

“The Cradle of the Women’s Suffrage Movement in Richland Center 1882-1912”

The Wisconsin State Historical Society Community Historians-In-Residence Project

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On June 2, 1882, a small group of ladies living in Richland Center, Wisconsin, met at the home of Laura Briggs James to organize a suffrage club. These women were well aware they were committing a controversial act for many then considered it quite radical to advocate woman’s right to vote. Their actions that day ignited the spark that was to make Richland Center the hub of the women’s suffrage movement in Wisconsin. This study focuses on the beginnings of the suffrage movement in Richland Center through its first generation of women, most of who never lived to enjoy the realization of their efforts. The historical visibility of these early workers has been hidden too long by the shadow of Richland Center’s best-known suffragist, Ada James, a second generation worker.

The meeting proceeded quickly that day in June, for most of the ladies were busy housewives and mothers. First, the idea of a suffrage club was approved. Then, Julia Bowen was elected president; Maggie Matteson, Georgianna James, and Marie McMurtrey, vice-presidents; Laura Briggs James, corresponding secretary; and Victoria Layton, recording secretary. Laura McCarthy, Marie Fowler, Belle Bailey, Martha Freeman, Marietta Pease, and Lucy Pier were appointed to the executive committee. These women comprised the twelve charter members.



Julia Busby Bowen - Arbegust photo archive

When it came to naming the club, a lively discussion ensued. Several of the women wanted to call their new organization the woman’s suffrage club. It was Victoria Layton who suggested it be called simply, “The Woman’s Club.” She explained that by omitting the word suffrage, the club would be more free to work for other reforms in addition to suffrage. The new president agreed with Mrs. Layton. Julia Bowen believed there was nothing to be gained by a name that might cause instant antagonism against what they wanted to do...convert the public in favor of woman’s suffrage. She warned the group, “We must be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves if we are to make converts to our cause.” The new organization was named the more acceptable title of “The Woman’s Club.”

After the ladies had written the constitution and the by-laws for their club, it was apparent that the new group supported their president. Surely the most prejudiced husband could not object to an organization whose constitution sought “to suggest and develop plans for social, intellectual, educational and philanthropic interests, to the end that we have better homes, better health, better charities, better laws, and better service for Humanity and God.” While the constitution did not define “intellectual interests,” members knew it meant female suffrage.

Some myths surround the group’s first meeting. While one writer claims that Richland Center Woman’s Club was “secretly a suffrage organization,” and that the first meeting was held “behind drawn blinds,” evidence suggests otherwise. Six days following the organizational meeting, a local weekly printed the new club’s constitution under the caption, “Suffrage Club, The Ladies Have Organized. Their Objects are Mutual Improvement, Suffrage and Charity.” Though the leaders of this new group considered it prudent not to flaunt their support of women’s suffrage, neither could their purpose have been all that secretive.

In the early days, a proposed member was asked to sign a statement that it was her desire to further the cause of suffrage. After she signed and paid her dues, she was a full-fledged member. The membership grew rapidly. The better

educated woman in Richland Center was receptive to the suffrage cause. These women were more able to comprehend the influence the ballot might make on the lives of females. At the time the Woman's Club was organized, the only "woman's rights" granted by the state legislature was the law securing property to married women. Every Election Day women watched drunken male paupers and ignorant immigrant men cast their ballots deciding laws females had to obey, while women who were better prepared to make political decisions sat at home disenfranchised.

Almost all of these early club members had been born into white, Protestant, middle-class Yankee families. Several of them had been school teachers before becoming wives. Julia Bowen was a graduate of an eastern academy. Laura Briggs James had attended Oberlin College in Ohio. Although the educational backgrounds for Lucy Pier, Georgianna James, and early club woman Fidelia Pease is not known, Lucy's and Georgianna's newspaper articles attest to their being well educated. The fact that merchant Dexter Pease often left his wife, Fidelia, in charge of their dry goods store when



Fidelia Pease - Richland County History Room

business trips necessitated his being gone for extended periods of time, acknowledges her ability to operate in a "man's sphere." In addition to being a devoted temperance and suffrage worker, Mrs. Pease was a charter member and long-time president of the Shakespeare Club. She and her family were a part of the lyceum crowd. It was Fidelia and later club member, Mary Anna Toms, who wrote letters to soldiers during the Civil War for women unable to do so themselves.

A composite profile on known early club members revealed that there were many interrelationships among these women, either by kinship, social or religious affiliations, or their husband's business connections. Several of the clubwomen were from social and politically elite families in Richland Center. Many of them had domestic help to assist with household chores. There were years when the Fred Bowen and David James families had footmen.

Even though most of the clubwomen were in their child-raising years, their husband's financial conditions made it possible for them to find the time and money for community activities. These were not a leisured class of women; they worked. Some of them had the domestic

responsibilities of a large home and care of several children. Almost without exception, all of them had church membership and duties. Most of them belonged to several organizations in addition to the Woman's Club. Some were a part of the social clique which entertained lavishly. Often this social and financial status imposed demands and obligations on their lives, some of which were not to their liking. Duties such as catering to a husband's clientele, being on call for relatives, and "laying out" the deceased plus the general expectation that wives be a constant source of comfort to their families, left some of the club women in an endless circle of responsibilities.

For Laura Briggs James, the circle of obligatory duties extended over a long period of time. In 1884 after a siege of constant company, she wrote in her diary, "I am miserable and tired to death." Only three days later, her entry includes, "Company seemed to enjoy the evening but I was too tired to live with any comfort and today I am sick." Nearly two decades later she and her husband hosted an elegant buffet in their home for the old established families in the community. The newspaper devoted almost an entire column describing the affair. Laura's diary account was a single line, "Old Settlers 40 in number were here to picnic supper last eve and enjoyed it immensely but me, 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and am tired today."

