



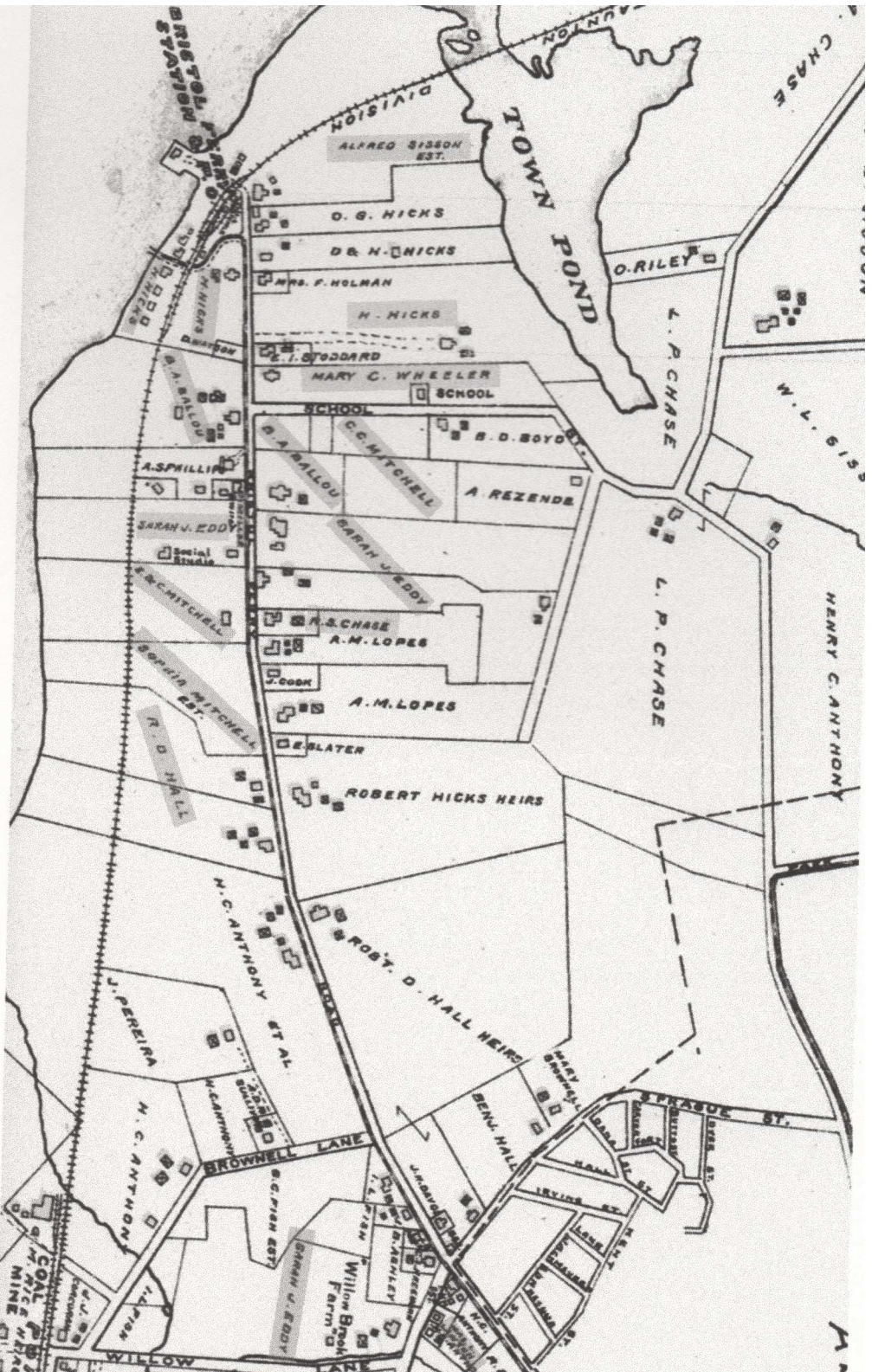
The Women of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League

Gloria Schmidt - 2020

**The Women of the
Newport County Woman
Suffrage League**

GLORIA H. SCHMIDT

2020



**Possible Homes of Bristol Ferry Women
Active in the Newport County Woman
Suffrage League**

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Introduction

From the Diary of Abby Sherman of Portsmouth, Rhode Island

2 Nov. 1920: "Today we cast our first ballot. The women of Portsmouth. Everything was conducted in a quiet manner. It was the greatest event of our lives. The men all said that it was the best town meeting that we ever had."

I am going to share with you some stories about the women of Portsmouth and Newport County who worked to get the vote for women. They are the members of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League which operated from 1907 to 1920. One or two of them are well known like Julia Ward Howe and her daughter Maud Howe Elliott. Many of the women are only remembered by family members today - and most of their descendants have no idea that great grandma was ever involved in the suffrage movement.

As I researched I saw ever widening rings of Portsmouth families and neighbors that were part of the movement. The short list of Portsmouth women active in the movement has begun to grow and grow.

Whole generations of families (women and men) were active in promoting the cause of the right of women to vote. The Mitchel Family, the Ballou Family and the Howe Family were prime examples of movement activity passing from one generation to another. The Bristol Ferry neighborhood in general was a "hotbed" of women's rights efforts. Our Portsmouth women had connections, too. There was a natural connection to other women on the island through the Newport County Women's Suffrage League. Through Portsmouth artist and reformer Sarah Eddy national leaders such as Susan B. Anthony came to visit Portsmouth. Through the hospitality of the Ballou Family, Rhode Island and Providence leaders came to visit and speak. Julia Ward Howe was a national leader in her own right and gave the Portsmouth women a connection to Massachusetts women as well.

These women were reformers and were involved in other efforts. Abolition, temperance and social welfare issues were part of their heritage. After women got the vote, they devoted their energies to the League of Women Voters and local political parties (primarily the Republican Party).

My goal is to focus on the women individually or in families. What is their background and what other causes were important to them? How did they fit into the life of Portsmouth and Aquidneck Island?



A Starting place - The History of Woman Suffrage

The History of Woman Suffrage 1900-1920 by Susan B. Anthony and Ida Harper is a good place to start our stories. The names listed here were the women I researched first.

“Among the nerve centers of suffrage activity in Rhode Island the Newport County Woman Suffrage League had a definite place from its founding in 1908, by Miss Cora Mitchell, its first president. The League’s work was at first largely carried on by an active group of philanthropic women of Bristol Ferry, Miss Mitchell’s friends and neighbors, among whom were Miss Sarah J. Eddy, Mrs. John Eldredge and Mrs. Barton Ballou. Gradually the suffrage agitation spread over the entire island which includes the three townships of Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport.....

Mrs. Julia Ward Howe was present at the first meeting and as long as she lived took great interest in its work. The summer meetings were sometimes held at Oak Glen , Portsmouth, Mrs. Howe’s country home, and on soft June afternoons the veteran suffrage workers and the young neophytes destined to carry on the work rejoiced in coming together.”

I found the names of 40 of these League Women and unearthed their stories as best I could but I wanted to know more than just names. I wanted to understand the roles they played in the league and in our community. “

Julia Ward Howe 1819-1910

Julia Ward Howe was a Portsmouth woman of note. Julia and her family came to Portsmouth every summer from the 1850s to 1910 when she died at her Oak Glen home on Union Street. Julia had deep family roots in Rhode Island. She is best remembered for writing the poem which was set to music as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Portsmouth women were at the forefront of the Rights Movement. We focus our attention on the effort to gain the right to vote, but there were many more rights that needed to be gained for women along the way. Even someone as prominent as Julia Ward Howe found that she had few rights as a married woman.

Julia wrote: "Even women of fortune possessed nothing individually after their marriage. The ring which promised to endow them with all the bridegroom's earthly goods, really endowed him all that belonged to them, even to the clothes that they wore. Their children were not their own. The father could dispose of them as he might think fit." Julia Ward Howe did not come into her own until after her husband's death. Samuel Gridley Howe (Julia called him Chev) believed that a wife and mother should find all fulfillment in family. Although Julia had a passion for writing, her husband refused to let her publish. She learned stealth and published her poetry book anonymously. Even the poem for "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was only published because Julia's minister had asked her to write it. Julia became famous for her poem, but Chev insisted that she not make any public appearances. Howe used his right to the children to threaten Julia into re-establishing a sexual relationship. He took full advantage of his rights to her money when he bought the Lawton Valley property - with her money but only put his name of the deed. Later he sold their first Lawton Valley home without consulting her. He frequently uprooted his family and moved at will even though Julia would beg to stay in her home.

