

RURAL VOICES ON THE PATH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

TOWN OF NEWFIELD

NEWFIELD WOMEN AND SUFFRAGE

The women of Newfield were, in many ways, in the forefront of the Tompkins County suffrage movement. They formed one of the first Political Equality Groups in the county and in 1915, the Town of Newfield passed the Suffrage Amendment for New York State. Newfield women were interested in equality and the political arena in which they lived, with several women leaving their quiet but lasting mark on history in order to achieve those goals. Participation in the Grange, the W.C.T.U. and literary clubs such as the Ladies Monday Club was plentiful and enthusiastic with many women active in several organizations.

Education was important and a significant number of these active women were also teachers. Women opened their homes to hold meetings, invite prominent speakers and guests, and educate themselves to aid in their charitable, educational and political causes. Their influence affected the men in their lives who voted for the passage of the 19th amendment.

In November 1894, the New York Women's Suffrage Association held their annual convention in Ithaca. Among the speakers was Susan B. Anthony. One of the women to attend this convention from Newfield was Mary Bedell, widow of a Civil War veteran.

In 1899, Harriet May Mills, President of the New York State Suffrage Association, spoke in Newfield at the Methodist Church on the topic of "Signs of the Times." Although the audience was small, the outcome of this inspiring talk was the formation of a local chapter of the Women's Political Equality Club. The formation of this organization was to enable women to learn and discuss politics freely in anticipation of the day when they would be able to vote. The Women's Political Study Group would later go on to become the League of Women Voters.

The Newfield chapter was only one of three chapters in Tompkins County, the others being Ithaca and Groton and its formation was mentioned in the Washington, D.C. Suffrage newspaper, "The Women's Tribune." Nellie Allen Van Kirk was chosen as President and Delia Cox was Secretary and Treasurer.

SPEAKERS IN NEWFIELD

"It is expected that a woman will be present at Newfield Grange next Saturday night to speak on woman's suffrage."

- ♦ **JUANITA BRECKINRIDGE BATES**
Chairman of the Suffrage Party, spoke at the Grange.
- ♦ **REV. ANNA H. SHAW**
National lecturer of the W.C.T.U. spoke at the Grange.
- ♦ **MABEL F. YEOMAN**
Field organizer for the New York State Woman Suffrage Association, spoke at the home of Maggie Bardwell Patterson on women's suffrage.
- ♦ **KATE M. WEIGAND AND MRS. H.B. OWENS**
visited the Grange to speak on women's suffrage.
- ♦ **HARRIET MAY MILLS**
President of the New York State Suffrage Association, spoke on suffrage and helped organize the Newfield Women's Political Study Group.

HOW THEY VOTED

On November 2, 1915, election returns in Tompkins County revealed the total rural vote for suffrage at 3,271 with 3,156 against suffrage. In this election Newfield voted 162 votes for suffrage and 149 against it.

On November 6, 1917, a canvass of the voters in Tompkins County was taken on the question of Equal Suffrage for Women. The tally showed 1,734 men did not vote at all for suffrage, yet in Newfield the final returns revealed 213 yes votes and 121 no votes with

- 1st District Newfield 91 voting yes and 56 no.
- 2nd District Newfield 122 voting yes and 65 no.



Newfield Library and Grange Hall

WOMENS CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

The W.C.T.U. was organized in 1873 and encompassed a multitude of causes, not just temperance. It offered an outlet for women to work toward suffrage and social causes in a format that was acceptable to many women. There were a significant number of women in Newfield who belonged to the W.C.T.U.

Some Women of the W.C.T.U.

- Maggie Bardwell Patterson, former President
- Mary Hays Stephens, former President
- Harriet Van Marter, former President & Vice President
- Delia Cox
- Grace Bardwell
- Mary Bedell
- Sarah Smith
- Catherine Bardwell
- Ella Westervelt

THE NEWFIELD GRANGE

The Grange was the first organization of its kind to admit women on an equal status as men. In 1917 the New York State Grange urged its members to become active in the cause for equal suffrage. Many speakers spoke to the populace on suffrage at the Newfield Grange. In Newfield in 1874, Alice Davenport became the first Lady Assistant and in 1876, Eliza Carpenter Douglas became the only new member to join the Grange in that year. Eliza Douglas remained a member for 54 years until her death in 1930.

WOMEN OF THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN NEWFIELD

MARGARET "MAGGIE" PHIDELIA BARDWELL PATTERSON 1858- 1922

Mabel Yeomans, N.Y. State lecturer and brilliant state organizer for the Empire State Campaign for Equal Suffrage spoke at her home to a group of women "in the interests of women's suffrage." Maggie was the President of the Newfield W.C.T.U. and President of the Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church. In 1912, Maggie attended the state convention of the W.C.T.U. in Canton, N.Y. She was a member of the Ladies Monday Club.

MARY E. BARNES BEDELL 1839-1916

Mary was a member of the Mystic Order of the Eastern Star, a member of the Arcana Rebekah Lodge, a member of the W.C.T.U. and attended the 1894 Women's Suffrage Convention in Ithaca. She did not live to see women get the vote



Nellie Van Kirk

EUDORA "DORA" ISABELLE STRAIGHT' ROBBINS 1866-1937

Active member of the W.C.T.U. and women's causes. In October 1915, Dora was the election District Chairman for the town of Newfield for the Tompkins County Women's Suffrage Assembly organization.



Delia Cox



Grace Pinckney

NELLIE ESTABROOK ALLEN VAN KIRK 1870-1920

Nellie Estabrook Allen graduated from Ithaca High School in 1889 where she was the commencement speaker. She taught school from 1889 - 1893 in Elmira, N.Y., and Maynard, Massachusetts before she married Edwin Van Kirk. She was the President of the Newfield Women's Political Study Group.

CATHERINE RODGERS BARDWELL 1845-1902

She was the sister-in-law to Maggie Bardwell Patterson A member of the W.C.T.U. and held large (60 people) meetings there. Rev. Anna Shaw spoke at her home.

ADELIA "DELIA" LOUISE COX 1854-1932

Delia was a teacher and later a secretary of the Board of Education Union School. She was a member of the Ladies Monday Club; Secretary of the W.C.T.U. and the Secretary and Treasurer of the Newfield Women's Political Club

GRACE ISABEL BARDWELL PINCKNEY 1874-1962

She was the daughter of Catherine Bardwell and niece of Maggie Patterson. Grace was a teacher and a member of the Senior Loyal Temperance League.