waiting to place on the brow of British Columbia, who knelt at her feet, praying for freedom.⁵⁴

A motion picture called "Votes for Women" was touring the province in 1912. *The Champion* recommended that local branches obtain it for September, the crusade month of the League.⁵⁵ The movie was "a sociological study, a suffrage speech and drama." Dr. Anna Shaw and Jane Addams played themselves together with a cast of professional actors. The play was followed by pictures of the 1912 New York Suffrage Parade. The motion picture house was used in at least one local branch to show advertisements for its meetings.⁵⁶

In 1912, the women of British Columbia made their annual pilgrimage to the Legislature to ask Premier McBride to extend the suffrage to women "as it is at present enjoyed by the men". Maria Grant wrote to McBride "on behalf of the deputation of ladies representing ninety organizations" who wanted to know what the Government had decided to do. McBride's reply was that the issue had "again been considered by the Executive Council" and it would not be made a party issue.⁵⁷ The excuse for not adopting woman's suffrage was that not enough women in the province had demonstrated a desire for it. In response, the League carried out a provincial drive for signatures.⁵⁸ The first issue of *The Champion* in August, 1912, carried a notice that the suffrage petitions were available at the League's offices. In addition, it was suggested that a suffrage leaflet and invitation to join the League be left at every home visited. A notice to circulate the petition in the November issue indicates that someone in the Government had left his representatives of the suffrage organization with the impression that a petition campaign would be enough to get the women what they wanted. *The Champion* wrote:

It is the intention of the women to prove to the Government that the people of British Columbia are very much in earnest in their request and it is confidently asserted by some of the leaders in this movement that the Government are sufficiently broad minded to grant the vote to women as soon as they show that a large number demand it.⁵⁹

Someone had aroused expectations that were not fulfilled in 1913. This may help to explain why active women supported the Liberal Party in the next provincial election.

In February of 1913 the women of British Columbia returned to the office of Premier McBride. They submitted a petition with ten thousand signatures to the Premier on February 14, in the late afternoon, so that women from Vancouver would

have the time to get to Victoria for the meeting.⁶⁰ The Premier was noncommittal at the meeting but on February 20 in the Legislature he turned down the women's request for a government measure on their behalf, although he said he had no objections to a private member introducing such a bill. "When one of the Socialists introduced a private member's bill calling for female suffrage, it was defeated despite the fact that seven conservatives had voted for it."⁶¹ In the McBride papers there is correspondence advocating woman's suffrage from the local branches of the League Dorothy Davis submitted a report, printed in *The Champion*, of the resolution adopted almost unanimously at all her organizing meetings. The resolution read:

That this meeting realizes the urgent need that the Woman's point of view should be directly represented in the control of Legislation and all affairs of the Nation, and deplores the injustice to herself and the loss to the State involved in her present political position; and preferring that British Columbia should lead the other provinces of Canada in all matters of Progressive Reform, rather than follow, it calls upon the Provincial Government to introduce and carry, during the coming Session, a Bill giving the Vote to Women on the same terms as it is or may be given to Men.⁶²

The Liberal Party put woman's suffrage in their party platform in 1913.⁶³ The party adopted woman's suffrage in their convention at Revelstoke on May 30. A delegation of women addressed the convention on the issue. This was scarcely a mere election ploy for the reform vote. Many of the former M.L.A.'s of the party had voted for woman's suffrage bills when they sat in the house previous to the Conservative landslide. Secondly, some of the active suffragists were the wives of future members of the Government. Mary Ellen Smith and Evelyn Farris were the most prominent in this respect. Mr. Farris, soon to be Attorney General, had spoken at a public debate in 1908 in support of women having the vote.⁶⁴

Despite being turned down the year before, the women were back at the Legislature again in 1914. The women of Victoria were led by Miss Susan Crease in a visit to the Legislature during January.⁶⁵ Their plea for the suffrage was supported by several dozen hectographed resolutions which had been filled in by local meetings. The blank read:

At a meeting of approximately _____ of _____ held at _____ on _____ the following resolution was passed: It is resolved that it is in the best interests of the people of British Columbia that the parliamentary franchise be extended to women at the next session on the same terms as it has been or may be granted to men.⁶⁶

The blank petitions had for the most part been filled in by meetings of the various locals of labour unions in Vancouver. Helena Gutteridge, a socialist and feminist in Vancouver, was responsible for many of these petitions being submitted.⁶⁷

Women's suffrage was also supported by the Methodist Church at their Annual Conference. In a letter to Premier McBride, Reverend Lashley Hall, the president of the Methodist Conference, reported their resolution that

We are of the opinion that further extension of the franchise so as to permit women to vote in all elections on the same terms as men, would not only be just and right, but it could be speedily obtained, it would greatly aid in the moral uplift of social and political affairs for which we are all working.⁶⁸

In Victoria, on January 15, 1914, a referendum at the civic elections on the question of woman's suffrage had been carried by large majority.⁶⁹ Support for the women's cause was broadly based by 1914.