The day after Chev died in January of 1876, Julia wrote: "Began my new life today." To add insult to injury, Chev left nothing to Julia in his will. She had to move on and she moved to Oak Glen in Portsmouth with her daughter Maud. Her lectures and writing became the way she supported herself. When she died in 1910 at her Portsmouth home, her obituary in the Newport Daily News summarized all the aspects of her life. "She was a beauty, social queen, preacher, poet, anchor, a lover of music and all the fine arts and a friend of the oppressed in all nations, a platform speaker of great popularity, the maker of home the gentlest, most ideal and holy to be conceived, a loyal, helping and loving wife, and yet one of the most pronounced of woman suffrage; the friend and intimate of the rich and powerful of earth yet with a heart full of sympathy for the lowly, ignorant and downtrodden, and with pen and voice ready for their defense and uplift."

For more: The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe



Oak Glen on Union Street

Julia's 1909 Marble House Speech Reflecting Back on the Suffrage Movement

On August 24, 1909 socialite Alva Belmont opened her Marble House for the benefit of the suffrage movement. Nine hundred guests held tickets. Guests came from Newport society, local residents and from Boston. Those holding dollar tickets were able to visit the grounds and the lecture tent. Those holding the five dollar tickets were able to view the interior of the grand home. As the hour for the lectures approached, Ninety year old Julia Ward Howe was brought in with an invalid chair. After the Newport Mayor introduced her, Julia was lifted from her chair to the platform. She was supported on one side by Mayor Boyle and on the other by her daughter Florence Howe Hall. Although her voice was not as strong as it once was, she was heard distinctly.

"Dear Friends, I feel a very pleasant inspiration to speak to you on this occasion so novel and to me so unusually full of interest. Mrs. Shaw and I have addressed many gatherings in different parts of the county. We have spoken in rural districts, where we could not hold a meeting in the morning because the farmers' wives had to stay at home and get the farmers' dinners. We told the farmers' wives what they ought to have and what they ought to do, and I have watched the movement from these early beginnings to this time, when we seem to have come into the full sunshine of human favor.

The change that I have seen in the position of women in the ninety years of my life is something miraculous. I remember the colleges, where no one would have thought of inviting us, and now how welcome women are to the women's colleges and co-educational colleges. The many professions that are open to women that never



MRS. JULIA WARD HOWE,
Who spoke for nine minutes in the crowded meeting in the Tent
on the LAWS at Marble House, Newport, R. I.

were thought of then have increased and are increasing every year, and women are better friends with each other because they so much better understand each other.

Men used to say 'women cannot reason, women have no logic,' but always when a woman amounted to something, they would say that that woman was an exception. We used to believe that once, but then we could not believe it any more, because we knew better. A man would say, 'Madame is an exception' but I lost illusion in regard to my own superiority and realized that the majority of the women were capable of intellectuality. The world will be very enlarged for us when we appreciate what women really are. We are coming to find out what the capacity of the real woman really is, that she is making up for centuries of waste behind her. The blessing of happy service is ordained for us and we will do our best to fulfill it."

Words of Julia's speech from New York Times, 25 August 1909.

Details of events from Newport Mercury, August 28, 1909.

A Division Among the Suffragists - Julia's group and Susan B. Anthony's Group

During the Civil War activists for women's rights set aside their cause. As they took up their activities again, many of them sought to combine their cause of rights for women with rights for African Americans. The American Equal Rights Association was formed in 1866 with the rights of women and blacks as their cause. In November of 1868 there was a regional meeting in Boston of the Women's Rights Convention. Some of those who participated in that meeting (Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, Isabella Beecher Hooker, Julia Ward Howe and T.W. Higginson) founded the New England Woman Suffrage Association (NEWSA). Julia Ward Howe was the first President. Frederick Douglass spoke at the first convention and said "the cause of the negro was more pressing than that of the woman's." Julia Ward Howe is recorded as saying at the convention that she would not demand suffrage for women until it was achieved for blacks. This did not sit well with those who were more focused on the woman's cause. In May of 1869 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and others formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). To counter this organization, the executive board of the New England Woman Suffrage Association formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) in November of 1869.

What were the goals of each group?

AWSA – Julia’s group – Headquarters in Boston

Focus on the vote for women and largely ignored other women’s rights issues.
Supported winning suffrage state by state instead of federal approach
Supported the Republican Party
Used a delegate system
Men were full members and served as officers
AWSA was the more conservative and larger group.
Opposed confrontational strategies.
Published “Woman’s Journal”

NWSA – Susan B. Anthony’s group – Headquarters in New York

Advocated for range of reforms for equal rights for women – not just the vote.
(Discrimination, pay issues, marriage and divorce laws).
Condemned passage of 14th and 15th amendments unless woman’s suffrage was included.
Female led group. All members were women although men could be affiliated.
Sought a national, constitutional change to insure voting rights.
Sought help from Democrats as well as Republicans.
Had a “top-down” organization.
Published – “The Revolution”

1870, voting rights for blacks was no longer an issue. In 1878 a woman suffrage amendment was proposed and Congress defeated it, so the NWSA began to use the state by state approach, too. Those active in woman suffrage were discouraged and tired of the divisions. There was little difference between the two groups at that time. Lucy Stone proposed at an AWSA convention that the organization should approach the NWSA and women in the two groups began to negotiate an alliance. In 1890 the two organizations merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Susan B. Anthony wrote to her sister. “I went in the carriage one afternoon to call on Julia Ward Howe, whose summer home is six miles from here; she was charming and I had an interesting time.” Two great leaders in the suffrage movement were meeting in Portsmouth through the efforts of Sarah Eddy. The woman’s suffrage cause was much stronger together than it had been divided.



THIS PICTURE OF THE WOMAN'S JOURNAL HAD THE HONOR TO BE THE FIRST OF THE WOMAN'S JOURNAL IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.

After the 15th Amendment was passed in

Sarah Eddy: Suffrage was a Family Cause

Portsmouth artist and philanthropist Sarah Eddy was the heart of the Bristol Ferry suffrage group. Three generations of her family were actively supporting the cause of the vote for women.

When he died in 1861, Sarah's maternal grandfather, Francis Jackson of Boston, left Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone \$5,000 to use as they sought fit "to secure the passage of laws, granting women, whether married or unmarried, the right to vote, to hold office, to hold, manage, and devise property, and all other civil rights enjoyed by men.." Jackson was very active in the abolition movement and counted William Lloyd Garrison as a good friend.

Francis Jackson's daughter, Eliza carried on this family interest in suffrage and Sarah was her daughter. Like her father, when Eliza died in 1882, she left money to both Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony. In her will she said "I request said Susan & Lucy to use said fund thus given to further what is called, the Woman's Rights cause." After other deductions from her estate were made, Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone received about \$57,000. Susan is quoted in a newspaper article :
"..I am going to make a long-promised visit at Bristol Ferry, with Mrs. Sarah Eddy, daughter of the woman who left me



\$24,000 for suffrage work, and which I used mostly in getting up the history of woman suffrage." (Rochester Democrat and Chronicle 8/11/1901).

Sarah's father, James Eddy, also gave generously to the social causes of his time. Eddy's fortune was self made. Eddy was born in Providence and learned the trade of an engraver. He traveled throughout Europe and made high quality copies of European works he loved. He became a collector of fine art and his home in Providence was filled with masterpieces. Sarah's interest in art might have come from being surrounded by an art gallery at home. One newspaper account stated that Eddy might have been worth three million dollars. (Boston Globe 7/17/1887).

Eddy gave generously to the anti-slavery movement, temperance reform and the improvement of women's status in society. Eddy came from a family of ministers, but his own views on religion are hard to follow. He advocated for the Free Religious Society

and built the Bell Street Chapel in Providence by his residence. He split with the society and often the ministers invited to speak at the Bell Street Chapel found themselves speaking to him alone. I could not find Sarah Eddy listed as part of any formal church in Portsmouth and that might have been her father's influence.