There were other clubwomen who were involved as much if not more than Laura James in the social and religious whirlwind of community activities and the demands of family duties. Most of these early members had been raised in an atmosphere of public sentiment that to be a "model Christian woman that they must be a modest and faithful wife, an industrious and benevolent community member, and an efficient housekeeper who did not neglect the refinements of life." Undoubtedly there were other club members like Laura who found,



Front row: David G. James, Vida, Laura (Briggs) James. Back row: Ada, O.B., Beulah
Richland County History Room

so entirely mixed up in other folk's affairs I have nearly lost my identity. I love my neighbors and I love my children but I would like a little while to myself. It is impossible for me to work to a plan if I turn my back upon the kitchen. I like to be busy but hate to have things double up and clamor for attention as they do." Although diaries or journals for other clubwomen are not available for a comparative study, there is no reason to believe that Laura's entries are atypical. Richland Center, located in a picturesque valley halfway between the cities of LaCrosse and Madison, was an incorporated village when the women organized their club. The town had grown from a single log cabin with one occupant

in 1850 to become the county seat with a population of 1,227 in 1880. By then the village had four churches, a graded school, a high

school, a bank, two weekly newspapers, several mills, a tannery, and a number of business places having a good local trade. The affluence and hard work of several of the area businessmen made possible the building of a narrow-gauge railroad from the town to Lone Rock in 1876. There, the train connected with the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Line and to the outside world. As a result, the village became a shipping center, creating a general prosperity in the area. This railroad made possible for the early suffragists to attend legislative hearings in Madison and to be delegates to suffrage conventions, not only in the state but places like Portland, Minneapolis and Chicago. It also provided transportation for such nationally known women as Olympia Brown and Susan B. Anthony to come to Richland Center to promote the cause of women's rights.

In the early days, the community was situated entirely on the east bank of the Pine River. This river furnished the area with excellent water power and a mediocre navigable route to the Wisconsin River. Almost immediately a saw mill and a grist mill were built, providing the very early settlers with lumber, corn meal and grist. In 1870, Parfrey and Pease erected a dam on the river and built a large "merchant and grist mill," which could produce 1,000 barrels of flour per week. This partnership also had a saw and planing mill capable of making 10,000 feet of hardwood lumber per day, a stave factory and a bedstead factory. This factory alone furnished employment for thirty-five men. In 1876, William Hill built a planing mill which did turning, scroll sawing, and joining work, and in 1883, A.H. Krouskop erected a large steam saw mill. After Norman James sold his share of the hardware business to his brother David, he operated a saw mill and a wagon factory on the west side of the river. This mill furnished work to approximately thirty employees. The Pine River and these industrial enterprises made possible the growth of Richland Center for many years.

The majorities of the early settlers in Richland Center were born in the United States and were prohibitionists and Republicans. In 1866, the town was incorporated as a village. Records reveal that the men of the James family, along with Caleb Waggoner, Dexter Pease, Alex Weigley, George Matteson, James Fogo, William Pier, and Henry Toms, all

husbands of early suffragists, were deeply involved in the politics of the village. Richland Center shed its first municipal structure and was incorporated as a city in 1887. Although the form of government changed, the same families were in control and successfully developed a tightly-knit political ring. "Those were the good old days of the caucus and the convention. With the approach of the spring and fall elections, the wheel horses of the county Republican Party would gather of an evening in the sanctum of the Republican Observer office and decide the fate of the aspiring candidates for county and village offices. There were Norm and Dave James, Major Joslin, Harry Pier, Jess Bunell and the editor. Occasionally some other sage, like Hute Allen, would be called in. Always the opposition would include "Doc" Krouskop in bi-party strife, but he was seldom their nemesis, for the Republicans were always much the stronger party; but woe to the upstart who did not consult with the political sages, until later years." Perhaps the economic and political clout of these husbands made it possible for their wives to work so publicly as suffragists.

Almost from the very beginning, the temperance question was a vital civic concern in the town. Two of the earliest lodges and societies organized in the community were the Ladies' Temperance Society and the teetotaler Good Templar Lodge; both were unpopular. Nevertheless, when an unlicensed saloon and a rum shop both opened in 1857, action was taken. Public opinion mobilized with the result that the saloon's stock of liquor was seized and poured onto the ground. The spirits of the rum shop were emptied into the Pine River. Physical violence, discharge of firearms and tense feelings accompanied the first advent of intoxicating liquor in Richland Center.

The temperance battle continued through the years. There were some bitter fights over the liquor question. In 1883, the strong prohibition ticket was elected; "The ladies were out in force, and worked from early in the morning till the polls closed soliciting votes for the no-license ticket." The opposition was persistent. Evidently the town was wet in 1886, for in July of that year a G.A.R. reunion was held in Richland Center. The Richland Rustic reported "Three hundred and twenty-seven kegs of beer from John Postel's brewery were sold here during the reunion, equal to about twenty thousand glasses."



Saloon in Richland Center- Richland County History Room

By the turn of the century, there were eight saloons located on some of the choicest sites in town, each paying a license fee of \$500 per year. This license money was considered by some citizens as a profitable source of easy revenue for the city's treasury. While the city was collecting their \$4,000 of revenue, the saloons were becoming "more lawless and inconsiderate towards public decency. A man was murdered in a saloon; drunkenness and inebriety was growing." As a climax, the Methodist church was dynamited because the pastor denounced the condition of affairs.

Citizen meetings were held; businessmen, ministers and the woman's' organizations pooled their efforts to bring about better conditions. As a result, Father Byrne of St. Mary's Catholic Church refused to take contributions from saloon keepers, cutting them out. A non-partisan ticket was put up for a mayor, a council of businessmen and the submission of the license question for the 1907 election. Election morning the liquor interests were on deck well organized and

equipped with bootleg supplies. The antis turned out, including the disenfranchised women, working from early morning until the polls closed. The result was a sixteen vote majority against license. The city remained dry following that election but the saloon people did not give up until 1912 when no-license was voted in by a majority of 298 votes.

