

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

## The Campaign for Women's Suffrage in Massachusetts, 1869-95

BARBARA F. BERENSON



**Editor's Introduction:** *HJM is proud to select as our Editor's Choice Award for this issue Barbara F. Berenson's Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement (2018) published by Arcadia Publishing. The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. And this year, 2019, marks the 100th anniversary of its passage by the Massachusetts General Court.*

*Berenson presents a lively, engaging, comprehensive, and cogent overview of the campaign for woman suffrage in Massachusetts from its birth during the antebellum years and its roots in the anti-slavery movement to its final success in 1920. Throughout she does a superb job balancing both the national and local stories and placing Massachusetts women at the center. Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement offers a riveting yet sophisticated account of the women activists who fought tenaciously for over seventy years, along with the histories of their organizations and the shifting strategic debates. Although Massachusetts women were at the center of the national struggle for women's rights, they*

*endured many defeats along the way. This introduction sketches a brief outline of this tumultuous tale, which Berenson thoroughly documents.<sup>1</sup>*

*The first national women's rights convention took place in Worcester in 1850. It was here, rather than at the more well-known Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, that an organized national women's rights movement truly began. Whereas the gathering at Seneca Falls had been primarily a local affair, the Worcester convention attracted delegates from most northern states. Although Seneca Falls sparked discussion and a "Declaration of Sentiments," it did not result in organized activity. Instead, it was the 1850 Worcester convention that resulted in the formation of standing committees which marked the beginnings of organized work for woman's rights.<sup>2</sup>*

*Suffrage activities ceased during the Civil War as women turned their energies to supporting the war effort. However, the movement reemerged as soon as the war was won. In May 1866, a group of women's rights activists gathered at a meeting hall on Tremont Street in Boston for the organizing meeting of the American Equal Rights Association. When the group split in 1869 over the issue of voting rights for African American men, the parent organization gave birth to both the Boston-based American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and the New York-based National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). In Massachusetts, leaders of the AWSA formed the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA).*

*This Editor's Choice excerpt explores the campaign in Massachusetts between 1869 and 1895. It is a chronicle of both victories and failures. In 1879 women succeeded in pressuring the state legislature to pass a law that allowed women to vote for school committee members. However, Massachusetts also saw the emergence of the oldest and strongest anti-woman suffrage organization in the country: the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, founded in 1895. It played a key role in the defeat of a municipal suffrage bill in 1895.*

*Suffrage supporters continued to campaign for full voting rights, and by 1915 the MWSA claimed over 58,000 members. In 1915, male voters in Massachusetts were asked to vote on an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that would strike the word "male" from the article that gave men the right to vote. On October 16, 1915, the MWSA organized a pro-suffrage parade involving some 15,000 marchers and thirty bands. Despite this strong showing, on November 2 Massachusetts' male voters went to the polls and voted against universal suffrage by a nearly two-to-one margin, with 35.5% of men voting "yes" and 64.5% voting "no." Massachusetts was one of four states to hold a vote on the issue of female suffrage that year; similar measures in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania were also defeated.*

*Following the vote, Massachusetts suffrage activists decided to concentrate their efforts on the national campaign to amend the federal constitution. There was, by then, considerable support in Congress, as eleven western states had enfranchised women. The Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, granting women the right to vote, was passed by the United States Congress on June 4, 1919. Reversing its 1915 stance, Massachusetts was the eighth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment on June 25, 1919. It became law in 1920 when Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the Amendment. For information on commemorative events in Massachusetts, see the website of the Women's Suffrage Celebration Coalition of Massachusetts, Inc. at [www.suffrage100ma.org](http://www.suffrage100ma.org). HJM is proud to be a partner organization.*

*In addition to Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement, Barbara F. Berenson has authored several books on Massachusetts history. This Editor's Choice selection was reproduced with permission of Arcadia Publishing and is excerpted from Chapter 5, "Setbacks in Massachusetts," pages 69-82.*