Sarah Eddy's philanthropy and advocacy for causes had strong roots in her family heritage. From grandfather Francis Jackson, mother Eliza and father James, Sarah had strong examples to follow as a supporter of Woman's Suffrage. They also provided her with connections to national leaders in the movement like Susan B. Anthony. Like her family members, Sarah was in the background - supporting, encouraging and enabling those who led the fight.

Sarah Eddy was a woman of many causes and in a sense many of them are intertwined. Her work on woman's suffrage is part of a larger effort of encouraging kindness and fairness to all. She advocated for humane treatment of animals, temperance, fair treatment of black people and for arts and cultural education. The motto of her Social Studio, a neighborhood meeting center, was "All men's good be each man's rule and universal Peace Lie like a shaft of light across the land." Sarah's goal was teaching kindness to every living creature and humane treatment of animals was her passion until her death in Portsmouth in 1945.

Sarah was born in Boston in 1851 and her

family moved to Providence in the 1860s. She studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Arts Students League of New York. She was back in Providence by 1880 and was active in the art community. By 1900 Sarah seemed to move permanently to the Bristol Ferry area of Portsmouth. Sarah never sold any of her work - she gave it away. She thought of her art as a way of reaching out to help others. She was a painter, sculptor and master photographer. She continued to paint even into her nineties.

Even though she was a photographer, she made a habit of avoiding her image being taken. We have only one photograph of her that appeared in a journal for humane treatment of animals. One newspaper account seems to capture her spirit: "Miss E(ddy) is an enthusiastic humanitarian and vegetarian, a believer in woman's rights and dress reform, and withal an artist and a lovely little lady." (Times-Picayune-New Orleans, 10/31/1887)

She followed in her mother's footsteps with her commitment to suffrage. She was part of national, state and local organizations. She was never a leader, but she was an organizer and worker for the cause. Sarah had lifelong membership in the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She was a delegate to national conventions in 1904 and 1906. She was on the executive committee of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association in 1886 and she chaired their legislative committee in 1905.

Sarah organized "parlor meetings" when there was a push to pass a state constitutional amendment giving women the vote.

In Portsmouth Sarah Eddy was a part of the Bristol Ferry women who organized the Newport County Woman Suffrage League in 1907. Gradually the Suffrage League grew throughout Aquidneck Island. Sarah protested against paying her Portsmouth property taxes because she had no representation. Sarah the philanthropist didn't hold grudges. After women could vote, she donated a storage cabinet that was sorely needed by the Portsmouth Town Clerk. Sarah's home on Bristol Ferry or her Social Studio across the street was often a meeting place for the Newport County Woman Suffrage League. It was the scene of celebration after the vote was won and it was the place for the centennial meeting of the League.

Sarah and Susan B. Anthony

Sarah brought national and state leaders to Portsmouth. She encouraged her Bristol Ferry friends and neighbors to be active in the cause. She hosted meetings large and small. Sarah Eddy was a force in the woman's suffrage movement in Portsmouth.

Sarah Eddy's mother and grandmother left Susan B. Anthony money in their wills to

further the cause of woman's suffrage, but the two ladies had not met until 1885. Miss Anthony had been able to get away from her work to go to the "Progressive Friends" (a Quaker offshoot) meeting in Pennsylvania. In her diary she wrote: "Last evening as I sat on the sofa Miss Eddy put her arms around me and said, 'I am so glad I love you; I should have felt very sorry if I had not.' And so should I, for the sake of her dear mother and grandfather, who had so much confidence in me."

Sarah and Susan went on to New York together and then to visit Elizabeth Cady Stanton. A friendship was formed that lasted until Susan's death. Miss Anthony could not be there when Sarah would visit Rochester for a convention. Miss Anthony wrote a friend "I am sure you would be glad to entertain her, she is a sweet, lovely little woman; thoroughly sympathizing with everything and everybody that suffers injustice. I am very sorry that sister Mary and I must be away and can not have the dear girl with us." *

Susan B. Anthony came to Portsmouth to visit Sarah and sit for a portrait. In August of 1901 a Rochester newspaper account quotes Miss Anthony saying that after a meeting in Buffalo - "Oh, after that I am going to make a long promised visit at Bristol Ferry, with Mrs. Sarah Eddy,...Mrs. Eddy has been trying to get me to sit for her for my portrait for years, but I

have never seen the time when I could stay long enough, but now that I am taking life so easy that I have consented, and she will see what she can do with me as her subject...**

Miss Anthony would write to her sister about the visit. Every morning was spent sitting for the two portraits Sarah was painting. One was a "bust portrait" - the other was a larger image of Susan's 80th birthday celebration. This birthday celebration was two years before in Washington, D.C. Eighty children filed past Miss Anthony to bring her an American Beauty rose. Sarah used local children as her models. As a subject, Susan B. Anthony didn't consider the portrait flattering. In a letter almost a year later to Sarah, she would write that "There is something about the hollowness of the left cheek that makes me look as if I had had a ball thrown at me and hit me good and hard! Could you fill it out with a touch of the brush?"

In her letter to her sister Susan wrote: "Every afternoon I have the most refreshing sleep and when I wake the slanting rays of the sun are shining on Narragansett Bay and from all the five windows of my big room is the most glorious view imaginable. We have delightful drives over the old stone bridge that connects us with the mainland, to Tiverton and along the shores of Sconset River, which is really an arm of the ocean, and here we can see the

whole length of the island with Newport in its beauty on the coast. It is ten miles away and we went by train one day, took the famous ocean drive and passed the palaces of the nabobs. I went in the carriage one afternoon to call on Julia Ward Howe, whose summer home is six miles from here; she was charming and I had an interesting time." ****

A Rochester newspaper account of the visit reports that Miss Anthony visited the women's section of Brown University. She remarked to the women: I see you girls at present have to peek over the fence at the boys, but the time will come when you will be admitted there on equal terms with them." The 200 women students applauded the idea. *****

*From "Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, 1880-1887. Rutgers, 1997.

**Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (Rochester NY, 8/11/1901)

***Letter from Susan B. Anthony to Sarah Eddy - June 12, 1903 in the collection of the University of Rochester.

****The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, Vol. 3, Ida Husted Harper 1908.

*****Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (11/8/1901).

Cora Mitchel and her Family

The Mitchel Sisters – Cora, Sophie and Floride – were very active in Portsmouth culture and social reform movements. Through their mother, Sophia Brownell Mitchel, they had long roots in the Bristol Ferry area. Their father was a cotton merchant in Florida before the Civil War and the Mitchel family had to literally escape the South once the fighting began. Their father Thomas Mitchel showed great courage in rescuing son Colby who had been conscripted into the Confederate Army. Mother Sophia and the rest of the children had a harrowing escape from behind Confederate lines in Florida. They came to Bristol Ferry because it was an ancestral and summer home for them.

Miss Cora Mitchel showed great courage again in founding the Newport County Woman Suffrage League in 1907. Cora was the first president of the League and many of the first meetings were held at the home she shared with sister Sophie. Cora was a wonderful organizer and speaker. At first she gathered her neighbors and friends among whom were Miss Sarah J. Eddy, Mrs. John Eldredge and Mrs. Barton Ballou. Gradually the suffrage league spread over the entire island, which includes the three townships of Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport. Cora spoke at meetings in Tiverton as well. Even when Maud Howe Elliott became the president, Cora stayed on as an active Vice

President. Cora remained active in demonstrations and organizing activities for many years.

Sophie was a talented artist and was among those in the Bristol Ferry artist community that had gathered around Sarah Eddy. Sophie had studios in both Brooklyn and Portsmouth. In 1908 Sophie built a house and studio on Bristol Ferry Road. She traveled around the United States and Europe. Subjects for her landscapes were Newport, Nantucket, Germany, Mexico, Long Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Cape Cod, etc. She often led young socialite ladies on sketching tours. She liked painting portraits, but she was more known for her landscapes and flower themes. She exhibited in her own studios and also in more prestigious Boston art shows.