Statistics show that trade in the little city increased about forty percent after 1907. Ninety-nine percent of the business and professional men in the city signed a paper that “no-license had been beneficial and helped increase the volume of trade and made a vast improvement in the morals of the city.” Merchants knew that money spent for booze did not buy their merchandise. The women knew that “when wives of drunkards left their homes to support their families, and the wives of sober men left their homes to hold bazars and chicken pie dinners to keep the victims from starving and freezing, the women met with no opposition. But just as soon as the women of Richland Center helped close the saloons, the local saloon keepers and the Milwaukee brewers began to shout, ‘Woman’s place is in the home.’ Who are the women the liquor interests wish to keep in their homes? The women who are organized and who would give almost anything they possess to have their opinions counted on Election Day.”

Almost all of the early members of the Woman’s Club were involved in prohibition work; many being temperance workers prior to their becoming suffragists. As early as 1874, twenty young girls of Richland Center signed a “Moral Pledge” which was published in the local newspaper resolving they would “not accompany any gentleman who frequents saloons, or uses intoxicating beverages, including wine and beer.” One of these young girls was Madge Eastland who later became Mrs. W.M. Waters and a devoted advocate for female suffrage.



All Nations welcome but Carrie - (Richland County History Room)

“A Remonstrance” appeared in the Observer, April 18, 1878, signed by 175 Richland Center “ladies over twenty-one years of age, that class on whom the miseries in intemperance chiefly fall, and to whom the direct power of the ballot is denied, respectively yet earnestly remonstrate against licensing the sale of intoxicants as a beverage within this village.” At least thirty-one of these ladies became suffragists and known members of the Woman’s Club.

The liquor question and local policies lent impetus to almost every election making the women keenly aware of

their inability to wield any power at the ballot box. The suffrage movement in Richland Center was definitely intertwined with the temperance cause. Temperance work was a major project of the Woman’s Club, second only to that of acquiring the vote. The clubwomen worked closely with the Prohibition Society and later, the WCTU. Julia Bowen was not only a charter member of the WCTU; she served ten consecutive years as the organization’s president. Lucy Pier, referred to as the “firebrand” of the Woman’s Club, often wrote short articles on prohibition for the local newspapers. For several years, Georgianna James wrote a weekly column entitled “The Woman’s Kingdom” for the Richland Rustic newspaper in behalf of the Woman’s Club. Although her column kept the Rustic readers well informed on every phase of women’s rights, local, national, and international, it was heavily laced with temperance information. The clubwomen did not hesitate to publically express their views on the liquor question. Emma Kinney wrote “Some Thoughts on the

Temperance Question” for the Rustic. Fidelia Pease presented “An excellent essay against license” complete with an original poem at a dime social held at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Norman James.



Palczewski, Catherine H. Postcard Archive. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

It seems that although the town became dry by law, it was still inclined to be wet in spirit. It is said that after 1907, drug stores stocked additional supplies of “cough and cold remedies” which were kept under the counter and that the number of prescriptions requiring a high alcohol content written by doctors increased. One doctor was fined “for prescribing spirits to a perfectly healthy man.” During the decade following the 1870 census, marriages had taken place, babies had arrived, new families had moved to town, several of the earlier families had

prospered, and the liquor question remained an unsettled condition. All of these factors help to make a fertile ground to sow the seed of female suffrage.

After the Woman’s Club was organized, the early members were a busy group promoting their cause. In August of 1882, a branch of the club was organized in Sextonville, a village seven miles from Richland Center and the parental home of Laura B. James. The officers elected for the branch club were: President, Mrs. Helen Thomas; Vice-Presidents, Mrs. Madge Waters, Dr. Ada Lamson, and Mrs. Kate Crapser, Mrs. Hadassah McCollum, Mrs. Lida McCollum, Mrs. Philena Lamson, Mrs. Isabel DeVoe, and Miss Josephine Eastland. The club started with fourteen members. (Ada Lamson, daughter of Mrs. Philena Lamson, was born in 1858. She was the first graduate of the first high school, Sextonville, in Richland County and a graduate of a homeopathic college in Chicago. Because Dr. Lamson had a positive attitude towards abortion, she was a controversial person in her community.)

During the next couple of decades, the Sextonville branch furnished several of the most active suffragists for the Richland Center club as Madge Waters, Jennie Lamberson, Blanche Barnard, Hattie McCorkle, and Josephine Eastland left Sextonville and moved to Richland Center. Although this branch club does not appear to have grown to any semblance of a strong group, some of the women were long time suffragists. In fact, the parent organization celebrated its twenty seventh anniversary with a picnic on the lawn of Isabel DeVoe. Thirty Richland Center members journeyed on the train to Twin Bluffs where they were met and then taken to the DeVoe home in Sextonville on a wagon decorated with yellow ribbons. No evidence has been found that there were other branch organizations formed in Richland County.

In September of 1882, Mrs. John Olin, wife of a prominent Madison attorney, requested that members of the Richland Center club come to Madison to help form a state suffrage organization. During the previous fifteen years, two attempts had been made to put into order a viable working state organization but the efforts always died out after legislative rejections of suffrage petitions. “With pencils sharpened at both ends,” fourteen Richland Center and Sextonville clubwomen went to Madison where they assisted in sending out a call for a state convention. The Woman’s Club of Richland Center was represented by Julia Bowen, Laura B. James, Victoria Layton, and others. The delegates from

Sextonville were Madge Waters and Dr. Ada Lamson. This was a new organization, independent of any former association. It was named the Wisconsin Woman's Suffrage Association (WWSA).

The first annual meeting of the Richland Center Woman's Club was held at the Baptist church on June 2, 1883, with Julia Bowen presiding. The meeting opened with a prayer, followed by the reading and signing of an original poem written for the occasion by Mary Hurlbut and read by her daughter, Laura B. James. President Bowen delivered the address of welcome which included: " And thus it comes that we, unable longer to hold our peace have taken counsel together for one year, as to how we shall enter in and repair our larger home, the State. While receiving few criticisms, we have had many encouragements. A majority of the noblest men and women of our county have given us hearty encouragements. The press has aided us liberally, for which we return our thanks. As a club we have grown in numbers from a membership of twelve to fifty. We have the nucleus of a library, have taken a short course of study in political economy, given four public lectures, and sent petitions to county, congressional and State legislatures for prohibitory and equal suffrage amendments to the State constitution. The true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals. Our political forefathers were but a vigorous offshoot of an aristocracy at first, then a rich man's government, requiring property qualifications for full citizenship, then a white man's government but never yet a free republic."

