“A Woman And Therefore Not a Citizen” - Fighting for Women’s Suffrage in Indiana

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Historical Paper

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In 1910, ten years before women won the right to vote, Antoinette Dakin Leach ran for Indiana state representative on the Equal Suffrage Party ticket. She received ten votes. Although she had no expectation of victory, she proved a point: Women were fully capable of handling the responsibilities of citizenship. As Lakin boldly declared on the campaign trail, “Men cannot point to a single instance of the failure of women to perform their full duty in matters of great public concern.” Her unsuccessful bid for office was one in a long series of attempts by Indiana citizens to gain full political rights for women. From the earliest calls for women’s suffrage in the late 1840s to the rush to the polls in 1920, reformers like Mary Thomas, George Julian, Amanda Way, and Ida Husted Harper lobbied for change in the halls of Congress, the White House, and the Indiana Statehouse. Although lacking the nationally recognized names of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, these crusaders played a crucial role in persuading Indiana lawmakers to support partial women’s suffrage and in designing the strategy that led to ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Historians date the women’s suffrage movement to 1848 when the Woman’s Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. Inspired by the convention’s Declaration of Sentiments, Indiana reformers gathered on October 14, 1851, in the town of Dublin to discuss ways to achieve property and voting rights for women (Appendix A). Nineteen citizens - twelve women and nine men - signed the “call” for a convention, addressed “to all the friends of Reform,” which had appeared in the Indiana State Sentinel of Oct. 2, 1851. Participants adopted a platform, which stated, “Resolved, that all customs, laws and institutions that deprive women of

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1 “Platform of Equal Suffrage Principles and Speech of Antoinette D. Leach in Support of Same,” The Sullivan Union, Sept. 21, 1910, 2.
2 “Indiana’s First Woman’s Rights Convention,” Indiana Historical Bureau.
an equal right with men … are unjust, cruel and repressive…” The Indiana Woman’s Rights Convention became known as the first organized women’s rights meeting in the state and was one of the earliest such gatherings in the nation. After this two-day event, the movement was continued into the more formal Indiana Woman’s Rights Association, later the Indiana Woman’s Suffrage Association. Ida Husted Harper, a Muncie, Indiana, native who became a leader in the national suffrage movement, observed, “It is not generally known that Indiana ranks among the very earliest of the pioneer states in the movement of woman suffrage preceded only by New York, Ohio and Massachusetts.”

The Record Book of the Indiana Woman’s Suffrage Association provided detailed notes of the Dublin meeting: “The president called the convention to order and … introduced H.C. Wright to the audience, who spoke at some length, showing the great injustice of the property laws, the inequality of wages, the insulting cruelty of shutting the doors of the high schools and colleges against women.” An activist for abolition and women’s rights, Henry C. Wright often addressed reform groups encouraging them to persevere in the struggle. Amanda Way, the “mother of women’s rights in Indiana,” delivered a similar message. “Unless women demand their rights politically, socially, and financially,” Way said, “they will continue in the future, as in the past, to be classed with negroes, criminals, insane persons, idiots, and infants.”

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6 Indiana Woman’s Suffrage Association Record Book 1851-1886, Indiana Historical Society Library Manuscript Collection.
comment, jarring today, reflected mid-19th Century biases that categorized women and minorities with dependent children.

Like many feminists of the day, Way also supported the movement to rid the country of alcoholic beverages, which were blamed for poverty and family breakdown. In 1854, she participated in a Whiskey Riot in Randolph County in which 40 to 50 women chopped down the door to a grocery store and dumped all its liquor. Way was armed, as was the shopkeeper. The women were prosecuted “for malicious trespass” but found not guilty. In 1869 Way helped found the national American Woman’s Suffrage Association. In 1900, after moving to Idaho, she ran unsuccessfully for a U.S. House seat on the Prohibition ticket, making her the first Indiana-born woman to run for Congress.