Floride Mitchel May was a mother and grandmother. Floride was the older sister of the Mitchel girls and she married around the time the Civil War began. We are not quite sure how she migrated from her home in Georgia but she found her way to Portsmouth and lived around her family.

Floride's daughter, Clara, married famous artist Oscar Miller. Clara took part in many of the activities that her aunts pursued. She was among those doing suffrage work. Under the leadership of Maud Howe Elliott, Clara became one of the Vice Presidents of the League. Once the women got the vote, Clara was active in Republican politics. In 1920 she was

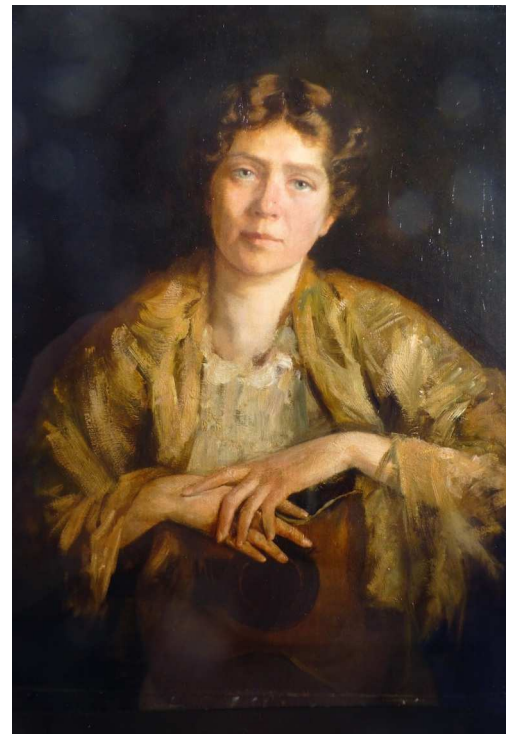


Cora's Home

one of the organizers of the Newport County Women's Republican Club. She was a delegate to the state Republican convention. Even after her husband's death she continued as a patron of the arts for a Swanhurst Concert and was active in the arts community.

Portsmouth benefited from the work of all the Mitchel/May women. Their activities in suffrage, the arts and politics made them women ahead of their time.

Portrait of Clara Miller, painted by her husband Oscar Miller.
Courtesy August Miller - grandson

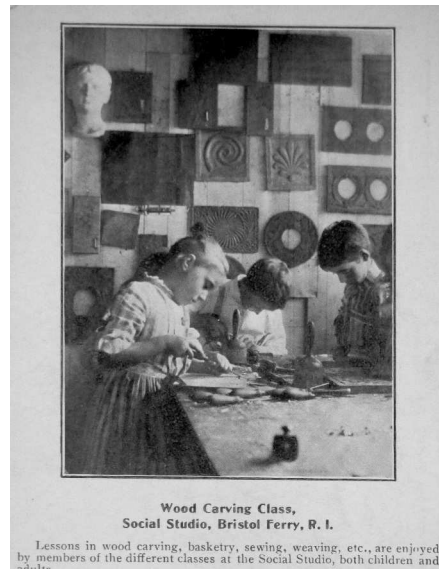




Emeline Eldredge

When Emeline Eldredge died at eighty years of age in 1934, her obituary mentioned many ways she made a difference in Portsmouth. She had been Superintendent of Schools in an era when that was a rare role for a woman. Women were allowed to serve on the School Committee even before they gained the vote. Emeline (also known as Mrs. John Eldredge) was a long time board member of the Portsmouth Library Association. She was an active member of St. Paul's Church and the Ladies Association. For many years she was in charge of the Social Studio at Bristol Ferry "where (said the obituary) young people used to gather for dancing lessons, instruction in wood carving and other work."

The Social Studio was founded by Emeline's friend and neighbor Sarah J. Eddy around 1900. It was a gathering place for youth in Portsmouth. Emeline had no children of her own, but she worked with young people at the Social Studio for twenty years or more. A



1913 Newport Mercury article mentions that Emeline was directing a group of twenty two girls called the "Girls Industrial Club" which met at the Social Studio. The girls learned basket weaving, leather work, wood-carving, embroidery and other useful arts.

Can you picture this School Superintendent, library supporter, craft teacher and church lady as a suffrage agitator? Her obituary doesn't mention anything about her efforts to secure the vote for women, but other newspaper articles lead us to believe that she was an integral part of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League from its founding in 1907. This group of Bristol Ferry area friends and neighbors was (according to Elizabeth Cady Stanton) "among the nerve centers of suffrage activity in Rhode Island." Emeline hosted some events by the Newport County Women Suffrage League at the Social Studio. Emeline may not have been a nationally recognized figure in the suffrage movement but she certainly contributed to it here in Portsmouth.

Mary Ballou

Back in 1920 when Rhode Island ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, the Providence Journal named Mary Ballou (of Providence and the Bristol Ferry neighborhood of Portsmouth) as a "Rhode Island Suffrage Pioneer." The newspaper quotes her as saying, "I am glad to have lived to see this day." Indeed, Mary had been fighting for suffrage since she joined the Rhode Island Woman's Suffrage Association in 1868. When Rhode Island passed a Presidential Suffrage Bill in 1917 which allowed Rhode Island women to vote in the presidential election, she was interviewed by the Journal and was asked to express her thoughts. "It marks the beginning of the end of what has been for me a long and often hopeless appearing fight. I have worked for suffrage for almost fifty years and when I celebrate my 80th birthday next week I will have a real cause for celebration. I hardly expected to live long enough to see old hide-bound Rhode Island take its place at the head of the processional of progress in the East." (ProJo 4/18/1917)

Mary belonged to the Bristol Ferry group of suffragists who became a "nerve center" of the Rhode Island suffrage movement. Its members were a diverse group of women. What was Mary's background? What roles did she play in the suffrage movement? Did she continue her activism after voting rights were passed?

Mary Rathbone Kelly Ballou was born in 1837 in Blackstone, Massachusetts. Her father was a successful factory owner. On her mother's side she descended from Rhode Island's Hazard family. Her grandmother, Alice Peckham Ballou, was a Quaker minister. Mary was raised as a Quaker and attended what is now Moses Brown School in Providence where her grandfather was principal. After graduation, Mary became a teacher.

In 1867 Mary became the wife of Barton A. Ballou who was a leader in the Providence jewelry industry. Mary's husband was active in the Providence community. He was a trustee of James Eddy's Bell Street Chapel. Eddy was Sarah Eddy's father and I suppose Mary and Sarah Eddy would have known each other from those early days in Providence. Mary and Barton raised three children, Frederick, Charles (Rathbone) and Alice. Even as a newlywed and young mother, Mary was active in the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association (RIWSA). She served as Treasurer and Vice President of the RIWSA and she carried over her interest in suffrage to her summer home on Bristol Ferry Road in Portsmouth. She hosted weekly meetings with friends and neighbors Cora Mitchel, Emeline Eldredge, Sarah Eddy and others.

Mary Ballou and Sarah Eddy were listed as part of the Rhode Island executive committee of the New England Woman's Suffrage Association in 1909. Julia Ward Howe, another summer Portsmouth resident, was elected as the President of the Association at their Boston meeting.

Mary would host combined meetings of the Providence and Newport County Woman's Suffrage League.

The Ballous had extensive properties on Bristol Ferry Road. Portsmouth became their summer home around 1900 and that was about the same time that Sarah Eddy came to make Portsmouth her home as well. Newspaper accounts say that John Manchester built their home in 1900, just as he built Sarah Eddy's home and the Social Studio. Sarah and the Ballous were next door neighbors. The Ballous often hosted events jointly with Sarah, especially the yearly outing for the residents of a home for elderly black men and women in Providence.

Barton Ballou was a very successful man, and his home in Portsmouth reflected his wealth. In 1902 the family had a tennis court laid out on their property. The Fall River News in 1900 reports that he "has a handsome locomotive, fitted with two one-horse power engines of the marine pattern." A Fall River Evening Journal article (6/14/1914) describes how Ballou and his automobile would come to the rescue when a fire breaks out in the caretaker's cottage of the Eddy estate. Ballou drove the power station engineer and fire extinguishers to the site of the fire. The extinguishers helped to put out fires on Sarah's roof that had been started by burning embers.