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When the American Woman Suffrage Association was formed in 1869, Lucy Stone intended the former abolitionist stronghold of Massachusetts to be a successful laboratory in which to demonstrate the wisdom of AWSA's state-based strategy. A state constitutional amendment enfranchising women would require the approval of the state House and Senate in two consecutive years, followed by ratification by a majority of the all-male voters. Stone and her allies believed that the Republican-dominated state legislature, which still included many former allies from the antislavery struggle, would readily give their support. "Woman suffrage is a Republican issue in Massachusetts," declared the *Woman's Journal*.<sup>3</sup> Suffrage leaders did not, however, anticipate the many social and political changes that would transform Massachusetts in the years after the Civil War. These included a new conservative strain in the Republican Party, the growing strength of the Democratic Party due to the large number of Irish immigrants and the growth in the industrial working class, a new postwar temperance movement, and the emergence of a woman-led anti-suffrage movement. Each of these developments would pose new obstacles to the state's suffrage movement.

In January 1870, two months after AWSA held its inaugural convention in Cleveland, Stone and Julia Ward Howe headed the list of former Bay State abolitionists who announced a meeting for the purpose of organizing a state woman suffrage association.<sup>4</sup> The mission of the new Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA) was to spawn and support local associations

that would campaign for a state constitutional amendment. Howe became president, and Stone served on the executive committee and led the finance committee. Other MWSA leaders included Mary Livermore and William Lloyd Garrison. Reflecting the close ties among MWSA, AWSA and the *Woman's Journal*, they all shared office space, briefly on Tremont Street and then on Park Street. (The New England Woman Suffrage Association also shared this space, but that association became less important after the state association formed.)

Many former abolitionists also joined the New England Woman's Club, which Julia Ward Howe and several others founded in 1869. The women's club movement began after the Civil War when women who had participated in war relief efforts wished to continue to meet and collaborate. The New England Women's Club provided a respectable meeting place where middle- and upper-class women could find camaraderie and pursue cultural and philanthropic activities. The club movement would come to play an important role in the suffrage tale.

Reflecting their founders' abolitionist roots, MWSA and the New England Women's Club, like AWSA, admitted black women.<sup>5</sup> In 1870, the African American population of Massachusetts was small, amounting to less than 2 percent of the state's 1.5 million residents. The state's black suffragists typically had a past connection to the abolitionist movement. Caroline Remond Putnam, who joined MWSA, was from Salem's best-known black family. Her brother and sister, Charles and Sarah Remond, had been leading abolitionist lecturers, and Putnam operated a women's hair salon and wig factory in Salem.<sup>6</sup>

Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin joined both MWSA and the New England Women's Club. She was born in Boston in 1842; her black father was the son of immigrants from Martinique, and her white mother hailed from England. At sixteen, she married George Ruffin, and they actively worked in the antislavery effort. In 1869, her husband became the first black graduate of Harvard Law School, and he would later become the state's first black judge. Years later, Ruffin wrote that she was welcomed into MWSA by Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and other "pioneer workers who were broad enough to include 'no distinction because of race' with 'no distinction because of sex.'"<sup>7</sup>

Even before MWSA was established, Stone had begun efforts to amend the Massachusetts Constitution. She helped convince the state legislature to create a joint special committee on woman suffrage and, in March 1869, she testified before it in support of an amendment that would remove the word male from the voter qualifications provision. Eight thousand women had signed pro-suffrage petitions. But foreshadowing future struggles with

women who opposed the expansion of their own rights, nearly two hundred women from the town of Lancaster signed an anti-suffrage petition. They contended that gaining the vote would decrease the moral influence of women and “bring into the family circle a dangerous element of discord.”<sup>8</sup> The joint special committee endorsed the woman suffrage amendment, but it was defeated in the legislature.

Once the battles over the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were concluded, suffragists anticipated that victory in Massachusetts was just around the corner. Stone and Mary Livermore addressed the Republican state convention in 1870. When the Victoria Woodhull scandal threatened to interrupt progress, MWSA hired several agents to hold dozens of meetings to rally supporters.

