

Project Description

Title: “The Suffrage Debate in Beverly, Massachusetts: ‘Inalienable Right’ or ‘the Fever of the Diseased Civilization’ 1895-1920.”

Abstract:

Despite the fact that Beverly, MA was known as “the hot bed of liberalism” in the early 1900’s, the suffrage movement in the area yielded mixed results. In fact, over a 20 year period within Beverly, and more widely in Massachusetts, in the only two polls held on the question of women’s suffrage (1895 and 1915), the non-binding referendum was defeated. Statewide, only 35.5% were in favor of women’s suffrage. This close community study, based on original primary source research, will offer provocative new insights about not only the social and political climate in which local citizens debated women’s suffrage but on also the larger national campaigns, debates and final votes.

Research Question:

What will this close community study of Beverly, MA, a town considered by some to be “the hot bed of liberalism,” reveal about the fierce resistance to suffrage in Massachusetts even as it closed in on national success?

Introduction:

The late 19th century and well into the beginning of the 20th century was a time in which females in the United States began to experiment with ways to expand their roles within society. In a sense, held prisoner by the gender ideologies and societal restrictions of the time period, many women were ready and willing, more than ever, to fight for their identity, both as individuals and as women. Part of this identity was political; women were searching for their voice among the general male population in which they could express their opinions on contemporary matters. They wanted respect for their ideas and room to explore their individuality. As a result, many women of this time period decided to fight for change. This change would come most profoundly in the women’s suffrage movement. Winning the right to vote was the avenue by which pro-suffrage women believed they would gain not just political access but also broad social and economic freedom. By becoming active members in the political discussion of the day, such activists hoped to be given the chance to shed long-standing, highly restrictive gender norms. What historians are beginning to discover, however, is that the movement toward suffrage was as much of a debate among women as it was between women and men or women and the general society. Many women did not view suffrage as progress for the rights of women.

On a basic, fundamental level, the suffrage movement resulted in the winning of the right to vote for women. It is a common misconception that because of the successful end result, that the movement was a smooth process. Upon further investigation, it quickly becomes clear that the fight for suffrage was anything but uneventful. Through the analysis of both pro and anti-suffrage primary documents, a strong and fiery voice can be heard. Those involved in the

suffrage debate were anything but complacent. A war of words often turned violent as protests and riots sprung up around the country. In the most extreme cases, women were arrested, beaten by police, and force-fed behind prison walls. The women fighting for suffrage not only attempted to secure the vote but were also threatening to demolish centuries of laws and beliefs stacked against the female gender. Those opposed to the passage of suffrage were equally steadfast in their attempt at keeping in place societal ideals that allowed them to live a sheltered and as some would consider a safer existence. The strength of these two sides and the lengths at which they were willing to go to protect and enforce their positions paint a very different picture of the suffrage movement. With a new understanding of this reality, I wish to look locally at the presence of these two opposing sides in the state of Massachusetts. By examining small town politics, like those of the town of Beverly, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the war of words surrounding the topic of suffrage and gain insight into how the local fight translated to the bigger, state and national picture.

Beverly was selected for several reasons, most importantly; its historical society holds a substantial collection of barely examined suffrage-related primary source materials. A rare find, it is a treasure trove of documents that will provide a unique window into the suffrage debate. Already in my initial conversations with Ms McFadden, a research assistant working at the historical society, and a review of the materials, I have discovered a rich and lively debate between the pro and anti-suffrage voices in Beverly. A small town alive with big time politics, Beverly offers a great deal of insight into the topics surrounding the suffrage movement.

In my quest to find answers to my questions about the social and political climate of Beverly and its relationship to the delayed passage of suffrage in Massachusetts as well as the national campaign, I plan to pursue the following: First, conduct a thorough literature search to understand the general progression of the suffrage movement at the state, regional, and national level. This information will come from an analysis of secondary documents regarding the national movement such as Marjorie S. Wheeler's *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*, Ellen DuBois's *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*, as well as more local studies including Sarah Deutsch's *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* and Harriet Jane Hanson Robinson's *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A General, Political, Legal and Legislative History from 1774 to 1881*. Second I will investigate the relationship between the social composition of Beverly (its demographics) and pro and anti suffrage factions. For example: What was the class breakdown of Beverly's population and in what way did this effect voter turnout and the debate over suffrage? Does its profile correspond to voter turnout across the state and on the national level? And finally, based on the above, I will analyze the political context and cultural representations of the pro and anti-forces in Beverly. What was the size and scope of the anti-suffrage presence in Beverly in comparison to the pro-suffrage presence? How did both camps represent themselves and the other? What sort of political strategies did they use? Were these the same or different than the national campaign? This research will be accomplished by looking at primary sources, such as the *Beverly Beacon* – a newspaper written, edited and published by local women as well as a variety of other documents that will provide real insight into the minds of pro and anti suffrage supporters.

Plenty of scholarly work has been done on the national suffrage movement in the United States, with particular focus on areas like Washington D.C. and New York. However, so much can be contributed to the field of history and in this case, the story of suffrage, by looking closely at the small towns that make up the nation. I believe that every story within history is a puzzle; each town, each voice is a piece of this puzzle. Without studying and investigating these pieces, the puzzle is left incomplete. By completing this project, one more piece of the puzzle will be added to the story of women's suffrage.