The Ballous continued to add to their property on Bristol Ferry Road. The Ballous

and Sarah Eddy were sold property held by Suffrage Leader Cora Mitchel and her family.

The Ballous even bought Julia Ward Howe's home on Union Street - Oak Glen. In July of 1931 Oak Glen, the home of Charles (aka Rathbone) Ballou, hosted a public meeting of the Rhode Island League of Women Voters. Two of Mary's children, Charles Rathbone Ballou and Dr. Alice Ballou Eliot, organized the event. They followed in the footsteps of their mother. Two years after the passage of RI Presidential Voting rights for women, the National American Woman Suffrage Organization was transformed into the League of Women Voters. Its aim was to support the new voting rights and expand the role of women in the political sphere. Mary Ballou's activism was carried over to this organization in 1919 when the Rhode Island division got its charter. In 1930 the Rhode Island League of Women Voters recognized Mary on the National Honor Role of the League of Women Voters. Mary died in 1926, but her efforts to win rights for women were still recognized.



Mrs. Barton A. Ballou
Who Gave Long Service as Treasurer of
the State Organization.

Bristol Ferry Neighbors

The History of Women Suffrage* notes that the work of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League was “at first largely carried out by an active group of philanthropic women of Bristol Ferry.” We have talked about some of the ladies who were founding members: Sarah Eddy, Mary Ballou, Sophie and Cora Mitchel, Clara May Mitchel and Emeline Eldredge. Who were some of the other women who served in leadership roles while the suffrage movement was centered in the Bristol Ferry neighborhood? Some of the women had deep Portsmouth roots and were the typical wives, mothers and daughters – Lillian Wheeler Boone, Edith Chase, Letitia Lawton, Pearl Hicks, Marjorie Hicks, and Hannah Hall Sisson.

The philanthropic work these women (neighbors and friends) did drew them together. Many of the women were active in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. The ladies of St. Paul’s were not just focused on religious causes. They were active in charitable outreach to the poor, young girls and the disabled. The women were active in the fabric of Portsmouth society. Many helped organize the Newport County Agricultural Fair Two were teachers at Bristol Ferry School. Many of the women were also active in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

The Newport County Woman’s Suffrage League was a sub-group of the American Woman Suffrage Association. This organization believed in organizing at the

local level and the Bristol Ferry group was a good example of the effectiveness of this strategy. The Bristol Ferry women had advantages. 1. Within the neighborhood there were women (Sarah Eddy and Mary Ballou) who had contacts with the national and state organization. They regularly attended conferences and brought the information back to Portsmouth. They circulated the suffrage publications. 2. The Bristol Ferry area is a natural neighborhood bounded by the Town Pond and shoreline of the bay. The Social Studio and the Town Commons served as hubs of community gathering. 3. Bristol Ferry was the transportation hub of Portsmouth. This was before the Mt. Hope Bridge was built and Bristol Ferry landing was a junction of railroads, steamboats, and ferries. The Fall River Line stopped there for easy access to New York. 4. Bristol Ferry was a cultural and artistic center for Portsmouth. There was a community of artists.

Lillian Wheeler Boone (1888-1978) - She was a NCWSL treasurer and worker. Like many of the local suffragists, she was active at St. Paul’s Church. She was a teacher at the Bristol Ferry School. During World War I she, like many of the suffragists, volunteered to aid the war effort. Lillian was one of the younger members of the group. Once the vote was won, Lillian became active in the Republican Party.

Edith Evans Chase (1876-1943) - She served as Corresponding Secretary from 1909-1910. Her activities included the St.

Paul's Ladies Guild, the Red Cross and the Girl Scouts.

Pearl Hicks: (1853-1922) - Pearl served as Vice President and Treasurer of NCWSL. She also taught school at the Bristol Ferry School. She was the wife of the Town Clerk.

Marjorie Hicks Tallman (1888-1961) - Marjorie was also one of the younger suffragists. She was a delegate to the state convention and she served as recording secretary in 1909. She was active in the temperance cause and helped with the Sunshine Society. She shared her musical gifts by playing the piano for local events.

Gertrude Macomber Hammond (1884-1978) - Gertrude can be credited for establishing Girl Scouts in Portsmouth in 1923. Friends from the suffrage group, like Emeline Eldredge and Lillian Boone helped in the effort. She had a tea house on Quaker Hill.

Letitia Lawton (1860-1939) was a local Portsmouth wife and mother who was active in her church and helped nurse people who were ill. She was often a companion to the Mitchel sisters in their travels. She was a part of the effort as early as 1907.



Letitia Lawton



Bristol Ferry Landing
photo by Sarah Eddy

Hannah Hall Sisson(1860-1946): Bristol Ferry Suffragist

Through the Hall family, I was able to see a picture of Hannah Hall Sisson. She had been part of a database of 40 women I found involved in the Newport County Woman Suffrage League. Our culture has portrayed the suffragists as radical and militant. There are other words I would use to describe our Portsmouth suffragists. Caring, community centered and dedicated are the words I would use. Hannah Hall Sisson played a small role in the suffrage movement, but she illustrates what I have found about the women in general.

Hannah was very dedicated to her church, St. Paul's Episcopal. Many of the local suffragists were part of St. Paul's women's groups - Grace Hicks, Emeline Eldredge, Veva Storrs and Abby Sherman among them. Their activities went beyond socials and they supported causes such as raising funds for the Girl's Friendly Society which was an Episcopalian society that sought to help girls – especially working girls. The women of St. Paul's held fundraisers like whist parties which helped them donate to homes for these young girls. One newspaper clipping in 1927 records that they were donating to “St. Virgin's Home” in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Like most of the Portsmouth suffragists, Hannah lived in the Bristol Ferry neighborhood. It is very clear that the early roots of the Newport County league were neighborhood meetings at

Sarah Eddy's Social Studio or Cora Mitchell's home. Hannah had long roots in the Bristol Ferry area and grew up there.

We may focus on winning the right to vote, but the suffragists were concerned about the rights of women in general. Women, especially married women, were just beginning to get rights to their own children. They had to fight for rights to own property on their own or even to keep what they earned. For too long husbands had all the rights. I don't know Hannah's story, but from newspaper clippings I know that she had to fight for guardianship of her daughter and she had to sue her husband to gain the income from a property that was willed to her and her daughter. Hannah was tenacious in fighting for her rights. In the suffrage movement she would be fighting for more than just the right to vote.



Frances Sisson Faulkner 1847-1920

Frances Faulkner was active in the Newport County Woman's Suffrage League in the early days. She joined when there were only seventeen members and the meetings were held in the Bristol Ferry neighborhood. By that time the league was beginning to branch out. Fanny lived on Power Street off of East Main Road. She was active in the Methodist Church, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Women's Foreign Missionary Society. Like many of the league women, Fanny was a member of the board of the Portsmouth Free Public Library. Fanny's husband George was a fisherman.

Frances had been married once before. She had married Jacob Almy. At age sixteen Jacob went to sea and traveled both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. He made two trips to Alaska for fishing and prospecting for gold. He must have passed his love of travel to his daughter with Frances - Charlotte Wales Almy. In an interview with a Honolulu reporter, Charlotte portrayed a different view of her father. She claimed her "ancestors were navy people and in roaming earth and sea in British domains upon which the sun never sets acquired the passion of the wanderlust." She portrayed herself as an orphan although both her parents were alive

and living in Portsmouth when she came to visit in 1918.

In 1918 Charlotte came to Portsmouth to visit her mother on her way to an Alaskan adventure. She gave travel talks at St. Paul's Church to benefit the Red Cross. As her fame increased, Charlotte let people believe she was from Portsmouth, England instead of Portsmouth, Rhode Island. She also told the interviewer in Hawaii that her home in London had been home to five generations of her family.



"Lady Cameron" - Frances' daughter

Veva Storrs

Although her obituary makes no mention of her suffrage activities, Mrs Bertram Storrs (Veva) was singled out in the History of Woman Suffrage* as a key contributor to the movement in Newport County. Veva was also an important member of the Portsmouth community for almost fifty years. Like many of the other Portsmouth suffragists, she was deeply involved in community activities.