To suffragists' dismay, in 1872, the state legislature defeated a bill that would have recommended a constitutional amendment enfranchising women. Half the Republicans and nearly all the Democrats opposed the measure.<sup>9</sup> This vote laid bare the shifting social forces that would shape the struggle ahead.

After the Civil War, a substantial segment of the state Republican Party, like the national party, oriented itself away from social reform. A new breed of Gilded Age Republicans—industrialists and bankers, but also farmers and small businessmen—favored economic growth and believed in Social Darwinism. Most of these men thought women belonged in their traditional sphere. Ominously, even some who were more open-minded about gender relations did not want to disrupt the status quo at a time when immigration, industrialization, and labor unions were rapidly transforming the state.

Massachusetts suffragists had far less support in the minority Democratic Party, in which Catholic immigrants from Ireland formed a core constituency.<sup>10</sup> Many Irish Catholics still regarded woman suffragists and their Republican supporters as irredeemably tainted by the pre-Civil War association between abolitionists and nativists. That's because the Republican Party included remnants of the 1850s nativist Know Nothing Party. Additionally, Irish immigrants bore values crafted in a world dominated by tradition and patriarchy.

Though the state's politics would remain dominated by Republicans for several decades, continuing immigration would swell the number of Democrats, especially in urban areas. The City of Lawrence elected a Democratic mayor in 1881, and Boston did so in 1884. Massachusetts sent its first post-Civil War Democratic representative to Congress in 1876. Women trying to achieve suffrage in Massachusetts would need a strategy to capture significant Democratic support. But in the 1870s, no such strategy existed.

They did make one strategic change, however. MWSA, in parallel with AWSA, came out in support of a partial suffrage-first strategy. MWSA declared that it would seek suffrage in city and town elections and then renew the campaign for a state constitutional amendment.<sup>11</sup> In addition to requiring only legislative approval, municipal suffrage was less radical than full suffrage. Many municipal issues were, arguably, within a woman's traditional family-oriented sphere. After all, cities and towns were responsible for providing families with such amenities as clean water and safe streets and parks.

Here they faced, however, another looming hurdle. Local governments also regulated the granting of liquor licenses. This nexus would lead to new alliances and animosities with lasting repercussions. Like the antislavery movement, the temperance movement had begun in the first, reformist decades of the nineteenth century, and Stone, Anthony, and Stanton were among the women's rights activists who had supported it. The temperance movement sought to shield women and children from the devastating consequences of excessive male drinking, including domestic violence, poverty, and abandonment.

A vigorous new anti-alcohol movement arose after the Civil War. A political party, the Prohibition Party, was founded in 1869, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in Ohio in 1874. Two years later, MWSA, angry with Republican state legislators for not enfranchising women, endorsed the state's Prohibition Party, which supported woman suffrage.<sup>12</sup> But the Prohibition Party did poorly on election day. Afterward, regretting that the suffrage movement had angered Republican supporters, the *Woman's Journal* urged suffragists to avoid alliances with third parties and work only with the two major parties. AWSA subsequently followed suit and adopted a formal policy of party neutrality; it pledged "to use every honorable effort to secure the election of suffragists as legislators irrespective of party lines."<sup>13</sup>

An association between the WCTU and the woman suffrage movement would prove longer lasting. A formal link was forged when Frances Willard became a leader of the WCTU. Speaking in Boston in 1876, she announced that loving wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers should seek the ballot to protect their homes and the men they loved from the temptations of alcohol. In 1879, upon Willard's ascension to the organization's presidency, delegates approved a resolution supporting what she called the "Home Protection Ballot." Mary Livermore, who had been active in the prewar temperance movement, reinforced the bond between Massachusetts' temperance and suffrage movements when she led the state chapter of the WCTU from

1875 to 1885. In 1881, the WCTU endorsed municipal suffrage “by a very nearly unanimous vote.”<sup>14</sup>

