

Woman Suffrage for Arizona - The Prescott Connection

By Elisabeth Ruffner

“ARTICLE XIX, THE UNITED STATE CONSTITUTION

The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. The Congress shall have the power by appropriate legislation to enforce the provisions of this article.”

When the right to vote for women became a federal law, with the ratification by 3/4 of the states on August 19, 1920, (or August 26, according to some sources) Arizona had already voted the privilege into law in 1912.

While the federal battle was tied to many prejudices against the abilities of women to be full United States Citizens, the struggle in Arizona was as closely tied to Prohibition (the Eighteenth Amendment) as to any other issue.

In the Wyoming Territory, the first guarantee of women’s right to vote was signed into law in 1869. In Montana, Jeannette Rankin, the first woman in America elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1917 – 1919, and again 1941-1943, was an active Suffragette all of her adult life.

In Tennessee, a young man named Harry Burn, required to vote for Tennessee’s women by his mother, cast the deciding vote in the last state to vote for ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Hostile legislators, it is reported, chased Harry out a window and onto the third floor ledge of the Tennessee capital, after his vote, but he was soon allowed to return to his place in the statehouse and join in the celebration with his like-minded fellow legislators.

The victory was reported in a New York Times article as ending “a fight which really dates from the American Revolution.” Women voted under

When the right to vote for women became a federal law, with the ratification by 3/4 of the states on August 19, 1920, (or August 26, according to some sources) Arizona had already voted the privilege into law in 1912.

several of the colonial governments and all during the Revolution women demanded to be included in the Government. Abigail Adams wrote her husband John Adams, the Second President of the United States “If women are not represented in this new Republic, there will be another revolution”.

Most of the arguments over the ensuing years had to do with states’ rights. The people supporting the movement weren’t only the activist women – both Arizona Senators Carl Hayden and Marcus Smith voted for the amendment when it was before Congress in 1919.

Prescott’s Frances Willard Munds was a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union as were many other of the supporters of suffrage. This dual role identified her in the minds of the Arizona Legislature, who were with the rest of the country, suffering under prohibition, the Eighteenth Amendment. Her appearances at the Arizona statehouse came to naught until she enlisted the Mormon women of the state who, joining the cause of suffrage soon convinced a sufficient number of sympathetic husbands to effect the successful November, 1912 referendum which conferred right to vote to the women of the state, after Statehood had

been achieved on February 14, 1912.

Frances Munds, with other western women, was in the forefront of the recognition that all politics are local and so moved away from the national organization in which she had held several important positions. The leadership of the National American Woman Suffrage Association lobbied for change in the Congress and among the eastern more populous states, while these Western women and their partisans were more successful in reaching the voters.

Munds, an astute politician even before she became the second woman in the United States elected to public office when she went to the Arizona Senate in 1914, had correctly gauged the temper of the electorate by conducting local campaigns, even courting third parties and other organizing groups in influencing them to favor suffrage. She was a highly regarded Senator in her one term, where she served on the land committee which wrote the policy dealing with control and disposition of all state lands. She was also the influential chairman of the committee on education and public institutions.

Returning to Prescott at the end of the term in 1915, Mrs. Munds continued her active life as a mother and wife, magazine and newspaper columnist. She established a nonpartisan club “dedicated to educate the female vote properly exercising her privilege of suffrage”. Her contributions to her state and nation were recognized in 1995 with the creation of the Frances Willard Munds Award to “honor the accomplishments of modern women who had fulfilled Munds’ vision of equal participation on Arizona politics.” The first recipient of the award was the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, Arizonan Sandra Day O’Connor.