All the participants in the program that day were either members of the club, their relatives, or county residents. The men taking part in the activities were Reverend J.D. Tull from the Methodist church, Reverend Simon B. Loomis, a Buena Vista township Unitarian, P.H. Fay and H.A. Eastland, both Richland Center attorneys, and Professors Smith and Sweet, educators in the area.

Reverend Loomis proved to be a popular speaker for the Richland Center clubwomen. He was one of the guest lecturers at almost every public meeting or convention sponsored by the Woman's Club in its early days. On the 1870 Federal Census he is listed as forty-six years old, born in New York, with real estate valued at \$10,000 and personal property worth \$2500. At that time, he and his wife had five children, ages ranging from ten to twenty-three. He was the minister for the Bear Valley Union Church and served as the District Assemblyman in 1870.

It was his daughter-in-law, Alice Ball Loomis, who was ordained a minister in 1894, organized the Unity church in Richland Center serving as the pastor for two years, and worked zealously for the suffrage movement for many years. She was a member of the Woman's Club and spent at least one term as its president. In 1900, she was elected a WWSA officer but newspaper accounts differ as to which office. For more than twenty years she endorsed the philosophy of Socialism. Her activity in the interest of women's rights continued after she moved to South Dakota where she helped organize a state suffrage organization.

All of the Eastland families were advocates for female suffrage. Although Madge Eastland Waters was probably the most prominent espousing the rights of women, there were other family members devoted to the cause. Lawyer Harrison A. Eastland was often the guest speaker at suffrage affairs. He was a Close Communion Baptist clergyman who studied law. He moved to Sextonville in 1851 as an attorney. His wife, clubwoman Isabel Eastland, was born in 1818. The couple was married in 1851 and became the parents of two sons, Kirk W. and Harrison W. Isabel had been married before and it was a daughter by the earlier marriage who was a charter member, Mrs. Laura McCarthy, of the Woman's Club. The son, Kirk, married Cynthia Ostrander, daughter of Blanche Barnard Ostrander, combining two suffrage conscious families. Kirk and Cynthia had a daughter, Vera, who became the city's librarian, and is listed in the 1906-1907 Woman's Club yearbook as a member, thus making three generations of suffragists. The Eastland family believed in the doctrine of spiritualism, belonged to the Lyceum crowd, and Harrison Eastland was an officer of the Law and Order League. His sister-in-law, Clara Eastland, was elected WWSA Press Committee Chairman in 1909.



Julia Busby Bowen - Arbegust photo archive

As Julia Bowen emphasized in her welcoming address at the annual celebration, both local newspapers co-operated with the club members. The women made sure that the suffrage issue was kept in the public eye. In the early years, the club meetings were held every Friday afternoon at a member's home. Almost every week the club's minutes appeared in the Observer. Georgianna James wrote her column faithfully each week for the Rustic. Although these women were vocal, it was always in a most dignified and ladylike manner. Laura James expressed the fears and hopes of the charter members in an article for the Observer. "We organized the club from a sense of duty, because we felt the need of it as a social school. We each felt a shrinking fear that we should fall so far short of our ideal that we might wish ourselves safely back forever in the seclusion of our homes. We feared no outside criticism, we cared little for the passing flings which are always hurled at anything like an innovation, but we dreaded lest the elements of inharmony might exist within our circle composed as it is of members differing widely and positively in sentiment, united only in a desire for improvement. Thus

far we have put self in the background and worked with a will for what we deemed the general good and according to the wishes of the majority, and instead of feeling it a task to attend our meetings we esteem it a privilege."

During 1883, the club participated in several civic projects in addition to their suffrage and temperance work. A wood bee was held for a needy family, funds were raised to build a pavilion on the courthouse square for open-air concerts, and the club subscribed to the Observer to make good to the paper the loss of a Rockbridge patron who was opposed to temperance and suffrage.

The highlight of 1884 was the hosting of the first regular convention of the WWSA. This was a two day affair held during September in Bailey's Hall. The event was much work for the Richland Center Club. Women from Milwaukee, Madison, Whitewater, Mukwonago, Evansville, Racine, Grand Rapids, and Schofield had to be met at the train; hospitality had to be secured for overnight lodgings; arrangement details for the convention required planning. Reverend Olympia Brown, Helen Gouger, Emma Bascom, and Helen Olin were in attendance. Newspaper accounts state that the hall was packed the evening session of the second day. This must have been quite uncomfortable for everyone as it was a day of intense heat and Bailey's Hall was on the second floor of a brick building. Electricity had not yet come to Richland Center making the hand fan the only acceptable method for ladies to cool themselves in public.

In the published minutes of the October 26 meeting of that year, Secretary Victoria Layton made a scathing commentary on women's rights regarding children and on the women apathetic to the woes of her sex. "There are only three states in the Union where the mother has any right to her own children, unless illegitimate, where she has the sole right, thereby offering a premium to illegitimacy. And in our own town recently, children were taken by the father from school, and from their mother against all her entreaties and tears. Women who have kind husbands and good homes fold their hands complacently and say, 'I have all the rights I want,' and we say, 'Then you are anointed.' The law and ballot should protect us, not the possible kindness of any person."

Local suffragists were adamant that they acquire the right to vote on laws which influenced their family life. When a father could bequeath his children to a perfect stranger without any recourse for their living mother, laws needed changing. These early members hoped to change public opinion on the bondage of women to custom and law encouraging their sex to appraise the past and to come to the realization that it was time to stop meekly accepting every suggestion of man. The Woman's Club sponsored lectures urging mothers to be less sacrificing for their families and to

keep up with the times so they could at least keep pace in general intelligence with members of their families. These same lectures urged young girls to get a practical education so that since the law made them a helpless dependent upon the charity and kindness of a husband, a wife could depend on her own resources in case of an emergency. Teen-aged girls were warned to be slow in accepting a husband, since upon that one step they ventured their future life.