Besides Dublin, women’s rights also were an issue at the 1850-51 convention in Indianapolis where delegates rewrote Indiana’s original Constitution of 1816. As a first step to the ultimate goal of suffrage, Robert Dale Owen, a member of the Indiana House of Representatives, tried to gain property rights for women; however, the convention rejected Owen’s proposal. Later elected to Congress, Owen continued to champion the issue until his death in 1877. “The women of Indiana are more indebted to Robert Dale Owen than to any other man - living or dead - for some of the most valuable of their legal rights,” said William Wesley Woollen, an Indianapolis banker and politician. As Owen led the fight for women’s property

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9 Dawn Mitchell.
12 “Robert Dale Owen - What he did for the women of Indiana,” Indiana Historical Society, date unknown, 1.
rights, “opponents warned that social chaos would result if women had equal property rights; they argued that women should remain in the home and raise children.”\textsuperscript{13}

After the new constitution took effect, reformers set their sights on changing it. In 1858, the suffrage association called on the Indiana General Assembly to begin the amendment process to extend the ballot to women. “Here again, Indiana was a pioneer state,” Harper noted, “as only in New York and in perhaps one or two other states had a petition for woman suffrage been sent to a legislature.”\textsuperscript{14} Their work was paused in the 1860s to support the Union in the Civil War. At the federal level, Radical Republican Congressman George Julian of Indianapolis pushed in 1868 to extend the the franchise to all citizens “without any distinction or discrimination whatever founded on race, color or sex.”\textsuperscript{15} Although his idea was tabled, his pioneering views persuaded others that women’s suffrage was a natural extension of the rights extended to African Americans by the Civil War amendments.

Before gaining the right to vote, women had to battle for the right to speak. In 1859, Dr. Mary F. Thomas, a Richmond physician, became the first woman allowed to address the Indiana General Assembly. She presented a petition signed by 1,000 residents of Wayne County “asking the Legislature to grant to women the same rights in property as men, and also the right of suffrage.”\textsuperscript{16} “We come to you, gentlemen, because you have legal authority – the power to redress grievances is vested in you. As mothers, as wives, as daughters, as sisters, and lastly as human beings, alike responsible with yourselves to God for the correct use of the rights bestowed on us,

\textsuperscript{13} Madison and Sandweiss, 78.
\textsuperscript{14} Ida Husted Harper, “Dublin, Wayne County was Cradle.”
we come to you, humiliating as it may be to ask these rights at the hands of others possessing no more natural rights than ourselves.”17 Her appeal was not taken seriously. Thomas and two female speakers who followed her “were subjected to ridicule and humiliation in the Assembly chambers and the local newspapers.”18 By 1881, lawmakers were more amenable. They voted that year to begin the process of amending the state constitution, a proposal that failed to pass in the next session as required under the state’s arduous amendment process.19 Had it succeeded, Indiana would have been the second state to grant the vote to women.

Indiana suffragists took their fight to the courts as well as the legislature. In the November elections of 1894, the Indiana Suffrage Association encouraged women to attempt to cast ballots around the state with the purpose of bringing a lawsuit if denied. In Kokomo, 200 women from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Equal Suffrage Club tried unsuccessfully to vote. In Logansport, 18 women were turned away. In Lafayette, Helen M. Gougar, president of the Indiana Suffrage Association, demanded a ballot, offering to sign an affidavit affirming her citizenship. “The inspector declined to give her a ballot upon the ground that she was a woman, and was therefore not a citizen,” the Chicago Tribune reported on Nov. 7, 1894.20 Gougar was a former teacher and publisher of Our Herald, a newspaper advocating for suffrage. She studied law and believed she could vote. On February 19, 1897, Gougar personally argued the issue before the Indiana Supreme Court in the case known as Gougar v. Timberlake.

17 “Petition Read by Dr. Mary F. Thomas before a joint session of the Indiana Legislature on January 6, 1859.”
20 “Helen M. Gougar Attempts to Vote,” Chicago Tribune, Nov. 7, 1894, 3.
“May it please the honorable court, I am here, not as a woman, but as a citizen,” Gougar said.\textsuperscript{21} Gougar argued that women had an equal right to the ballot in general elections with men; that it was not a constitutional question but a natural right to be granted to every citizen regardless of sex, even though the Indiana Constitution declared that “in all elections not otherwise provided for by this constitution, every male citizen of the United States of the age of twenty-one and upward . . . shall be entitled to vote.”\textsuperscript{22} On February 24, 1897, the Supreme Court issued a ruling against her, concluding that a political right could only be granted by the legislature. The court noted “the marked intellectual advancement of women since the adoption of the present constitution” but explained that its hands were tied by the language of that constitution.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1911, the Woman’s Franchise League of Indiana was created and became a driving force towards the right to vote. The League rallied women to protest in the streets of Indiana and in Washington D.C., urging a more aggressive tone than taken by the Suffrage Association. Citizens responded with marches and protests and often wore white in support of the cause (Appendix B).\textsuperscript{24} Their actions culminated in Suffrage Day on March 3, 1913, the day before the presidential inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, who had yet to support women’s suffrage. A group of Hoosier women joined thousands of others in the capital to press their call for the right to vote. Their parade featured “8,000 marchers, including nine bands, four mounted brigades, twenty floats, and an allegorical performance near the Treasury Building.”\textsuperscript{25} Along with the