But the alliance with the temperance movement came at a significant cost. The WCTU was deeply Protestant, and a substantial number of its members blamed an alleged link between “Romanism and rum” for the impoverished state of Irish Catholic immigrants. This reinforced Catholics’ distrust of the suffrage movement. Further, thousands who made their living as brewers, distillers, distributors, and saloon keepers saw women voters as a dangerous threat and pledged to oppose municipal suffrage.<sup>15</sup>



**Frances Willard**

Image source: Library of Congress

## **SCHOOL COMMITTEE SUFFRAGE: THE “LESSER” ENTERING WEDGE**

As the campaign for municipal suffrage unfolded, Bay State women did gain the right to vote in school committee elections. MWSA was not the driving force behind this partial enfranchisement, however. In fact, it initially disfavored a campaign for school suffrage, which allowed women to vote only on issues directly connected to their traditional role of overseeing their children’s education. MWSA considered school committee suffrage vastly inferior to full municipal suffrage.

The school suffrage effort originated when several members of the Education Committee of the New England Women’s Club sought to serve on the Boston School Committee. Their effort was precipitated by a desire to improve children’s physical and mental health, expand the movement for kindergartens, and increase opportunities for girls. Although the Massachusetts Constitution provided that only men could vote, it did not limit the gender of office holders.

Abigail Williams May, whose managerial skills had made her New England’s leader of the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, became the public face of the school suffrage effort. Born into a reformist family, she was the cousin of Samuel May, whose lecture on women’s rights had so



influenced Lucy Stone. May and three other Women's Club members ran for the Boston School Committee in December 1873. Remarkably, they were elected. Their success demonstrates that many men viewed women's involvement with schools as consistent with their role as nurturers of children. Many men who favored restricting alcohol also believed that women would support temperance education in the public schools. A majority of the Boston School Committee refused to seat the women, however. This turn of events led MWSA to wryly observe, "Barbarism dies hard, and nowhere harder than in the Athens of America."<sup>16</sup> The legislature intervened, believing that women were well-suited to serve on school committees, and the women took their seats.

The tenure of these pioneers was short-lived. May was defeated in 1878, and at the end of that year, only one woman remained on the school committee. Well aware that women voters would likely have retained the women members, the New England Women's Club sprang into action. Members petitioned the legislature to permit women to vote in school committee elections. They pointed out that neighboring New Hampshire, as well as Michigan and Minnesota, had such laws.

Despite its earlier reluctance, MWSA decided to support school committee suffrage. Passage would signify, Lucy Stone remarked, "the first actual break in the double wall built by custom and laws to shut women away from their political rights."<sup>17</sup> In April 1879, the Massachusetts legislature, by wide margins, enacted a law permitting women to vote in school committee elections (although it burdened women voters with a disproportionately high poll tax). The *Woman's Journal* promptly urged women to register and vote. Author Louisa May Alcott, who was also related to Abigail Williams May, was among the first to do so. Voting in the town of Concord, she reported that "no bolt fell on our audacious heads; no earthquake shook the town."<sup>18</sup> Ironically, Lucy Stone was not permitted to vote. Boston officials denied her a ballot when she refused to register under her married name.

MWSA was optimistic that the legislature, now having supported one form of partial suffrage, would relax its resistance to municipal suffrage. Along with AWSA, MWSA stressed the particular fitness of women to improve the "bad housekeeping" in cities. While suffragists would continue to argue that they were entitled to vote as a matter of natural right, they would thereafter also employ arguments based on social expediency.<sup>19</sup>

Apparent momentum in support of woman suffrage gave rise to an ominous counter-reaction. In 1882, a group of thirteen influential Boston-area women organized in opposition to municipal suffrage. These "remonstrants," as they were called, may have been prodded into action by state senator George