Methodology:

I will be completing my research project via a close community study. A close community study is a type of social history. A social history is an approach to history investigation that favors the analysis of social events and trends from the perspective of ordinary, everyday people. In my case, this will be an analysis of the suffrage movement from the perspective of the citizens of Beverly. I will gain this knowledge by looking at primary sources from the Beverly Historical Society as well as exploring secondary sources that can give me insight into the background of the suffrage movement on a national, regional, and state level. I plan to make weekly, if not bi-weekly, visits to the Beverly Historical Society in which I will be working with these primary sources first hand. I also plan on visiting the Massachusetts State House as well as the libraries at Harvard University. If possible, I may also visit the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. At all of these institutions, I hope to have informative interactions with the staff that will help to shed new light on the primary and secondary sources I will be examining as well as the events of the Suffrage movement as a whole.

My final product for this project will be a research paper. This final paper will contain the close community study of Beverly, including in-depth analyses of primary source documents. Primary source documents that will be incorporated are such texts as newspapers, pamphlets, and town records, as well as some local images. Special attention will be paid to the *Beverly Beacon*, a women's newspaper published for only one edition in 1913. With insightful and fiery articles like "Equal Suffrage" and "The Conclusions of an Anti-Suffragist" the *Beverly Beacon* is a powerful collection of primary sources that catapults the modern-day reader into early 20th century politics. This particular newspaper also offers many articles that give a voice to the women of Beverly, allowing them a venue in which they can discuss their day-to-day experiences. For example, such articles like "The Needs of Our Girls," "Checking off the Laundry," "What People Think," "The Beverly Female Charitable Society," and finally, "Housework as an Art." These were articles written by women for the general population of the town of Beverly. The *Beverly Beacon* serves as a snapshot in time; a glimpse at the lives of women during the suffrage movement in the late 19th, early 20th century.

Preliminary Bibliography

Sample of Secondary Sources:

In *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited (Viewpoints on American Culture)*, Jean H. Baker, USA: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Deutsch, Sarah. *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*. USA: Oxford University Press, 2002.

DuBois, Ellen. *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*. New York City: NYU Press, 1998.

Jane Hanson Robinson, Harriet. *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A General, Political, Legal and Legislative History from 1774 to 1881*. : Nabu Press, 2010.

Kraditor, Aileen S. *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement: 1890-1920*. : W.W. Norton & Co., 1981.

Smurzynski, Rosemarie C. "Remembering Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford." *Harvard Square Library Review* (2008)

Strom, Sharon H. "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts." *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 2 (1975): 296-315.

Wheeler, Marjorie S. *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*. : NewSage Press, 1995.

Sample of Primary Sources:

Anti-Suffrage Essays by Massachusetts Women, by Massachusetts Women with an Introduction by Ernest Bernbaum, Ph.D. (Harvard University). (Boston, MA: The Forum Publications of Boston, 1916). 152 pp.

Why Women Do Not Want the Ballot, Boston, Mass: Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women

Woman Suffrage, a Menace to Social Reform, by Margaret C. Robinson. Boston: Woman's Anti-Suffrage Association of Massachusetts, (1915)

Primaryresearch.org

Documents from Beverly:

Women Registered to Vote, 1894

Beverly, MA Results of 1915 Statewide Referendum on State Constitution

Beverly, MA Results of 1895 Referendum on State Constitution

1881 Petition for Women's Suffrage, Beverly, MA

Sources from Beverly Historical Society:

The Beverly Beacon: A Woman's Newspaper. 1 November 1913. Beverly

The Blank-Cartridge Ballot. Johnson, Rossiter. J.J. O'Brien & Son, 122 East 23rd St., NY, NY. Printed by the New York State Association Opposed to the Extension of the Suffrage to Women. {no date}

Woman's Progress versus Woman Suffrage. Johnson, Helen Kendrick. Issued by the New York State Association Opposed to the Extension of the Suffrage to Women. {no date}

Tenth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Association opposed to the further extension of suffrage to women. 1905.

Some of the Reasons against Woman's Suffrage. Parkman, Francis. Printed at the request of an association of women. {no date}

Logistics

May 3, 2010: Attend orientation meeting at BSC.

May 24, 2010: Research project begins. Visit Beverly Historical Society. Request, order, and copy materials. Begin analysis secondary sources. Begin research notes.

May 31, 2010: Visit Beverly Historical Society. Visit Massachusetts State House. Continue with research notes on secondary sources and primary documents.

June 7, 2010: Organize and compile research notes. Outline Paper. Meet with Dr. Lowe to discuss findings.

June 14, 2010: Re-organize/re-asses research based on Dr. Lowe's recommendations. Begin drafting paper introduction.

June 21, 2010: Meet with Dr. Lowe to discuss introduction and an update on research.

June 28, 2010: Make changes to introduction based on Dr. Lowe's recommendations. Continue draft and return to Beverly Historical Society to clarify some resources/speak with historians.

July 5, 2010: Meet with Dr. Lowe to discuss draft. Continue writing.

July 12, 2010: Finalize all research. Continue writing.

July 19, 2010: Meet with Dr. Lowe to go over completed document. Meet with historian at Beverly Historical Society to share findings and gain insight.

July 26, 2010: Edit paper based on recommendations from Dr. Lowe and Beverly Historical society. Submit, with changes, to Dr. Lowe for final recommendations.

August 5, 2010: Project completed.