In 1915, women seemed to have been resting their forces in preparation for the next provincial elections. No woman's suffrage bill was presented in the Legislature that year.

The final campaign in 1916 for the woman's right to vote took place in the Legislature, in public opinion, and finally at the ballot box. Premier Bowser, who had succeeded McBride, tried to win back the support the Conservative Party had lost by their opposition to suffrage. For reasons that are not known, he refused to make woman's suffrage a Government measure, preferring to submit the matter in a referendum to the voters. Perhaps he hoped to gain favour from both sides of the question by posing as the man who had given "everyman" the chance to express his opinion on this issue. More likely, he did not want the re-election of the Conservatives to hinge upon suffrage sentiments. On March 17, 1916, John Place, member for Nanaimo, gave notice to the Legislature that he would introduce a bill entitled An Act to Extend the Franchise to Women.⁷⁰ On April 13, Premier Bowser told the Legislature that he would bring down an Amendment to the Provincial Elections Act and submit the matter as a referendum to the electors at the forthcoming general elections" which if approved, would make effective on January 1, next, the amendment to the Elections Act".⁷¹ A deputation of women, who interviewed the Premier on April 26, asked him to make the suffrage a matter of Government policy since women would not be able to vote in the general election on the question of their enfranchisement. Maria Grant pointed out that a Government bill would not "draw away the women from the work they were doing for the Red Cross and other patriotic purposes and [would not] compel them to go out and work for a referendum."⁷² However, this appeal did not sway Bowser and the Place bill was defeated on its second reading, May 17.⁷³

The Liberal Party, the suffrage referendum, and the prohibition referendum were successful on September 14, 1916. The success of all three in the province (the soldier's vote later reversed the results of the prohibition pool) has been attributed to the reform spirit of the times while another common view is that the supporters of the Liberals, woman's suffrage and prohibition were often the same people. As Elsie MacGill said,

The suffragists turned out in force for the Liberals. They did clerical work, organized telephone campaigns and although none took to the public platform, they conducted drawing room meetings at

which they arraigned the referendum as an anti-suffrage gesture, and cited the government's years of refusal of the vote as indicative of its true attitude.⁷⁴

It is not difficult to show that the Liberal party supported woman's suffrage. It is more difficult, if not impossible, to show that the same people voted for the Liberals and for the suffrage referendum. An indication of the Liberals' support for woman's suffrage is clear in the fact that as the government they did not wait for the official results of the referendum. Due to slowness in the reporting of the soldiers' vote it might not have become effective until 1918, but the Government [passed a bill in the Legislature which gave women both the vote and the right to run for office.⁷⁵ Women officially received the right to vote in British Columbia on April 5, 1917. another indication that the Liberals would be responsive to the demands of women was that they had passed an Equal Guardianship Bill "giving mothers equal right with fathers to the guardianship of their children" two weeks before the suffrage bill.

While it is almost self-evident that Liberal legislators were strongly in favour of woman's suffrage, an analysis of the referendum results shows that there is little correlation between the successes of the Liberal party and the suffrage referendum despite the fact that both won decisive victories in the province. The suffrage referendum passed in every riding and the Liberal Party almost reversed the thirty-five to four majority which the Conservatives had enjoyed earlier. When the returns of the civilian votes on a riding by riding basis are compared with the civilian returns on the suffrage referendum there is only a slight relationship discernible between the percentage of the two different votes in each riding. Using either the *Spearman Rank Correlation Test* or the *Kruskall-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance Test* the results showed no correlation between the rank of Liberal vote percentages by riding and a similar list for the Woman's Suffrage vote.⁷⁶ The top third of the ridings in terms of percentages of votes in favour of the suffrage varied from fifth to thirty-fifty in percentage of Liberal votes.

The interesting point is that there appears to be a lack of relationship between women's efforts on their own behalf and the results of the referendum. In those areas where women had worked longest and hardest to influence public opinion they did not do well, relatively speaking. In the city of Vancouver the referendum received only sixty-seven per cent (67%) of the vote and in Victoria, the birthplace of the movement, the referendum received only fifty-seven per cent (57%) of the vote while it did just as poorly in the areas surrounding Victoria such as Esquimalt and Saanich. In other ridings which contained towns of over twenty-five hundred (2500) people - with several significant exceptions - the suffrage referendum did poorly. The point is that rural ridings were more favourable to the question.⁷⁷ Lack of strong support in the major cities of the province where the Political Equality Leagues were strongest suggests that the suffrage advertising was totally ineffectual, or that a process of oversaturation worked against a strong positive vote or that the women's hard work saved the cities from rejecting the referendum altogether.