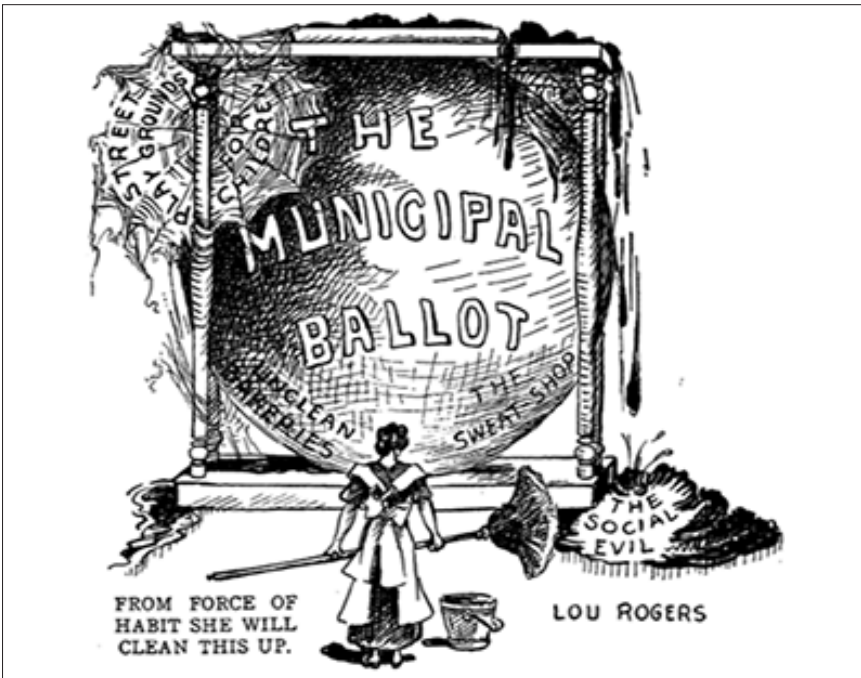
**“Women voting at the municipal election in Boston on December 11”**

*Harper's Weekly*, December 15, 1888. Women were actually voting in the school committee election. Image source: Library of Congress.

Crocker, who was closely allied with both conservative business and liquor interests. The remonstrants, who included Senator Crocker's wife, were nearly all Boston Brahmins (the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant descendants of early settlers who were members of Boston's social, economic, and political elite).

They, like their husbands, feared any changes to the existing social order that granted them positions of privilege. The remonstrants presented anti-suffrage petitions stating that politics was outside a woman's proper sphere and would lead to the neglect of children and household responsibilities. They also argued that a woman's ability to do good works in society required her moral authority to remain untainted by partisan interests.<sup>20</sup>

Remonstrants quickly gained influence, including within the New England Women's Club. (Women's clubs would become a suffrage battleground.) Kate Gannett Wells, a vice president of the club, testified against municipal suffrage legislation in January 1885. She explained that she performed this "unwomanly" task in order to save women "from further imposition of political duties which we are not prepared to fulfill." She also argued that the suggestion that women opposed to suffrage could simply refrain from voting was flawed, because "when [women] see some measure we deem unwise likely to succeed, then, to save our country or State, we must vote." Wells also made clear the prejudices of conservative elites who



**“From force of habit she will clean this up.”**

Lou Rogers, *Judge*, February 8, 1913. This cartoon reflects suffragists' "municipal housecleaning" campaign. Image courtesy of HathiTrust

were unwilling to expand the franchise. Describing her charitable work with poor immigrant women, she shared that “many a one spoke of the time when she could vote as the only vengeance left her to exercise upon the wealthy classes.”<sup>21</sup>

The following year, 140 prominent men, including the president of Harvard University, published a newspaper advertisement opposing woman suffrage. Although suffragists continued to petition for municipal suffrage, the Massachusetts legislature defeated each piece of legislation by large margins.<sup>22</sup>

In 1888, Massachusetts suffragists faced a new challenge. By this time, Catholics held half of the twenty-four seats on the Boston School Committee. Sectarian conflict ensued when a report emerged that during a history lesson on the Middle Ages, a Protestant teacher had mocked the Catholic Church’s attitude toward indulgences. When Catholics had the teacher censured, Protestants launched a campaign to defeat all Catholic school board candidates. Eleven of twenty-four seats were slated to be filled at the next election.<sup>23</sup>

The Republican Party put forth a slate of anti-Catholic candidates endorsed by a nativist women’s group called the Loyal Women of America and by the Massachusetts chapter of the WCTU. The Democrats offered their own list of pro-Catholic candidates. Ednah Cheney, a leader in the drive for school committee enfranchisement, proposed a less divisive approach. A founder of the Massachusetts School Suffrage Association, she persuaded many fellow members to offer a slate of candidates opposed to sectarianism in the public schools.