Born Veva Etheline Potter in 1875, she came to Portsmouth around 1903 as the bride of Dr. Bertram Storrs. Dr. Storrs was the proverbial "country doctor" and he held many medical positions within the town, county and state. They were often involved in activities together. When a movement started to hire a school district nurse, both Dr. Storrs and Veva were active on the committee. It is interesting to note that many of our Portsmouth suffrage women were involved in the effort as well. Maud Howe Elliott was a featured speaker and focused on combating the idea of "what was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them." Emeline Eldredge, another suffragist, chaired the committee.**

Veva was active in the St. Paul's Ladies Guild and did a number of charitable works through that group and many of the Bristol Ferry Suffragists were active there as well. Veva, Emeline Eldredge, and Sarah Eddy all served

together on the Board of the Portsmouth Free Public Library. Veva served on Girl Scout Councils, as a charter member of the Portsmouth Historical Society, and she was in charge of a Red Cross book drive (Victory Book Campaign) to collect books for service men.***

Mrs. Storr's suffrage activities were centered around the Newport County Woman Suffrage League. She served as secretary in 1913 and 1914. Fall River Daily Evening News accounts (9/14/1909) show that she and Cora Mitchel (the founder of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League) were delegates to the state fair in Kingston. Their role there was to "man" a table of suffrage literature and to talk to fairgoers about the cause.

The life and contributions of Veva Potter Storrs illustrate an important fact about the women of the Newport County Woman's Suffrage League. These were women who actively worked in their community.

*Ida Harper, ed. The History of Woman Suffrage Vol. 6: 1900-1920 (New York: J.J.Little, 1922, page 577-578

** Fall River Evening News 5/5/1914.

*** Newport Mercury, 1/22/1943.

Maud Howe Elliott

Can you imagine the U.S. Congress taking your citizenship away. That is what happened to Maud Howe Elliott (the daughter of Julia Ward Howe) and many other women. In 1907 the Congress passed the Expatriation Act which took citizenship away from American born women who had married a foreigner. Maud had married English artist John Elliott about 25 years before. What is interesting is that this applied ONLY to women. Men retained their citizenship if married to a foreign citizen. So when women got the vote in 1920, Maud could not cast a vote. She had to wait until another bill was passed. The Cable Act passed in 1922 BECAUSE women now had the vote and the politicians were anxious to solicit the votes of women. A newspaper article in June of 1923 records that Maud had petitioned the Superior Court in Newport in order to regain her citizenship under the Cable Act.*

I consider Maud to be a "Portsmouth Suffragist" although Newport and even Boston lay claim to her. She spent fourteen summers at her parents' homes at Lawton's Valley. As her mother Julia grew older, she spent more time with her at the Oak Glen home on Union Street. After her mother's death in 1910, Maud and her husband John lived at Oak Glen. Oak Glen was a base of operation for the Newport County Suffrage League when Maud became president. Maud was a busy woman and she hesitated about taking on the presidency of the league. She wrote.

Sept. 6, 1912: "Miss Cora Mitchell asks me to take the presidency of the Newport County Suffrage League. I delayed decision but suppose I shall in the end accept, unless we can find another person. With the heavy work I have undertaken as secretary of the Art Association and for the Progressive Party, this seems the last straw." ** Maud's connections with both the Art Association and the Progressive Party drew many new women to the suffrage movement. As a co-founder of the Art Association, she had a great impact on Newport culture. She founded the Rhode Island Woman's branch of the Progressive Party and she worked tirelessly for the party's candidates. Most of the local suffragists favored the Republican Party.

Maud and the other ladies of the Newport County League did not believe in the militancy of the English suffragists or even noted Newport socialite Ava Belmont. However, they were not hesitant to press their case. Maud and others from the League "button-holed" Rhode Island legislators in 1914. When the "Antis" (those against suffrage) rented a theater in Newport, Maud and two other League ladies came to refute their arguments. Maud was an excellent spokesman for the suffrage cause and she energized a new group of suffragists among Newport women and the summer socialite community.

*Rutland (Vermont) Daily Herald, June 5, 1923

** Maud Howe Elliott: Three Generations.

NCWSL - Goes County Wide

True to its name, the NEWPORT COUNTY Woman Suffrage League (NCWSL) began to quickly branch out county wide from its Bristol Ferry roots. Founded with eight members in 1907, by 1909 there were seventeen members. One of the 1909 officers, Mary Osborn, was from Tiverton. Cora Mitchel and Veva Storrs went to the Kingston state fair to promote the suffrage cause. NCWSL was active in giving lectures and socials. The group hosted the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association and there were sixty people present. By 1910 membership was up to thirty-three members.

There was a critical shift in 1912 once Maude Howe Elliott became the President. Cora Mitchel stepped into the Vice President role. In 1913 there were ninety members and they were from Portsmouth, Middletown, Newport and Tiverton. Newport, Middletown and Tiverton meetings began. Julia Ward Howe had died in 1910 and her daughter Maude Howe Elliott moved into the Oak Glen home on Union Street. Meetings were conducted there, but they were also held at the Channing Parlors in Newport and at the summer residence of socialite Mrs. Katherine McCormick. The League keeps its contact with the Rhode Island Suffrage League in Providence.

The Middletown Suffragists

Mary Clark Sturtevant (1843-1931) and daughters Mary, Helena and Alice Sturtevant Howard

Mrs. Eugene Sturtevant (Mary) was a prime founder of St. Columba's (the Berkeley Memorial Chapel). Mary was the daughter of Thomas Clark - Episcopal Bishop of RI. She and her husband donated the land. Eugene Sturtevant was a real estate developer and he bought up large parcels of land on the eastern shore of Middletown and sold the lots.

Mary was a local historian and she researched, wrote and spoke about the history of the East Side of Middletown. She had been a Middletown resident since 1871. Mary was an active member of the Art Association and would have worked with Maud Howe Elliott there. She worked for the preservation of Whitehall, the Middletown home of Bishop Berkeley. She was an advocate of child welfare causes and was on the board of St. Mary's Home for Children in Providence.

Mary Sturtevant was active in the suffrage cause. In *The History of Woman Suffrage* it states that "In Middletown the [Newport County Woman Suffrage] league's work was ably carried on by Mrs. Eugene Sturtevant and her daughters." In November 1914, Mary Sturtevant was named Vice President of the Newport County Woman's Suffrage League. Her daughter Mary was named treasurer. In February 1915, Mary Clark Sturtevant was the Newport representative on the Rhode Island

State Committee of Woman Suffrage. She also was a member of the Congressional Union, the offset of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), in Rhode Island in 1915. In a newspaper article "Woman Suffragists Invade State House" Cora Mitchel, Maud Howe Elliott and Mrs. Sturtevant "buttonholed" (detained them in conversation against their will) state senators and representatives. They had pictures taken with the statesmen. She was a speaker before NCWSL at Oak Glen 1913. When the suffragists entertained the troops as war service, Mary would play the organ. She wrote a booklet countering the arguments of the Anti-Suffrage speakers.

Lila Pierce Peckham 1864-1948 (Mrs. Elisha Peckham) hosted meetings at her Middletown home, "Seven Pines". A Newport Mercury account of a meeting there in 1914 tells of a "Preparation Day" meeting for a national woman Suffrage demonstration. Lila's daughter, Elizabeth A. Peckham presented readings for "The Woman's Journal." Interestingly, the meeting was presided by a man - R. Wallace Peckham.



Socialite Suffragist: Katherine McCormick

October of 1913: The newspaper articles told of a scene at the Colonial Theater in Newport. The Rhode Island Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage rented the hall for a free lecture by a noted journalist who opposed the suffrage movement. The Boston Globe (11/11/1913) reported that after Talcott Williams spoke against "votes for women" the three women (Katherine McCormick, Maude Howe Elliott and Mrs. James Wentz) "arose one after another, and refuted every argument he had made. Their pointed questions worried Mr. Williams considerably, it is said, but he stood his ground -- that is, he remained on the platform until the end of the meeting. The Anti-Suffragists, however, marched indignantly out of the hall - a pantomime of what they thought of the performance. Then the Suffragists forces ended the meeting with a demonstration for their 'cause,' the Anti-Suffragists having paid for the use of the theatre for the evening."

