

Women's Suffrage & the Constitutional Convention

Women's Suffrage – that is, the right of women to vote – was won twice in Utah. In 1871, national suffrage leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony visited the Utah Territory to congratulate women on becoming the second group of American women to receive the vote. The privilege was short-lived, however, because the federal *Edmunds-Tucker Act* disenfranchised Utah women in 1887 as part of Congress's effort to rid the Territory of polygamy.

Women's suffrage came to the spotlight once more in 1895 when Utah formed a Constitutional Convention to try, once again, for statehood. The major question seemed to be whether Utah would “get out of the rut of bigotry ... intolerance and injustice,” to grant both men and women the right to vote. James Paton Lowe, the representative from Cache County, stated to Convention members that he campaigned in support of women's suffrage and “cut out of the newspaper at the time ... two clauses referring to ... equal suffrage [for] women, and placed them in his hat” as a reminder of his duty. Women's groups were also involved in the debate. Petitions from Salt Lake, Weber, Utah, Davis, Wasatch and Juab Counties were sent to the Convention stating that just because they were women did not mean they were unaware of Utah politics, and since they were taxed equally as men, they ought to have a voice in those politics.



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Utah suffrage leaders, including Martha Cannon, Emily S. Richards, Sarah Kimball, Emmeline B. Wells, Zina D. Young, along with Colorado suffrage leaders Mary C. C. Bradford and Lyle Meredith Stansbury, accompany Susan B. Anthony and Rev. Anne Howard Shaw. Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, #20395, all rights reserved.

Not all were in favor of suffrage, however. Arguments were made that, given Utah's shaky past relationship with the federal government, including suffrage in the proposed Constitution might actually hinder Utah's chances for Statehood. It was also thought that suffrage would somehow decrease women's femininity and take away their inborn gentle nature. Despite these objections, suffrage prevailed and was included in Utah's proposed Constitution. Statehood was achieved in 1896. Ironically, women could not vote to ratify the document that would once again allow them that right.

Sources:

See *Proceedings of the Constitution Convention, 1895*. (342.792 Ut1 v. 1 and 2); Carol Cornwall Madsen, *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells 1870-1920*, Provo, Utah. 2006. (921 W 46m 2006); “Women's Suffrage in Utah,” *The Utah History Encyclopedia*, http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/statehood_and_the_progressive_era/womenssuffrageinutah.html

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