As the election approached, the number of Protestant and Catholic women registered to vote grew from 3,200 to 25,000. Despite the opposition of the Catholic clergy, many Democratic politicians encouraged Catholic women to register and support the Democratic slate.

Although pleased to see the growth in voter registration, Lucy Stone and her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, were alarmed by the sectarian appeals. The *Woman’s Journal* argued in favor of electing a school committee of “public-spirited men and women who know that the schools need to be useful and acceptable to all classes, creeds, and races, so as to educate the children of our various nationalities into enlightened American citizens.”

On Election Day, the majority of voters elected the Republican slate endorsed by the Loyal Women of America. The election reinforced the belief of many Democrats that woman suffrage in Massachusetts was a Republican cause. Catholic clergy in the state renewed their contention that voting interfered with the domestic duties of Catholic women. *The Pilot*, the leading



**Alice Stone Blackwell**

Image source: Library of Congress

newspaper of Boston's Catholic community, opined that the Republican Party was the party of "intolerance and injustice," and any Democrat who supported woman suffrage was either a knave or a fool.<sup>24</sup>

### **THE "SHAM" SUFFRAGE REFERENDUM OF 1895**

By the end of the 1880s, increasing numbers of Massachusetts Republicans supported municipal suffrage for women. Many nativist Republicans believed that the votes of Protestant women (who were expected to vote in large numbers) would save the state from "rum and Romanism." Many reformist Republicans had been convinced that women's housekeeping skills would address the many challenges posed by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Some Republicans continued to believe that suffrage was a natural right of citizens.

The state's Republican Party remained deeply divided on this issue, however. The committee of remonstrants reacted to increased prospects for municipal suffrage by beginning an annual newsletter, the *Remonstrance*,

in 1890, which was edited anonymously by journalist Frank Foxcroft. The *Remonstrance* asserted that the “great majority” of women did not want the ballot, and to “force” it upon them would be an injustice and “lessen their influence for good and imperil the community.”<sup>25</sup> With the inception of the *Remonstrance*, Massachusetts became the center of the emerging women’s anti-suffrage movement.

The rapid growth of industrialization raised a challenge from another quarter. The 1880s and 1890s were a time of labor conflict that pitted management against newly unionized laborers. Republicans with business interests feared that women voters would support legislators who favored laws beneficial to laborers, especially women and children working in factories.

Additionally, Boston was a center of a new wave of anti-immigration sentiment that swept through conservative Republican circles. These conservatives believed in governance by the elite and opposed any expansion of the franchise, particularly to uneducated immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. In 1892, the state legislature enacted a statute providing that a voter must be able to write his name and read at least three lines of the state constitution.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, Republican support for municipal suffrage continued to increase. In March 1893, the Massachusetts House narrowly defeated municipal suffrage 102–111; ninety-four Republicans and eight Democrats voted in favor, while forty-five Republicans and sixty-six Democrats were opposed. The state senate did not vote on municipal suffrage legislation that year.<sup>27</sup>

The women’s movement also suffered a grave personal loss that year. On October 18, 1893, seventy-five-year-old Lucy Stone died from stomach cancer. Her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, reported her mother’s last words of advice: “Make the world better.” The next issue of the *Woman’s Journal* included numerous tributes to the iconic figure. Her daughter’s summary of her mother’s life pointedly noted that she “always craved, not the post of prominence, but the post of work.”<sup>28</sup> From this time onward, Stone Blackwell’s independent streak emerged; she began to pursue numerous humanitarian causes, such as assisting Armenian refugees, in addition to her continued work for woman suffrage.

