

Champions by Choice: The Long Climb to the Top

Legacy of Woman Suffrage in Washington State

This series was created to honor and celebrate the contributions made by women in Washington state to advance suffrage and equal rights over the past 100 years. This program will run in The Sunday Seattle Times from October 31 – December 5, 2010.

CHAPTER 2:

Right to Vote Demands Patience: Determination Leads to Victory



Mary Olney Brown of White River, Washington, was the first woman in Washington to attempt to vote. Mary Olney Brown (ca. 1821–1884) Photo courtesy of Washington State Historical Society.

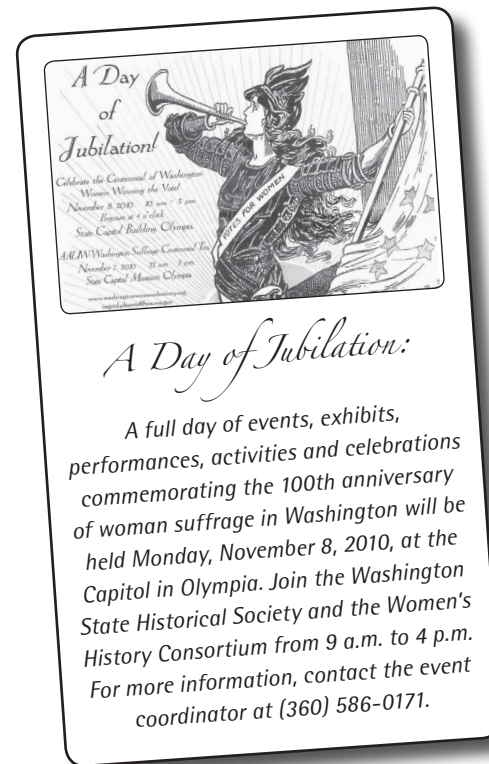
became the first woman in Washington to cast her vote as a U.S. citizen. However, her ballot was rejected by election judges who felt it might affect the integrity of the rest of the precinct's votes. Three years later, it was Brown again who led a small group of women to cast their ballots at Grand Mound in southern Thurston County – and this time, their votes were counted.

Setbacks for Suffrage

Permanent suffrage for Washington women, however, was short-lived. Suffrage laws were approved and repealed several times throughout the next few decades. The U.S. Constitution did not provide for equal voting rights and even though Washington was a territory with its own legislation until 1889, this loophole influenced many votes. In 1883, the Washington Territorial Women's Suffrage Act passed both houses of the legislature. This act allowed women to serve as jurors – but it was again repealed. And so it went: Women won and lost the right to vote several times over the next 40 years. Through it all, however, the suffragists remained determined.

Right to Vote Passed

In 1910, the Fifth Amendment to the Washington State Constitution made Washington women the first in the 20th century to have the right to vote in all local and state elections. Official voting records reveal that the movement met with statewide approval – every county in the state voted affirmatively for woman suffrage. As only the fifth state to pass this kind of law, Washington served as a working example for other Western states to award women the right to vote. Even though it would be 10 more years until the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of



In the next several weeks, this Newspapers In Education series will look at the women who came next – determined ordinary women who worked tirelessly to make sure that women's equal right to vote was matched with equal opportunity in other aspects of daily life.

Time to think!

- ✗ How would our lives be different if women did not have the right to vote?
- ✗ Who do you know who would not have influenced your life if she had not had the right to vote?
- ✗ How have techniques to share and distribute information about political issues changed and improved?

These women orchestrated changes that ensured that young women today have the opportunity to realize their dreams and accomplish their life goals.



Photo courtesy of Washington State Historical Society.

the United States gave women nationwide the right to vote, Washington suffragists continued to champion the national movement.

It is important to understand that although women gained the right to vote, they were not automatically treated as equals in all aspects of life. Women have worked steadfastly for the past 100 years to ensure that their voices in government – earned through the right to vote – continue to implement change and promote opportunities for their peers and for future generations.