The lack of correlation between the referendum and Liberal votes does not mean that suffrage would have become an issue without the effort made by women, nor does it deny the fact that over the span of fifty years the work of women had changed the moral and intellectual values of men with regard to the female franchise. However, the

evidence of the referendum strongly implies that the final campaign in 1916 for woman's suffrage did little to change anyone's ideas in an empirically measurable way.

The involvement of women in politics did not end with their successful achievement of the vote. The legal disabilities from which they had suffered and their belief in the purifying influence of women in politics spurred them on to further action. In November, 1916, women were considering how to use the vote in their best interests. As Helen MacGill said, "Many women felt they should organize to avail themselves of their new won power in order to obtain better laws for women and children."⁷⁸ In Vancouver, they organized the Women's New Era League. Child welfare, education, recreation and care of the juvenile delinquent were concerns of the new League, whose first president, Susie Lang (Mrs. J.A. Clark), had been a member of the Political Equality League and the Mount Pleasant Suffrage League. In the thirties she was still public and political, working through the New Era League and the Vancouver Local Council of Women.

Debates arose over how to make the best use of the women's vote. Should women join existing political parties or create their own? The Local Council of Women in Victoria had a meeting in February, 1917, to discuss

whether women in possession of the franchise could best wield their power to secure legislation that should represent the ideals for which the women of the country had long and energetically laboured by joining existing organizations representing the two political forces, or whether or not greater service would be rendered to the state by a separate woman's organization as a third party.⁷⁹

Mrs. Grant revealed at this meeting the depth of her commitment to the woman's cause. "She believed that the woman's vote and a party aloof from either faction was the thin end of the wedge that would crack the skull of party government."⁸⁰ For a long time, the rhetoric of supporters of woman's suffrage had emphasized the purifying of government by the woman's vote and it is evident that many women accepted this view of themselves, making it their reason for future involvement in politics.

Footnotes

¹ *Daily Colonist*, October 26, 1871, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, October 27, 1871, p. 3

³ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1872, p. 2

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 28, 1875, p. 3

⁵ Elizabeth Forbes, *Wild Roses at Their Feet* (Victoria, B.C., 1971), p. 7.

⁶ *Daily Colonist*, January 14, 1874, p. 3.

⁷ Helen Gregory MacGill, *The Story of Vancouver Social Service*, 1943, p. 1.

⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, February 18, 1938, p. 6.

⁹ Elsie Gregory MacGill, *My Mother, The Judge: A Biography of Judge Helen Gregory MacGill* (Toronto, 1955), p. 124

¹⁰ H. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹¹ *Daily Colonist*, February 18, 1885, p. 2.

¹² E. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹³ H. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