At the twenty-fifth annual meeting of MWSA, held two months after her mother’s death, Alice Stone Blackwell announced a comprehensive blueprint to win municipal suffrage. Plans included the establishment of additional local leagues, press outreach, pro-suffrage essay contests, and suffrage booths at county fairs. This renewed effort had partial success. In 1894, the

Massachusetts House supported municipal suffrage, 118–107; the Senate defeated it, 14–24. Victory appeared tantalizingly close.<sup>29</sup>

Anti-suffragists mobilized in response to the close vote. They argued suffrage should not be “thrust” upon women without proof that the majority of them wished to vote. Opponents persuaded legislators to schedule a nonbinding “informational” referendum on November 2, 1895. Men voting in the state election and women voting in the school committee election would receive a separate ballot containing one question: “Is it expedient that municipal suffrage should be extended to women?”<sup>30</sup>

Suffrage supporters were furious at what they called the “sham referendum.” MWSA initially intended to recommend a boycott but then changed course. Alice Stone Blackwell explained that suffragists decided to “stir up as much agitation and discussion of the question as possible and to use it as a means of education.”<sup>31</sup>

Some suffrage backers used the pending referendum to make divisive partisan appeals, however. The Loyal Women of America forecast that women voters would save the state from Romanism. Temperance advocates predicted that women voters would enact alcohol restrictions. Henry Blackwell suggested many reasons to support municipal suffrage, including appeals to justice and what he called women’s superior morality. But he also appealed to anti-immigrant Republicans when he observed that, due to native-born women’s greater desire to participate and the state’s literacy law, enfranchising women would add many more native-born voters than foreign-born ones.<sup>32</sup>

The remonstrants, meanwhile, shaped a strategy that would permit them to use the referendum to full advantage. Organizing as the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, they urged women not to vote. They maintained that every woman who abstained from voting was, in effect, voting “no.” After all, they claimed, women opposed to voting could not reasonably be expected to go to the polls to show their opposition.<sup>33</sup>

The remonstrants’ efforts were supported, both financially and organizationally, by the Man Suffrage Association, which was formed to defeat the referendum. Francis C. Lowell, a Boston Brahmin and Harvard trustee whose wife was a remonstrant, chaired the Man Suffrage Association. Members included wealthy and influential businessmen, lawyers, and academics. Reflecting the wealth of its members—and the power of money in politics—the Man Suffrage Association spent \$3,600 to defeat the referendum, while pro-suffrage forces raised only \$1,300. The Man Suffrage

Association “covered walls and fences from one end of the state to the other with huge placards” urging opposition.<sup>34</sup>

Democrats also mounted extensive opposition to the referendum. Many in the Irish Catholic wing of the party continued to associate woman suffrage with nativism, temperance, and anti-family radicalism. Although some Democratic labor leaders believed that women voters would help elect pro-labor candidates, the state's still young labor movement largely remained on the sidelines during the referendum campaign. When Henry Blackwell asked the 150 labor organizations in the state how they felt, only 34 unions replied in favor of suffrage; 5 were opposed, and 111 ignored the inquiry.<sup>35</sup>

On Election Day, male voters decisively defeated the referendum: 87,000 men agreed it would be “expedient” to extend municipal suffrage to women, but 187,000 disagreed. The 4 percent of women who voted overwhelmingly supported expanding suffrage: 22,204–864. The *Remonstrance*, offering its own interpretation of the women's vote, gleefully reported that 96 percent of women were opposed or indifferent to suffrage.<sup>36</sup>

Led by the *Woman's Journal*, the suffragists tried to put a positive spin on the disastrous outcome, noting that one-third of men and 96 percent of women who voted favored expanding suffrage. Alice Stone Blackwell maintained that suffrage was inevitable and that the presumed indifference of many women was inconsequential. Why, she wrote, should those who do not care to vote prevent those who do care from voting? She also noted that the referendum had stirred up an unprecedented amount of interest in the subject. Her less diplomatic father wrote that a geographical analysis of election results showed that “intelligent, active, wide-minded” middle-class men favored woman suffrage. He identified opponents as immigrants with “old world prejudices,” representatives of “the liquor traffic [and] the monopolies,” and those blinded by the “exclusiveness of wealth” and the “bigotry of tradition.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite attempts to look for a silver lining, the referendum was experienced as an enormous defeat by the suffrage movement, and the consequences were quickly felt. Many local chapters of MWSA shrank in size or disbanded, and remaining members were often middle-aged or elderly.<sup>38</sup> The Massachusetts defeat also cast a long shadow over the entire nation's suffrage movement. Opponents claimed they now had irrefutable evidence that women did not wish to vote, and that the subject should not again be raised until such time as women clearly demonstrated that desire.<sup>39</sup>



