In the early 1900s, many women who worked outside the home were employed in fisheries, canneries, laundries, breweries, and restaurants. Most worked 10 hours a day, and many worked seven days a week.

As the years passed, women began to take advantage of opportunities to enter new and challenging career fields, such as medicine, aviation, music, publishing, and advanced education. There are many examples of women who chose to push beyond traditional boundaries, leading the way for others to follow. Without the right to vote, voices and contributions of these women and millions of others may have gone unnoticed and been difficult to imitate. Every person has been positively influenced and encouraged to succeed by women who have made sacrifices in the name of suffrage and equal rights.

Alice Lord (1877–1940) was a Seattle waitress who often worked 14 hours a day for very little pay. She realized that there needed to be reform in work conditions for women, including an established minimum wage—but she knew she couldn’t bring about the necessary changes by herself. Lord organized other women to work for better conditions for women working outside the home. In 1911, Washington state became one of the first in the nation to grant women an eight-hour workday. (To learn more about Alice Lord, see HistoryLink.org essay 865.)

Vi Hilbert (1918–2008) was the only child of a father who was a fisherman and a logger. In order to find work, her parents moved often to different locations along the Upper Skagit River. As a result, Hilbert attended more than 15 schools, making it difficult for her to develop friendships. Instead, she spent much of her time listening to her parents tell stories in their native Lushootseed language.

Hilbert was determined to get the best education possible for a young native woman in the early 20th century, so she eventually attended a boarding school where she was encouraged to speak English only. It wasn’t until she was nearly fifty years old that she was approached by language scholars to help save her traditional Coast Salish language. Because she had listened carefully and honored the words of her ancestors, she was able to translate taped stories of native elders, publish several collections of stories and cultural information, and create lesson plans to teach the disappearing Lushootseed language to a new generation. Without Vi Hilbert, the words of her ancestors might have been lost forever. (To learn more about Vi Hilbert, see HistoryLink.org essay 7130. To hear Hilbert speak in Lushootseed, see HistoryLink.org essay 8156.)

As a young woman, Missouri Hanna (1857–1926) experienced many tragedies. Her husband drowned in a boating disaster, her son died of a medical problem, and her youngest daughter was severely injured in a bicycle accident. She decided to move to Edmonds to see if the salt air and sea breezes of the waterside community would help her disabled daughter. Hanna purchased a tract of land on a bluff above the Puget Sound and sold building lots. Because she was a single parent in need of additional income, she purchased the local newspaper, the Edmonds Review. Very few women were involved in the publishing business at this time, and many men in the community were skeptical and unsupportive. Over many years and against the odds, Hanna built the Review into a fine newspaper, covering local events, politics, and suffrage. She also founded the suffrage magazine Votes for Women. She was Washington’s first female newspaper publisher and is known as the “mother of journalism” in Washington state. (For more information, see HistoryLink.org essay 8107.)

The primary fundraiser for the suffrage movement in Washington was the “Washington Women’s Cookbook.” It included favorite family recipes, along with plenty of information about why it was important to gain the right to vote. The cookbook, which sold for $1 and featured the official slogan, “Votes for Women,” on its cover, was an ideal way to get this type of information to women in their homes.

Washington Women’s Cookbook, 1908. (Photo courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)