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Gougar v. Timberlake}, 46 N.E. 339 341-345 (Ind. 1897).
\textsuperscript{23} “Suffrage a Privilege, Not a Right,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, Feb. 25, 1897, 10.
\textsuperscript{24} “Postcard - Suffragettes in Hebron, Indiana,” Indiana Historical Society.
\textsuperscript{25} Alan Taylor, “The 1913 Women’s Suffrage Parade. \textit{The Atlantic}, March 1, 2013.
triumph of the spectacle, there was tragedy. Marchers were jostled and ridiculed by the crowd. Some were tripped, others assaulted, and at the end of the day more than 100 were hospitalized. “Mistreatment of the marchers amplified the event … into a major news story,” leading to congressional hearings and the firing of the Washington D.C. superintendent of police.\(^2^6\) On March 17, Ida Husted Harper was part of a group that appealed personally to President Wilson to “insert in his message to the coming session of Congress a clause favoring a constitutional Amendment granting votes to women.” He told them he would consider it but that the special session would be focused on tariff legislation.\(^2^7\)

Despite Indiana reformers’ pioneering role in the suffrage movement, success proved elusive. By 1914, 13 states had enacted full women’s suffrage, and close to 20 others allowed women to vote in some elections, such as school board or on tax questions (Appendix C).\(^2^8\) Indiana was not among them. A poster produced by the Woman’s Franchise League of Indiana noted, “Women should vote for the same reason that men do … Indiana women are concerned in the development of the public schools. They are concerned in such matters as clean streets, public sanitation and pure food.”\(^2^9\)

World War I accelerated public acceptance of the idea. From 1914 to 1918, as war raged in Europe, economic necessity demanded that women work in paying jobs outside of the home. Social norms shifted, making it more acceptable for women to partake in public life. An article in the *South Bend News-Times* captured the changing role of women as men headed off to war.

\(^2^6\) Alan Taylor.
\(^2^8\) “Woman Suffrage Map - Find Indiana,” Woman’s Franchise League of Indiana, circa 1914, Women's suffrage movement collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Indiana State Library.
\(^2^9\) “Why Indiana Women Should Vote,” Woman’s Franchise League of Indiana, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Indiana State Library.
”While we are waiting for the call to come the employers who expect to find themselves short of help are looking about for women who will qualify as laborers.”  

With women entering the workforce, the demand for equality in the political arena intensified.

By the spring of 1917, Indiana’s legislature was ready to act. After a bipartisan effort, lawmakers enacted the Maston-McKinley Partial Suffrage Act known as Senate Bill 77. The measure granted women at least 21 years old the right to vote for municipal, school, and special elections. A petition entered into the Senate record declared, “This act of simple justice to one-half the citizens of the State has already been too long delayed.” Not everyone agreed. A remonstrance petition signed by Mrs. Lucius B. Swift and 18 others said: “We are opposed to woman suffrage because we believe that women can best serve the State and community by leaving party politics to men.” The bill passed 31-16 in the Senate and 68-24 in the House. A headline in The Indianapolis Star declared, “Triumph is cheered by women.” Within a few months, between 30,000 and 40,000 women registered to vote in Indianapolis alone.