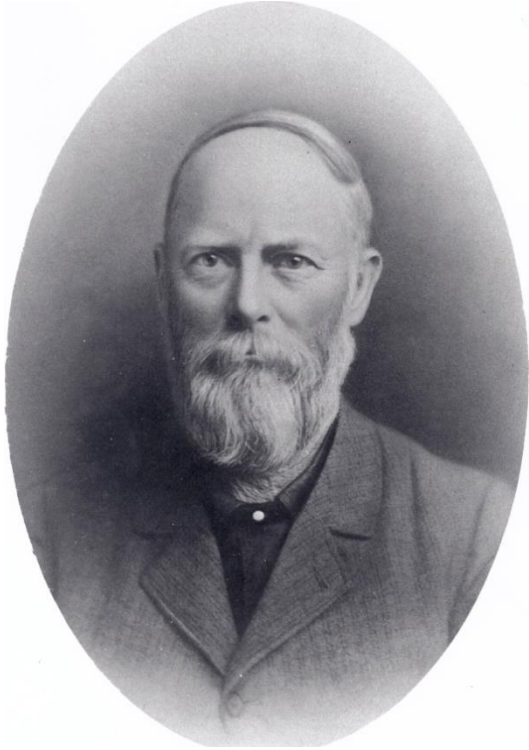
The clubwomen were aware of sorry examples of women too unselfish in their families to represent themselves and who were seldom appreciated by those who benefitted by their faithful labor. One wife had worked for fifty years rearing a large family of boys, all receiving good educations, who were ashamed of their ignorant mother. In another family, the husband had left his wife the drudgery of the farm while he cultivated acquaintances in town. By learning to read, he outgrew his wife and took a mistress. The wife objected by leaving his bed and board. The husband duly advertised and his wife found herself poor and alone.

For many early clubwomen, their original goal was to obtain the right to vote only on local issues, especially at school elections and on the liquor problem. Several of the members found that their husbands were even more in favor of suffrage than they were. Mrs. McMurtrey said "that in these early days she thought she would only care to vote on local matters, but that her husband backed the idea of national universal suffrage." Surprisingly enough, when most men were opposed to giving the vote to women, the husbands of many of the club members gave their support to their wives and became ardent workers themselves. There were clubwomen who wanted to extend membership to these men but the idea ran into opposition. Martha Freeman thought the women needed the discipline and education they would acquire by depending on themselves. Lizzie Strang said that the work should be done by women alone for the man who would join would help the women anyway. As a result, the Woman's Club remained an organization for women only.

One of these men was clubwoman Georgianna James' husband, Assemblyman Norman L. James, who fathered the bill granting school suffrage to women in 1885. The bill resulted in a poorly worded law providing women the right to vote at any election pertaining to school matters. The suffragists were elated, not knowing at this time that it would take most of them fourteen more years to have their vote counted. The law proved to be almost impossible to execute because city officials were often elected at the same time as school officers. The law did not provide the means of determining how the ballots of women voting only for school officials should be received with those of candidates for other offices. When WWSA President Olympia Brown's vote was refused in Racine, the executive committee of the state convention in the fall of 1887, the members passed a resolution stating: "Whereas this law has been set aside in many places, and women denied the right to vote as such elections, and whereas our executive committee have brought suit to secure the enforcement of the law, resolve, that we unanimously and heartily endorse this action, and pledge our influence, sympathy, and money to sustain them in the suit, through the necessary steps until an unequivocal and authoritative decision is reached."

The test case won in the circuit court but the appeal that was taken to the Supreme Court lost. Richland Center clubwoman Marie Fowler, serving as chairman of the executive committee of the WWSA at the time, wrote letters of protest to state papers comparing the court's decision to the Dred Scott case. In Mrs. Fowler's opinion, "A black man has no rights that a white man is bound to respect. A woman has no rights that a man is bound to respect, except to be hung, pay taxes and vote at county school meetings." The litigation cost the small group of state suffragists \$2000. Accounts say that every dollar was paid in full by these devoted women but it was 1901 before the legislature passed an act providing separate ballot boxes for women. Nevertheless, the first legislative step for the enfranchisement of Wisconsin woman was instigated by the husband of a Richland Center Woman's Club member.

It was at the 1887 state convention that \$528.75 was pledged for the work of the state organization for the upcoming year, of which the six delegates from Richland Center “generously” promised \$200. The lawsuit and the state pledge meant much self-sacrifice on the part of the local suffragists. Many club members were seen wearing vaguely familiar hats with new trimmings. Wedding dresses were made over; an oyster supper to raise money was held at the Good Templar’s Hall. It may have been at this time that Julia Bowen and her husband were ready to leave for a gala evening affair when Mr. Bowen asked his wife why she was not wearing the necklace he had given her. Being a good Christian wife, Julia admitted she had donated it to the suffrage cause. Her husband was a bit disgruntled for it was an especially nice piece of jewelry and he would have given her the money she deemed necessary for the cause. Many of the husbands of the clubwomen were more willing to help in the suffrage cause than the wives were able to comprehend.



Frederick Phelps Bowen - Arbegust photo archive

It was also in 1887 that the village fathers tried to have an amendment allowing women to vote in the charter they drafted to change Richland Center center from an incorporated village to a city. The legislature refused to consider the amendment. In order to have Richland Center become a city, the amendment was withdrawn.

These setbacks did not deter the local suffragists from working for their cause. It may have made them all the more determined to make the day come when they were not impotent at the ballot box. It was about this time that Georgianna called attention of the Rustic readers to the fact that ladies in Kansa had voted. “Nobody had to eat cold victuals as a consequence, and the baby and the housework received their usual amount of attention. We do not see that their social status has been lowered thereby, or that the fact of their handling the ballot has tended in any way to degrade the fair sex in the estimation of right-minded people. They went to the polls, deposited their tickets, and went any about their business, without stopping to loaf on street corners or indulge in heated arguments on the merits and demerits of certain candidates. They did not get drunk and create disturbances, but quietly wended their way to their homes and resumed their ordinary occupations, an example which might well be followed by the lords of creation.”