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- ¹⁴ *Woman's Life and Work in the Province of British Columbia* (Victoria 1909), p. 80.
- ¹⁵ Linda Hale, "The British Columbia Woman's Suffrage Movement, 1890 - 1917", unpublished M.A. thesis, U.B.C., 1977, p. 20
- ¹⁶ *Daily Colonist*, March 12, 1895, p. 6; December 30, 1898, p. 5; March 31, 1937, p. 3.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 6, 1897, p. 6.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1897, p. 7.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 23, 1898, p. 5.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, February 25, 1899, p. 6
- ²² *Ibid.*, March 4, 1899, p. 8.
- ²³ The roll call votes are found in *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* (British Columbia), 1891, p. 132; 1893, p. 16; 1897, p. 147; 1898, p. 128; 1899, p. 22.
- ²⁴ Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6, 1900 - 1920 (New York, 1969), p. 756. *Daily Colonist*, June 15, 1902, p. 4.
- ²⁵ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* (1906), p. 34. *Daily Colonist*, February 2, 1906, p. 1 *Victoria Daily Times*, February 2, 1906, p. 3.
- ²⁶ *Daily Colonist*, March 12, 1909, p. 1. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* (1909), pp. 128 - 129.
- ²⁷ *Daily Colonist*, January 8, 1908, p. 3.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1907, p. 3; December 22, 1906, p. 7.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 22, 1906, p. 3
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 17, 1907, p. 7; *Victoria Daily Times*, October 30, 1906, p. 2; *Daily Colonist*, March 21, 1907, p. 11.
- ³¹ *Daily Colonist*, March 24, 1907, p. 2.
- ³² Harper, *op. cit.* p. 756.
- ³³ *Victoria Daily Times*, February 15, 1908, p. 14.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1908, p. 4.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, December 16, 1908. It was the first local council in Canada to do so.
- ³⁷ H. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- ³⁸ Helen Gregory MacGill, *Daughters, Wives and Mothers in British Columbia, Some Laws Regarding Them* (Vancouver, 1914), pp. 7 - 13.
- ³⁹ Cleverdon, *Woman's Suffrage in Canada*, P. 89. J. Castell Hopkins, ed., *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, 1910 (Toronto, 1911), p. 313. Hereafter referred to as C.A.R.) *The Champion*, April, 1913, p. 5
- ⁴⁰ Original invitation in the files of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia.
- ⁴¹ *The Champion*, August 1912, p. 6.
- ⁴² *Legal Status of Women*, p. 16.
- ⁴³ *The Champion*, November 1913, p. 8.
- ⁴⁴ C.A.R., 1912, p. 304.
- ⁴⁵ *The Champion*, February 1914, p. 7, 10, 11.
- ⁴⁶ C.A.R., 1911, p. 370
- ⁴⁷ C.A.R., 1910, p. 313. Susanne L. Jeune, *The Domestic side of World War 1, The War Period as Seen by the Women of Victoria*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁸ *The Champion*, September 1912, p. 12.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, June 1913, p. 4.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, September 1912, p. 17.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, October 1912, p. 6; November 1912, p. 12; January 1913, pp. 5 - 12; February 1913, p. 15.
- ⁵² *The Champion*, January 1913, p. 14. Official correspondence of McBride. No. 77, February 16, 1914.
- ⁵³ *The Champion*, September 1913, p. 4; August 1913, p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, August 1913, p. 4
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, August 1912, p. 15; September 1912, p. 20
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, January 1913, p. 7.
- ⁵⁷ *Official Correspondence of McBride*. No. 272, Letter from Maria Gordon Grant, February 29, 1912. Reply March 5, 1912.

- ⁵⁸ *Legal Status of Women*, p. 2. (From the edition published in Vancouver in the City Archives of Vancouver.)
- ⁵⁹ *The Champion*, November 1912, p. 5.
- ⁶⁰ *Official Correspondence of McBride*. No. 97, Letter from Winnifred Bromley-Jubb, January 21, 1913.
- ⁶¹ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly (B.C.)* (1913), p. 115. Brian Smith, Sir Richard McBride, *A Study in the Conservative Party of British Columbia*, M.A. Thesis, 1959, p. 227
- ⁶² *Official Correspondence of McBride*, No. 97, Copy of Resolution and list of the Meetings at which it was adopted.
- ⁶³ *Victoria Daily Times*, May 30, 1913, pp. 1, 17. *The Champion*, July 1913, pp. 5, 7.
- ⁶⁴ *Vancouver Daily Province*, November 25, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁶⁵ E. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 147. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* (1914), p. 83.
- ⁶⁶ *Official Correspondence of McBride*, No. 97, Several dozen hectographed forms.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees of America, Div. 101, *Minute Book*, 1913, 9, December, 3 and 4.
- ⁶⁸ *Official Correspondence of McBride*, No. 77. Letter from Methodist Church, British Columbia Conference, February 16, 1914.
- ⁶⁹ *The Champion*, February 1914, p. 4.
- ⁷⁰ *Daily Colonist*, April 14, 1916, p. 2
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, April 14, 1916, p. 2
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, April 27, 1916, p. 2. *Victoria Daily Times*, April 26, 1916, p. 11.
- ⁷³ *Daily Colonist*, May 18, 1916, p. 1. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* (1916), p. 139.
- ⁷⁴ E. MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 150. See also *The Champion*, April 1914, p. 5.
- ⁷⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, March 30, 1917, p. 7. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1917, p. 7. H. MacGill, *Social Service in Vancouver*, p. 58.
- ⁷⁶ The voting figures are in the *Victoria Daily Times*, October 19, 1916, p. 16, and the *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1917, pp. 433-436. Taking the percentage of Liberal votes to all votes or just to itself and the Conservative votes, the Spearman test gave values of -.0399 and .1027 and the Kruskal-Wallis tests gave values of .341 and 3.363. None of these values approach the .05 level of significance.
- ⁷⁷ For military/civilian correlations and Presbyterian/Anglican/Methodist correlations see Michael Cramer "An Analysis of the Results of the Woman's Suffrage Referendum in British Columbia" (1975).
- ⁷⁸ H. MacGill, *Social Service in Vancouver*, p. 54.
- ⁷⁹ *Victoria Daily Times*, February 21, 1917, p. 7
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

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