Who was "Society Suffragist" Katherine Dexter McCormick? Katherine was well educated. She graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1904 with a degree in biology. That same year she married Stanley McCormick whose father, Cyrus McCormick, had patented the mechanical reaper. By 1906 Stanley

McCormick was diagnosed with a catatonic dementia. Katherine had little say over Stanley's care and she and all other women were kept from seeing him. Katherine remained married to Stanley and sought to use new hormone treatments to cure him. There were constant legal battles over his care.

She fought for a voice on other issues and by 1908 she began to be quite an active speaker and benefactor for the cause of woman suffrage. Based in Boston, Katherine was an officer in the Massachusetts and national suffrage movement. She became the first auditor for the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1912 and 1913. She went to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress at Budapest and was elected to the International board.

How was Katherine connected to the Newport County Woman Suffrage League? Mrs. McCormick spent her summers in Newport, renting properties on Bellevue Avenue. When in Newport, Katherine would be a speaker for the league and she would host league meetings at her gracious homes. The local suffrage league benefited from her state, national and international connections. For example, she shared her personal experiences at the International Congress at Budapest at a time when news resources were limited to the newspapers.

She is quoted as saying: "To come into

contact with the suffrage movement means, to some individuals, to come into a larger world of thought and action than they had known before. To others it means approaching the same world in a more real and effective way. To all it gives a wider horizon in the recognition of one fact - that the broadest human aims and the highest human ideals are an integral part of the lives of women." (Hutchinson Gazette, 10-12-1912)

When the vote for women was won, Katherine was one of the founders of the League of Women Voters. She continued her philanthropy by funding housing for women at MIT and she provided necessary funding for the development of "the Pill" and research on the long term effects of the birth control pill. She may have been a "socialite" but she used her considerable resources for social causes dear to her.



Socialite Suffragist: Georgie Wentz

What is your image of the suffragists?

Georgie Wentz may not fit the stereotypes.

Her campaign against immodesty in women's evening dress got coverage in the New York Times and other publications. She opposed cocktails, cigarettes and the "drug habit."

Apart from suffrage, her passion was electing Republicans. Even before she was able to vote she worked on the campaigns of Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley. She actually went door to door in the tenements of New York to campaign for her candidates.

When Maude Howe Elliott took over as President of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League the center of league activities moved to Newport. Georgie Nichols Wentz (Mrs. James Griswold) is a good example of the Newport summer colonists that joined the league and helped the effort. While in Newport, Georgie Wentz worked hard for her causes. As early as 1914 Newport County Woman Suffrage League meetings were being held at the Wentz home - "Beaumaris." Newspaper articles show her as a speaker at suffrage meetings and demonstrations. In 1915 she helped with Mrs. Belmont's event at Marble House. Mrs. Wentz (along with several other socialite

suffragists) are listed as Vice-Presidents of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League in 1917.

Like many of the suffragists, Georgie Wentz helped in the war effort during World War I. She opened her estate in Newport to entertain sailors from the Naval Training School. She was an active member of the Red Cross. Once women secured the vote, Mrs. Wentz focused on organizing the Newport County Woman's Republican Club. She established her headquarters on Thames Street and by the mid 1920's she had 400 members.

Sources: Biographical Cyclopaedia of American Women, Alvord Publishing, 1924.

Newspaper clippings from Newport Mercury and New York papers.

Olivia Watson - Newport Suffragist

Olivia Lyman Watson was only seventeen or eighteen when she served as a corresponding secretary for the Newport County Woman's Suffrage League in 1918 and 1919. Maud Howe Elliott, Julia Ward Howe's daughter, had taken over the presidency of the group and Olivia might have joined through her influence. Later newspaper articles mention that Olivia was related to Julia Ward Howe. Olivia was very proud of her deep Rhode Island family roots. She was a descendent of one of the first Newport founders, Thomas Hazard. Ancestors William Green Arnold and John Cook served as colonels in the Continental Army.

Early newspaper articles identify her as "Olive" but she seemed to use "Olivia" as she was older. She thought of herself as a literary woman. In a newspaper interview she said that her forebears were founders of the Redwood Library in Newport, one of the oldest libraries in the United States. She was a member of the League of American Pen Women and contributed articles and poetry to a number of publications. Olivia was a published poet and she said she wrote poetry from childhood. In an interview she said - "I can't remember when poetry did not sing itself to me."

She married a Navy officer, Joseph H. Hoffman, in Newport in 1929 and she moved all over the country as a Navy wife. She always kept her Newport connections and visited Aquidneck Island frequently. Later in life she became a song writer and wrote the words to a "Breaker's Ball" song and it was performed at the Breakers by the Meyer Davis Orchestra. She even wrote a campaign song in 1968 for Richard Nixon called "Win with Dick" which was used at campaign rallies.

Abby Sherman's Diary - Portsmouth Women Vote

"The Greatest Event of Our Lives." Abby Sherman's diary* records what a Portsmouth woman thought of her opportunity to vote for the first time. Abby was not the type of woman you might imagine as a "suffragist." Her father was an Almy and her mother a Sisson - both families descending from early Portsmouth settlers. Her husband, Benjamin C. Sherman, was a state representative and her son, Arthur Sherman, became both a state representative and state senator. Abby was one of the founders of the Portsmouth Free Public Library and was active in the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution), temperance work and Sunshine Society (a charity which aimed to help blind and disabled children). In 1908 Abby is listed as the corresponding secretary of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League. She was part of the effort to secure the vote for women.

Abby Sherman noted a few suffrage related entries in her diary.

1910 - March 2 "Hearing before committee on Constitutional amendments in favor of Woman's Suffrage."

1917 - November 7 "I read on the board that the New York state and city has voted women the franchise. Be something done now I guess."

The entries for 1920 give us a brief but first hand account of a woman voter.

1920 - June 8 "At one o'clock I went down to the Town Hall and registered. Now I am a voter or shall be after I vote. Who knows but what I might be President of the United States."

Abby had lost no time in signing up to vote. A Newport Mercury article on June 26th 1920 gives us a little more information on the women voters.

"June 30 is the last day upon which the women of this town may register, so as to be allowed to vote next November at the Presidential election. A number of women registered last fall, but now a lively interest is being taken in affairs, and the town clerk is being kept busy at his task. It is hoped that many more may attend to their registration fore it is too late. Mr. George R. Hicks, the town clerk, is doing all in his power to help the ladies in this line."

Abby's suffrage entries continue:

1920, 30 September: "Today happens the greatest event of our lives. That is the women will cast their first vote at the Republican caucus. It was a very quiet pleasant meeting. We were welcomed cordially and we were all interested and eager to know our duties. Now we are fellow workers."

For a women whose family was very active in

Republican politics, being a "fellow worker" and voter was important. Many of Portsmouth women suffrage leaders favored the Republican party and became active in roles within the party once they had the vote. It is interesting that this caucus vote was Abby's first vote and very meaningful to her. A newspaper article (Newport Mercury 9 October 1920) shows that women gained roles as delegates to the state convention and congressional convention. Cora Mitchel's neice, Clara May Miller and Veva Storrs (both women very active in the Newport County Woman's Suffrage League) were elected to the Republican town committee.

Newspaper articles show that voter education was an important element of the first votes for women.

Many of the suffrage leaders were active in St. Paul's Episcopal church. In early October sixty women attended a meeting at St. Paul's for instruction on how government works. Clara May Miller was elected the chairman for the women. Town Clerk George Hicks stated the qualifications of a voter. "He said that it is compulsory to register once, even though (one is) a real estate taxpayer..." It seems there were different rules for those who owned property or real estate and those who didn't. Walter Chase talked about the role of the town committee, State Senator Arthur Sherman (Abby's son) and Representative Boyd spoke of "the manner in which state affairs are conducted," and School Committee Chairman Earl Anthony spoke about the schools. All members of the town's

committee and town council were present and took questions from the ladies. (Newport Mercury 3 Oct. 1920)

Town Hall

At yet another meeting, women were instructed on the actual ballot process.

"A meeting of the women voters was held at Town Hall on Wednesday afternoon. They were addressed by Mr. Davis Arnold of Bristol Ferry, who instructed them in the use of the ballots and many questions were answered by Mr. Arnold. " Newport Mercury, October 30, 1920.