In November of 1888, the club hosted its first semi-annual convention of the Seventh Congressional District of the WWSA. The convention was held at the new Christian church. District President Julia Bowen presented the greetings; Fidelia Pease gave the address of welcome. Other Woman’s Club members taking part in the program were Mrs. W.D.S. Ross, Clara Eastland and Victoria Layton. Their beloved Olympia Brown was in attendance. Featured speaker was the old stand-by Reverend S.B. Loomis.

The following month found the women sponsoring a two-day Christmas fair and bazaar to help defray convention expenses. The affair was held at Chandler’s Hall. Admission to the fair was ten cents. Lunches were served all day the first day of activities followed by a supper in the evening. The second day, both a dinner and a supper was served; each meal cost twenty five cents, oysters being ten cents extra. The young women presided over the tables. Accounts say they were pretty and useful items for sale at the bazaar. Only women who have been involved in serving public meals can appreciate the labor required by an event such as this Christmas fair. Every single item had to be carried to a second floor; there were no elevators in those days. There was also no running water or sewer service.

For the first time, support from farm women was evident. Mrs. Fred Carswell, Mrs. George Carswell, and Mrs. Brace, all from Bear Valley, donated chickens and turkeys. Mrs. Harry Eaton sent chickens and vegetables; Mrs. Albert Holcomb provided chickens and cheese. Mrs. Brown of Sextonville sent a pair of hand-knit stockings along with her best wishes for success. Doctor Pearson's wife, Spring Green, made fancy holders for the bazaar. Mrs. Butterfield gave five dollars' worth of polish for cleaning silver. Donations from Richland Center residents noted in the local papers were a gift of money from Mrs. H.L. Burnham, the use of the hall from D.O. Chandler, and a load of wood from David G. James. Mrs. A.M. Lane, Connecticut, mother of Georgianna James sent a fancy pen wiper and some lace.

The public was invited to the fair and to bring their sisters, cousins, and aunts for a dish of hot oysters, fragrant coffee, baked beans, and delicious cakes and pies. The bazaar was advertised as the place to buy presents for Christmas gifts. It is not known if the donated poultry and foodstuffs were used in the meals served during the two days or if they were sold for cash.

The contributions to the fair and bazaar reveal that there were some farm women who were interested in the suffrage movement. Naturally living in the country hampered rural women from participating in activities away from their immediate communities. Transportation was by horse and buggy. For many farm wives at this time, the only occasion they journeyed to Richland Center was to attend the county fair. For some families on the far edge of the county that meant leaving home at four or five o'clock in the morning and getting home after dark. Many of the farm women were immigrants living the customs of their native land, believing woman's place was in the home, not at the ballot box. This was especially true of German families. Some rural wives were too uneducated to realize the implications of women acquiring the vote. Others were so busy keeping their families clothed and fed that there was not time to worry about such insignificant problems as casting their ballot. Perhaps Jennie Lamberson expressed the sentiments of many Richland County farm women when she said, "Although I was deeply interested in suffrage, I had little time to think about it then as I was living on the farm and was busy cooking for hired men and minding twin babies."

Although the suffragists, national, state, and local, held conventions, had public forums, increased press publicity, and were better organized, there was no appearance of advancement of suffrage legislation in the state or in the nation. Wisconsin suffrage workers poured measures embodying full or partial female suffrage in at every session of the legislature but could not gather enough support to secure their passage. After ten years of devout dedication some of the local suffragists were beginning to tire. By 1892, the average attendance at the bi-monthly meetings was down to ten. When a communication from Olympia Brown informed the members of the club that Brodhead had



declined to have the state annual meeting and that it would be in Richland Center unless she was informed to the contrary, the ladies decided "to accept the inevitable with grace."

Some of the early enthusiasts of the membership were no longer with the group. Clubwoman Maggie Matteson and her family had moved to Woonsocket, South Dakota, "a wonderful little city only three years old." The club missed the presence and the inspiration of Lucy Hoyt Pier who died of a sudden heart attack in 1890. It was about this time that club member Josephine Downs Munson, her editor husband and their three daughters, moved to Viroqua, Wisconsin, where Mr. Munson was in the newspaper business and for five years, the private secretary for Wisconsin Governor James H. Davidson. Some of the clubwomen were so absorbed in home duties and church work they found it difficult to spare the time for club meetings.

By now the group was meeting in a room downtown. As in any organization, there were those dedicated souls who continue to carry the responsibilities for the group. Every now and then a new member joined, adding zeal to the cause. The women continued to watch and petition the legislature. They not only kept an eye on the Wisconsin legislature, they also watched their local officials. The city fathers were careless during a spring election in the early 1890's by being tardy with their election notices and by allowing candidates to serve as inspectors and clerks, both violations of the city charter. The clubwomen sent a criticism to officials alerting them to clean up their act.

In the early nineteenth century, men distinguished women's work by referring to it as the "women's sphere." Women



became so accustomed to having their sphere defined by men it became an ingrained opinion that they had a "special sphere" which encouraged self-control and the preservation of home and family life. This domestic sphere required preparation; woman was neither greater nor less than man, but supposedly, she was of a different sphere. For many men, the schoolroom ranked next to the home as a "sphere of woman's work" but law, medicine, religion, and politics were exclusively men's. For many women, their only activities outside the home were allied with the church. Ministers used the concept of "Woman's sphere" to esteem female importance while containing it. In their sermons they emphasized the necessity to be subordinate to and be dependent on husbands. Females were trained from youth to know their place. Their gender was the determinant of their lives until women began to be educated. Education led many women to look beyond their normal sphere; this worried both the liberals and conservatives of the day. They were afraid that "feminist claims to intellectual equality with man and to the same educational and professional opportunity" might mean "the irreparable loss of moral influence."

Palczewski, Catherine H. Postcard Archive. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

The New Englanders brought this Victorian frame of mind west to Wisconsin. As early as 1847, during the debates in the territorial legislature, the men were worrying over the sphere of women. Marshall

M. Strong felt that if a woman was given separate property rights, she would "be transferred from her appropriate sphere and every trace of loveliness blotted out."

