

# VERMONT



# HISTORY

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**The Journal of the Vermont Historical Society**

## About the Cover Illustration

In this undated photograph, an unidentified suffragist stands on a chair making a speech in front of the Vermont and New Hampshire Equal Suffrage Association tent at the Vermont State Fair in White River Junction. The Vermont Historical Society holds two major collections related to the Vermont campaign for women's right to vote: the Mary Grace Canfield papers, from which the cover photograph is drawn, and the records of the Vermont Equal Suffrage Association. Together they document a pivotal period in Vermont and United States history.

The Vermont Woman's Suffrage Association was organized in 1883 and held its first annual meeting in January 1885 at Barton Landing. The organization was closely allied with the American Woman's Suffrage Association, founded by Lucy Stone and Henry Ward Beecher to counter the more radical approach of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and the women-only membership of the National Woman's Suffrage Association. Laura Moore of Barnet served the Vermont group as secretary from its founding until her death in 1906. The next year the group changed its name to the Vermont Equal Suffrage Association.

The group made sure that at least one suffrage bill was introduced at each session of the Vermont legislature. Leading the charge was Annette W. Parmelee of Enosburg Falls who, as "superintendent of press work" for the organization, lobbied newspapers for the cause. Her advocacy and public speaking engagements earned her the sobriquet "Annette the Suffragette." In 1917 Vermont became the first New England state to grant women full municipal suffrage; other states permitted women to vote only in school elections.

Mary Grace Canfield, another figure in the fight, moved to Vermont in 1902 when her husband became minister at the Woodstock Universalist Church. The two became involved in the suffrage movement and Mrs. Canfield began to keep scrapbooks to document the Vermont and national efforts.

Members of the suffrage association put their organizational acumen to work during the summer of 1919 after the U. S. Senate passed the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, giving women the right to vote if ratified by three-fourths of the states. The Vermont legislature had adjourned for the year, so the women's rights group lobbied Governor

Percival Clement to bring the legislature back in session so that Vermont could join the growing number of states to ratify. They took out ads in the newspapers with headlines that said “‘The ‘Solid South’—and Vermont” and urged the public to “root for a special session.”

They also printed slips of paper calling for a special session to be signed individually by members of the legislature. All of the slips, and a gold ribbon, a popular advocacy tool of the time, which says “Special Session,” are in the collection at the VHS. After March 22, 1920, Vermont was poised to become the thirty-sixth and final state required to ratify the amendment, but Governor Clement would not budge. Contending that the state constitution required amendments to the federal Constitution to be ratified by popular referenda, he wrote to the association on April 26, 1920, saying “I must, therefore, deny your request for a special session.” On August 18, 1920, Tennessee put the women’s suffrage cause over the top, making Vermont’s ratification on February 8, 1921, moot. Vermont did not amend its constitution to give women full suffrage until 1924.

Both the Vermont Equal Suffrage Association Papers, 1883–1927 (MSC 144–146; three linear feet), and the Mary Grace Canfield Papers, 1888–1937 (Doc 419; one linear foot), are located in the Society’s Leahy Library at the Vermont History Center in Barre, where they may be consulted by researchers, along with other printed material about the fight for women’s suffrage. Descriptions of the collections can be found on the Society’s web site at [www.vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/suffrage.pdf](http://www.vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/suffrage.pdf) and [www.vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/canfieldmary.pdf](http://www.vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/canfieldmary.pdf).

The library is also collecting records from the Vermont campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in the 1980s. We have two substantive collections and have just received a third. Additional collections are welcome.

— PAUL CARNAHAN, *Librarian*