Disappointment followed. On October 26, 1917, the Indiana Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional. As it did in Gougar 20 years earlier, the Supreme Court discounted how the justices “may feel or think as to the principle of universal suffrage,” but reiterated that its decision corresponded “with recognized canons of constitutional construction.” In an editorial, “Woman Loses Her Ballot,” The South Bend News-Times advised, “It will come girls,

30 “How Many South Bend Women Can Step into Men’s Place?” South Bend News-Times, May 16, 1917, Section 3-1.
35 Board of Election Commissioners of City of Indianapolis v. Knight, 117 N.E. 565 (Ind. 1917).
don’t be discouraged.” The newspaper noted that neighboring Illinois had a similar partial suffrage law that had been upheld by that state’s highest court. “The Indiana supreme court, of a different intellectual bent, under much the same conditions, jumped in the opposite direction. We’re sorry but it can’t be helped.” The ruling convinced Indiana suffragists to focus on amending state and federal constitutions.

That effort got a boost in January 1918 when President Wilson announced that suffrage was needed as a war measure in response to women’s essential role maintaining the homefront. On May 21, 1919, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 274-136 to approve the language of the 19th Amendment: “The right of 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.” On June 5, 1919, the U.S. Senate voted 56-25, which sent the amendment to the states for ratification.

During the 20-year period leading up to that moment, no fewer than 10 women suffrage bills were proposed to the Indiana General Assembly. They were rejected, not considered, or declared unconstitutional. On January 16, 1920, a special session of the legislature ratified the 19th Amendment, making Indiana the 26th state to do so. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee cast the 36th vote for the amendment to take effect.

After 69 years of fighting, nationally and locally, Hoosier women rushed to the polls on Nov. 2, 1920, to cast their ballot as equals to men. At this historic election, 54 percent of the eligible women in Indiana voted, the tenth highest voting percentage in the country. Eager to vote and restless to stand in line at the polls, women appeared “at the voting places with their

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children.”38 The Daily Ledger of Noblesville observed the day with this headline: “Women Had Good Time at Election -- They Voted in Large Numbers and Enjoyed the Novelty”39 The writer’s choice of words downplayed the momentous nature of what happened that day: a resounding triumph in the quest for voting rights.

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38 “Less than 5,000 of 76,000 Women in County Fail to Vote,” The Indianapolis Star. Nov. 3, 1920, 11.
Appendix A

A historical marker is all that remains of the site of the first women’s suffrage convention in Dublin, Indiana.

Appendix B

Indiana women publicly campaigned for suffrage, often wearing white to signify the purity of their convictions.

Appendix C
This broadside was used by Indiana activists to push for women’s suffrage in the mid 1910s.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary sources

Board of Election Commissioners of City of Indianapolis v. Knight, 117 N.E. 565 (Ind. 1917).
This court ruling struck down the Maston-McKinley Partial Suffrage law, which had
granted Indiana women a limited right to vote for offices not mentioned in the state
constitution. The law was considered a big step forward when it passed, but the victory
was short-lived. This court case played a big part in my paper.

From the Library of Congress, Chronicling America - Historic American Newspapers:
https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015677/1851-11-13/ed-1/seq-1/, accessed
This article from a weekly newspaper reported on the women’s rights convention held in
Dublin, Indiana in 1851.

Gougar v. Timberlake, 46 N.E. 339 (Ind. 1897).
This court ruling preceded Board of Election Commissioners and was important in telling
the story of the fight for suffrage. It basically found that there was no natural right to vote.
I used and quoted from this case.

Harper, Ida Husted. “Dublin, Wayne County, was Cradle of Movement Which Brought Suffrage.”
The Richmond Palladium and Sun-Telegram, Jan. 26, 1920, 4. From the Library of
Congress, Chronicling America - Historic American Newspapers:
May 1, 2019.
This newspaper article helped prove my thesis that Indiana was a pioneer in the suffrage
movement. Ida Husted Harper, a famous reformer, noted that Indiana suffragists were
among the first to hold a convention and petition the legislature.

“Helen M. Gougar Attempts to Vote,” Chicago Tribune, Nov. 7, 1894, 3. From newspapers.com:
This newspaper account provided specific details of Helen Gougar’s attempt to vote in her
Lafayette precinct and the direct quotation that I used in my title.

“How Many South Bend Women Can Step into Men’s Place?” South Bend News-Times, May 16,
1917, Section 3-1. From the Library of Congress, Chronicling America - Historic
American Newspapers:
This article highlighted the need for women to step into men’s jobs during World War I,
which accelerated the demand for suffrage.
Indiana Woman’s Suffrage Association Record Book 1851-1886. Item ID BV2577 SC 1792. Indiana Historical Society Library Manuscript Collection.
This record at the Indiana Historical Society Library was one of the earliest artifacts I examined while writing my paper. I quoted from the record book in my discussion of the early years of the movement.