The early members of the Woman's Club had been raised during the time of dominating Victorian mores. Literature, both pro and con on the suffrage issue, was filled with information relating to the sphere of women. Evidently, some of the suffragists were tired of the sphere cliché. Georgianna James wrote about visiting Frank Burnham who had moved from Bear Valley to a "beautiful farm" near Ellensdale, North Dakota, where he was keeping house and cooking all alone. "He came up and invited us all there to a tea party. Let me give you his bill of fare, and assure you that a man can certainly engineered a tea party successfully; bread butter, cheese, tea, lemonade, apples, strawberries and cream, three kinds of nuts, three kinds of candies, oranges, fruit, and coconut cakes, and all served up very neatly. Perhaps he was out of his sphere. Do you think so? What bosh! I am so tired of hearing that worn out old argument. I say let a man or woman do any honest work that they wish to do. For a long time, woman had been supposed to be the refiner of the domestic circle. But why should not her power of refinement is suspected to be applicable to every other relation in life as to the household? What is there hinders it from producing the same effects in the church, in senate chambers, in legislative halls, in primary meetings, anywhere in the broad sphere of public affairs that men now acknowledge in the

family? My faith is rooted, and grounded, and established, that the cheapest, the easiest, and most natural and proper method of introducing reformation into public affairs, is to give woman a coordinate influence there?"

By 1910 the change in domestic conditions had been so widespread and profound that an enlargement of the sphere of women's interest and activities had been an inevitable consequence. As women became more and more involved in the civic, educational, social, and political life of their communities, the terminology, "Women's sphere" died out.

Although there is nothing to make one believe Georgianna James ever lost her interest in the suffrage movement, she did become disenchanted with the Woman's Club. In the August 11, 1893 minutes of the club, the entry includes, "Sec. reported letter from Mrs. Georgia James criticizing the Club and asking that her name be taken from the membership." Her resignation may have been due to an earlier incident. A couple of months previous the minutes reveal, "Mrs. Georgia James proposed a work of charity saying, 'This is what we are banded together for,' but the President decided that our sole work since becoming auxiliary is suffrage. As individuals they could assist, but not as a Club." The president at that time was Madge Waters. Georgianna apparently had no further involvement with the Woman's Club.



Palczewski, Catherine H. Postcard Archive.
University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

It was at a November meeting of that year that Mrs. Ludwig entered the meeting "almost unceremoniously" and tore the eight attending members away to the courthouse where they appeared in shawls and fascinators as the Woman's Club to ask the county board to allow them to store their library in an empty room there. The petition was granted; the following Monday the board reconsidered and the same women went in their best cloaks and hats as the women of Richland Center and were refused their requests. It seems that men had just as much to change their minds as women. Too, the county board was composed mostly of rural men who, with their wives, often viewed suffragists as "worldly women." It may have been that constituents influenced the board members to have second thoughts over the weekend. News of unpopular actions traveled fast even in the horse and buggy days.

Besides their Yankee backgrounds, there were other probable factors which influenced the lives of early Richland Center suffragists. Clubwomen such as Margaret Richards, Mary Briggs Hurlbut, Maggie Fogo, Liva DeVoe, Clara Eastland, Lillie Wood, Louise James, Laura B. James and Georgianna James may have attended a lecture on women's rights given by Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell, in June, 1856. These clubwomen were living in

Richland County in 1856 and were either young girls or married women at the time. So far as it is known, Lucy Stone was the first female to speak before an audience in Richland County and certainly the first suffragist. The

Blackwells may have been the first persons of national note to visit Richland Center.

It was reported that the couple spoke to a large and attentive audience. Lucy has been described as being able to hold her listeners in "breathless silence." She was the first woman in the United States to keep her maiden name after marriage. Laura Briggs James always used her given and maiden name along with her married name instead of using the customary title of Mrs. David G. James. Did Laura practice this policy because she was following a precedent set by Lucy Stone or was she using her name as a way of demonstrating that women could be recognized as a separate entity? Although the suffragists in Richland Center did not get organized until twenty six years after the Stone – Blackwell lecture, several of the clubwomen were to have an acquaintance with Lucy Stone. Lucy was one of those who helped organize the WWSA in September of 1882 at Madison. Fourteen Richland County clubwomen also helped at that particular coming together of local, state, and national suffragists. There must have been later contacts between the



Lucy Stone - Richland County History Room

local feminists and the Blackwells at state and national conventions. A letter written to Julia Bowen by Henry Blackwell, with an added postscript from Lucy, reveals that the couple was familiar and pleased with the suffrage movement in Richland Center.

Sophia Emmeline Bloomer is another woman who may have been an influence on those females who later became involved in women's rights in Richland Center. Mrs. Bloomer was probably one of the first true feminists in the United States. This fiery twenty four year old came to town to be the editor of a new independent weekly newspaper, the Richland Zouave. To the conservative little unincorporated village, which already had a newspaper, the idea of a woman invading the journalistic field must have ruffled more than a few male egos at this early date. Mrs. Bloomer was a graduate of Lawrence College and wrote under the pen name of Lisle Lester. If she was trying to hide her gender behind a male sounding pen name, in a town as small as Richland Center in 1861, secrets simply did not survive.

Life was made difficult for this attractive young woman. The editor of the other paper accused her of being a secessionist. Her reply was a long editorial stating that the accusation was "an Unmitigated, Unwarranted Falsehood." Being labeled a secessionist during the early days of the Civil War was most uncomplimentary. A month later, in her farewell editorial, Lisle Lester described herself as a "weary child." The newspaper did not prove to be a financial success, so the publication was soon suspended. Probable factors contributing to its short life were the unsettled conditions due to the beginning of the Civil war, the inability of the small village to support two weekly newspapers at that time, and possible apathy towards a literary type publication. After the paper's demise, Sophie Bloomer went to Milwaukee where she taught the first girls who ever set type on the Milwaukee Sentinel, since, due to the war, there was a shortage of male typesetters.