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## Notes

1. The *Historical Journal of Massachusetts (HJM)* has published several articles relating to women's suffrage in the Commonwealth. These include: Edmund Thomas, "School Suffrage and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in Massachusetts, 1879-1920," *HJM* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 1-17; Robert Granfield, "The Massachusetts Suffrage Referendum of 1915," *HJM* 7, no. 1 (January 1979): 46-57; and Lori Bogle, "Paradox of Opportunities: Lucy Stone, Alice Stone Blackwell and the Tragedy of Reform," *HJM* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 17-33.
2. See the award-winning book, Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
3. *Women's Journal* (hereafter cited as *WJ*), September 28, 1872; February 5, 1870.
4. *Ibid.*, January 22, 1870.
5. Both admitted men also.
6. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 43-44.
7. Josephine Ruffin, *The Crisis*, August 1915.
8. Sally G. McMillen, *Lucy Stone: An Unapologetic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 176-77; Harriet Robinson, *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement* (1883), 101-2.
9. *WJ*, March 30, 1872; Merk, "Massachusetts and the Woman Suffrage Movement," 43-44; NAWSA, *Woman Suffrage Yearbook 1917*, 32.
10. In 1870, the Irish Catholic population of Boston was nearly 35 percent. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-1990."
11. *WJ*, January 31, 1874.
12. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1876.
13. Merk, "Massachusetts and the Woman Suffrage Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, 1961), 381; *WJ*, April 24, 1886.
14. *WJ*, July 30, 1881.
15. See generally Ruth Borden, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).
16. *WJ*, January 30, 1875.

17. *Ibid.*, May 31, 1879.
18. Mass Moments, "Concord Women Cast First Votes," March 29, 1880.
19. See, e.g., *WJ*, January 8, 1881; February 12, 1881.
20. *WJ*, March 25, 1882; Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 23-35.
21. Kate Gannett Wells, *An Argument Against Woman Suffrage*, 1885.
22. IV HWS 704; *Woman Suffrage Yearbook 1917*.
23. See generally Lois Bannister Merk, "Boston's Historic Public School Crisis," *New England Quarterly* (June 1958); Edmund B. Thomas Jr., "School Suffrage and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in Massachusetts, 1879-1920," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* (Winter 1997); Polly Welts Kaufman, *Boston Women and City School Politics, 1872-1905* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); *WJ*, December 24, 1888; January 5, 1889; October 6, 1888.
24. Thomas, "School Suffrage," 13; Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 155.
25. *Remonstrance*, 1891; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 87.
26. *Stone v. Smith*, 159 Mass 413 (1893).
27. *WJ*, March 18, 1893.
28. *Ibid.*, October 21, 1893.
29. *Woman Suffrage Yearbook*, 1917; *WJ*, December 23, 1893.
30. *Remonstrance*, 1894, 1895; IV HWS 734.
31. *WJ*, March 16, 1895; June 8, 1895; October 5, 1895; James J. Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts Referendum of 1895," *The Historian* (1968): 626.
32. *WJ*, October 5, 1895.
33. *Remonstrance*, 1896.
34. IV HWS 737-38.
35. Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage," 627.
36. *Remonstrance*, 1896.
37. *WJ*, November 9, 1895; November 16, 1895.
38. Maud Wood Park Papers, Pa-137, WRC-SL; Merk, "Massachusetts and the Woman Suffrage Movement," 330.
39. See, e.g., Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage," 632.