This digitized version of the House Journal documented Mary F. Thomas’s historic address to the legislature.

This digitized version of the Senate Journal included testimony received on the partial suffrage bill.

This article reported on the turnout on Nov. 2, 1920, and gave me color and quotes to use in my conclusion.

The *Chicago Tribune* covered the Gougar suffrage case more thoroughly than Indianapolis newspapers. This article reported on the oral arguments.

I quoted from Thomas’s address to the legislature, the first time a woman testified before Indiana lawmakers.

An entire page in the Sullivan newspaper was devoted to the suffrage association’s platform and Leach’s support of it during her campaign for the Statehouse. This became the focus of my introduction.

“Robert Dale Owen - What he did for the women of Indiana.” Indiana Historical Society. Date unknown. This pamphlet was essentially a tribute to Robert Dale Owen and showed me how important he was to the women of Indiana. It had no author or date of publication, so I could not be specific about its origins.

“Suffrage a Privilege, Not a Right,” Chicago Tribune, Feb. 25, 1897, 10. From newspapers.com: https://www.newspapers.com/image/349882890/, accessed Feb. 19, 2019. This article reported on the Indiana Supreme Court ruling that rejected Helen Gougar’s claim that women had a natural right to vote.

“Triumph Is Cheered by Women,” The Indianapolis Star. Feb. 9, 1917, 1. I quoted this headline about the state senate’s passage of the partial suffrage law, which affirmed my topic’s connection to the “Triumph and Tragedy” theme.

United Press. “Prominent Women Seeking Ballots.” The Republic. March 17, 1913, 1. This news item mentioned Hoosier native Ida Husted Harper’s direct appeal to President Wilson for the right to vote.

“Why Indiana Women Should Vote,” Woman’s Franchise League of Indiana, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Indiana State Library. This was a broadside, circa 1910s, that listed reasons women should be granted the franchise.

“Woman loses her ballot.” South Bend News-Times, Oct. 28, 1917, Section 3, 12. From the Library of Congress, Chronicling America - Historic American Newspapers: https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87055779/1917-10-28/ed-1/seq-28/, Accessed May 1, 2019. This editorial commented on the Indiana Supreme Court ruling that invalidated Indiana’s partial suffrage and also showed the language of the day, referring to disappointed women voters as “girls.”

This document showed which states had adopted full suffrage as of 1914. I included it in the appendix because of the map’s visual impact.

This study listed women’s voting percentages by state, a statistic that helped prove Indiana women’s enthusiasm for the franchise and that I included in the conclusion.

This article had a headline that I used in my conclusion.

This article reported on the “call” for a women’s rights convention in Dublin, Indiana, and named the signers.

**Secondary sources**

This article produced during the Indiana bicentennial profiled Amanda Way and mentioned her run for Congress in 1910.

This historic marker text and accompanying annotation explained Amanda Way’s involvement in the Whiskey Riot and her role in the founding of the American Woman’s Suffrage Association, which I mentioned in the text.

The text on this historical marker, and accompanying annotation, provided the basis of my research for the women’s rights convention. I included a photograph of the marker in my appendix.

The author of this thesis spent considerable time researching voting records from the early 20th century. Although registration forms had been destroyed, she pieced together newspaper accounts to determine the number of female registrants.
This described the Woman’s Rights Association and Robert Dale Owen’s contribution to the suffrage movement.

This textbook was important in my early research because it summarized the story of women’s suffrage and provided a useful quotation.

Most of my information about Amanda Way came from this article.

This law review article discussed the early suffrage movement and told the story of Antoinette Leach running for office, which I used in my introduction.

This source gave me plentiful information on what happened during the Washington D.C. women’s suffrage parade.

This book was very important to my research about the women’s suffrage movement during the Civil War.

This article alerted me to Helen Gougar’s attempt to vote in 1894. Eventually I found all primary sources to document the story.

This edition of *The Indiana Historian* magazine described various attempts by women to win political rights, including the failed attempt to amend the state constitution in the 1880.