Another article relates the first vote.

"The ladies were out in large numbers, and did their voting, many of them going in the morning. One of the oldest women in the town, Mrs. Letitia Freeborn, aged 82, was the first woman to enter the voting booth, but on account of poor eyesight had to have the assistance of a supervisor, so was not the first woman to cast a ballot, but came second. Mrs. Harrison Peckham was next behind Mrs. Freeborn, and was the first woman to cast a vote. The voters from Prudence came over in an oyster boat which was sent for them by some of the candidates for office. The boat was met by automobiles. Many automobiles were used to go for voters at a distance." (Newport Mercury, 6 November 1920).

And how did Abby describe her first vote?

1920 - 2 November: Today we cast our first ballot. The women of Portsmouth. Everything was conducted in a quiet manner. It was the greatest event of our lives. The men all said that it was the best town meeting that we ever had.

*Transcriptions of Abby's diary are by Portsmouth Historian Jim Garman.



Abby Sherman

Rhode Island Ratifies 19th Amendment

Rhode Island was not among the first states to ratify the federal constitutional amendment that would grant the vote to women. In fact, two attempts to secure a special legislative session failed in July and September of 1919. Just a few days before the opening of the January 1920 legislative session, word was out that there would be a suspension of rules so that on January 6 the vote would be taken. At that point the Providence League of Women Voters began to plan for a Victory Dinner. Congressman Jeanette Rankin would be the lead speaker. Rankin came from Montana which had granted women the vote in 1914 and in 1916 Rankin was the first woman elected to Congress. She had a long history of working for the vote for women.

Women gathered outside the State House. Suffragists filled the seats in the galleries along with the first lady of the state, Mrs. R. Livingston Beeckman. Not all the politicians had been converted to the suffrage cause. The Speaker of the House, Arthur Sumner (a lifelong opponent of the vote for women) asked for permission to cast the first vote against the amendment. Women in the

room began to fear that the speaker could somehow hold up the vote, but in the end there were only two other votes against - William Taylor of Bristol and Albert Zurlinden of Lincoln.

With that vote taken, the resolution was taken across the corridor to the Senate. The chair of the Senate was a "friend of the cause" - Lt. Governor Emery J. San Souci. With no speeches, the resolution was passed by voice vote. There was only one dissent - John H. McCabe of Burrillville.

With the passage of the resolution to approve the 19th Amendment, the Victory Party was held at the Turks Head Club. Men and women dined together on the turkey dinner. "Jolly little speechlets" were given by those who had worked hard for suffrage during the previous fifty years. Among those speaking were three who had Aquidneck Island ties - Anna Darlin Spencer, Sarah Eddy and Maud Howe Elliott. Mrs. J.K. Barney spoke for the pioneers and especially those who could not be there like Portsmouth's own Mrs. Barton Ballou.

On January 7th 1920 a large delegation of the suffragists witnessed Governor Beeckman sign the Ratification Resolution. Sara Algo, reporting for the "Women Citizen" summed it this way. "Thus ended in a most satisfactory manner the glorious victory which will long be remembered in the annals of Rhode Island."

A Jubilee Ends the Newport County Woman Suffrage League

When the state of Tennessee ratified the 19th Amendment to grant suffrage to women, suffrage groups throughout the nation celebrated the victory with jubilees. Philadelphia, New York City, Tacoma in Washington, San Francisco, Minneapolis and Chattanooga were among the locations to hold the jubilees. On Aquidneck Island, the suffragists gathered back where it all began - at Sarah Eddy's Social Studio in the Bristol Ferry neighborhood.

The Jubilee was planned even before Tennessee cast its vote on August 18th. An article in the Newport Mercury on August 14th announced the coming celebration. The gathering was set for August 17th. "It is expected that by that time the necessary number of State legislatures will have ratified the Constitutional amendment to make it effective."

The article ends by saying "A large number of invitations have been issued." Among those attending were two Catholic suffragists from the Philadelphia area - Jane and Marianne Campbell. In a letter from Jane to her nephew, she writes: "We are staying over a day here to attend a Jubilee Suffrage Meeting, the practical dissolution of the Newport and Bristol Ferry Suffrage Society. The women in Rhode Island had Presidential Suffrage and the gentle Misses Chace have registered so they can cast a ballot in the Presidential Elections. The Rhode Island

Constitution gives the legislature the power of conferring Presidential Suffrage on the women and that legislature has done that" (August 13. 1920) letter of Jane Campbell to John J. Campbell.) The envelope to the letter had a return address of "Willowbrook" in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. This was a guest house owned by Sarah Eddy.

The program of the Jubilee included speeches by Rhode Island Governor, R. Livingstone Beeckman. The clergy were represented by the former pastor of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, Reverend Charles Jarvis Harriman and the pastor of Channing Memorial Church in Newport, Reverend William Safford Jones. Miss Sarah Louise Arnold, the Dean of Simmons College in Boston, also spoke. Other speakers were George Moriarty, a Newport Genealogist and Dr. Alfred Johnson.

Music was part of the program as well. Kate Durfee (Mrs. Charles H. Durfee) of Fall River and Mr. Augustus Hazard Swan of Newport performed solos. Kate performed the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." That would be a fitting note in a celebration to end a Portsmouth suffrage group that included Julia Ward Howe as one of the founding members. Julia's daughter Maud Howe Elliott presided over the celebration. The Social Studio, the home of many of the first meetings was an appropriate place to celebrate a victory in securing the vote for women.

Women also affiliated with Newport County Woman Suffrage League

Florence Howe Hall (1845-1922) - Portsmouth and New Jersey. NCWSL Lecturer 1916. Helped host meetings at Oak Glen. President of New Jersey State Woman's Suffrage Society.

Anna Hitchcock Sims (1875-1960). Newport. Married to Admiral William Sims. Member of NCWSL and the RI Equal Suffrage Association. Submitted petition in support of Woman Suffrage to the U.S. House of Representatives 1915. President of Girls Scouts USA. Active in Red Cross. Raised funds for Miantonomi Hill Monument.

Sade Crane Wright (1867-1942). Newport. NCWSL Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Original member of the Newport County Republican Club and active in Art Association and Newport Historical Society.

Mary Osborn (1889-1953). Tiverton. NCWSL Treasurer in 1909. Active in Tiverton Nanaquaket Grange and Always Busy Club.

Mary Van Buren (1971-1951). Newport/New York. NCWSL Vice President in 1917-1918. Meetings held at her Newport home.

Harriet Cottrell Nowell (1850-1934). Newport. NCWSL Vice President in 1917-1918. Active in Republican Club and Pelham neighborhood causes.

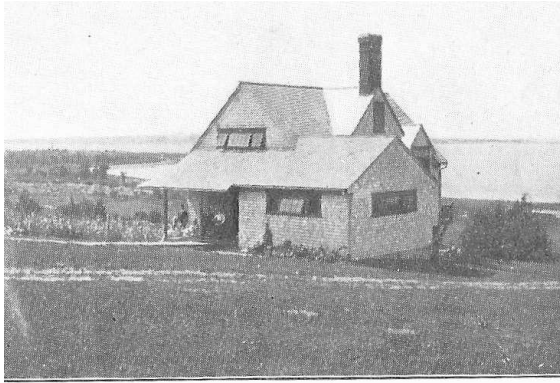
Annabell Berry (1880-1930). Newport. NCWSL Vice President 1917-1918. Republican Club, War work, Musical director for Art Association.

Sophie Sage. Newport. NCWSL Vice President 1917-1918. Republican Club.

Mrs. M. Anna Ford. NCWSL Vice President 1917-1918.

Edith Earle Pardee (1887-1969). Newport. NCWSL Corresponding Secretary 1917-1918. Active in YMCA and community theater.

Isadora Lull Gould (1882-1938). Newport. NCWSL Recording Secretary 1917-1918. Officer in Republican Club, Art Association and War work.



SOCIAL STUDIO, BRISTOL FERRY, R. I.

“ All men’s good
Be each man’s rule, and universal Peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land.”



Meeting Places for the Newport County Woman Suffrage League