Like Lucy Stone, Sophia Bloomer's influence on the local women cannot be determined. She did lecture in the county on the topic of "Women." Some of the early clubwomen did follow Lisle Lester's literary career. Women like Sophie Emmeline Bloomer leave impressions where ever they go. She had ten months to leave an impression on the women in Richland Center.

The circumstance which made possible this group of enthusiastic suffragists in Richland Center, and set them apart in the state as a beehive of shakers and movers, was the support and progressive attitude of so many of the area menfolk. As early as 1874, a woman was appointed by the village board as clerk of the town. It is believed that this woman was Alice Downs, nineteen year old daughter of William H. Downs. Mr. Downs had been the village clerk since 1870 and served until he suffered a stroke in 1873. Probably the daughter, Alice, took over the work of her father's office after his disability and then was appointed as his replacement in 1874. The following year she married a man by the name of Swatek and went to live in Cherry Valley, Illinois.

If Alice Downs was the first woman to hold a public office in Richland County, then she was followed as village clerk by her sister, Katie G. Downs, a well-known school teacher in the county. Katie served three years in the office. In 1878, she became the bride of the county prosecuting attorney Eugene Wulfing. The couple moved to Mitchell South Dakota in 1882.

After 1877 the office of village clerk was filled by Katie's father-in law for two years and by her brother-in-law for two years. This means that one of the Downs families was appointed to be village clerk for at least twelve consecutive years. Nevertheless, it is very uncommon during those early times for village fathers to appoint females to an office.

At the annual school meeting held during July of 1876 in Richland Center, the men elected Fidelia Pease to the position of director on the school board. Fidelia Pease was one of those people who excel in everything they try. Apparently she proved a woman could fulfill the responsibilities of such an office since the following July, the men voted in Julia Bowen as clerk of the school district.

Although Victorian era standards were evident in the social, economic, and political lives of these early settlers, when it came to women's rights, both sexes in Richland Center were pioneer in thought and deed. Certainly, the confidence that the men demonstrated they had in their womenfolk was an influencing factor on the actions of the later suffragists. Regardless of the discouragements that came, year after weary year, the members of the Woman's Club never gave up their goal of acquiring the vote. Their resiliency may have been due to the enthusiasm of their male counterparts. This is not to say every man in Richland Center favored women's rights. There were those who ridiculed the idea and some cowed their women to silence, just as there were women who considered the political arena a man's world. On the whole, equal suffrage was met with a receptive mind in Richland Center.



Palczewski, Catherine H. Postcard Archive. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

One of the best occurrences that ever took place for the people of Richland County was the formation of the Federation of Women's Clubs in 1898. The Alpha Circle, the Shakespeare Club, the Women's Relief Corps, the WCTU, and the Woman's Club were the charter organizations. Madge Waters, president of the Woman's Club at the time, along with her committee, presented the first program. Woman's Club member, Jennie Lamberson, was elected the first president of the Federation. The purpose of the new

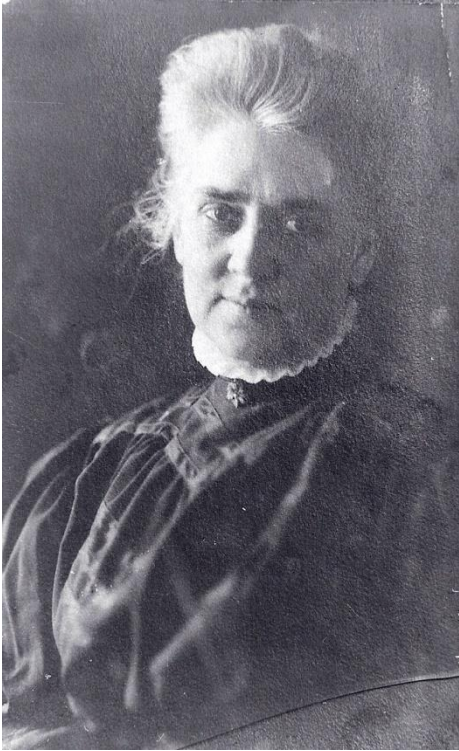
organization was civic improvement. The Federation became the vital force

in the progress of the city. This affiliation gave women the advantage of collective resources for such projects as acquiring a Carnegie Library, a city hospital, the first municipal auditorium in the state, a new high school, and in later years a public swimming pool. It also made possible for the members of the Woman's Club to concentrate on their primary goal of female suffrage.

By 1905, Richland Center had a population of 2635 with a total of 426 females in the "silk stocking" third ward which had the heaviest concentration of suffragists. Alice Edwards was the treasurer of the Woman's Club; her account shows thirty three paid members with dues of two dollars. It was during 1905 that Richland Center lost two of the staunchest advocates for the suffrage cause when both Laura Briggs James and Julia Bowen died the same week in January.

Although Julia Bowen was more of a civic leader than Laura Briggs James, Laura was the backbone of the early suffrage movement in Richland County. It was on Laura's lawn that the ice cream socials were held when the Woman's Club treasury ran dry. It was her home that such suffragists as Susan B. Anthony, Olympia Brown, and Anna Howard Shaw were given hospitality and lodging when they came to Richland Center to promote the suffrage movement.

In her tribute to Laura, Reverend Olympia Brown wrote the following: "Retiring in her disposition, and unassuming, her best work was not known to the great multitude, but was felt and recognized by the circle who knew her best. She had the courage of her convictions and without any demonstration or claim to being a reformer; she led the thought of the people in her vicinity. She was untrammelled by old traditions and unhampered by any form of superstition or fear of public opinion. She did her own thinking and lived out her high ideal. One of the first women in this state to advocate woman's suffrage, she continued loyal and earnest in her work to the day of her death."



Grace Garrison Lincoln - (Richland County History Room

By this time, second generation suffragists compose approximately one third of the membership of the Woman's Club, most of them being daughters or daughters-in-law of early members. One of the group of young matrons of Richland Center, who became interested in the suffrage movement, both local and on the state level, was Grace Garrison Lincoln.

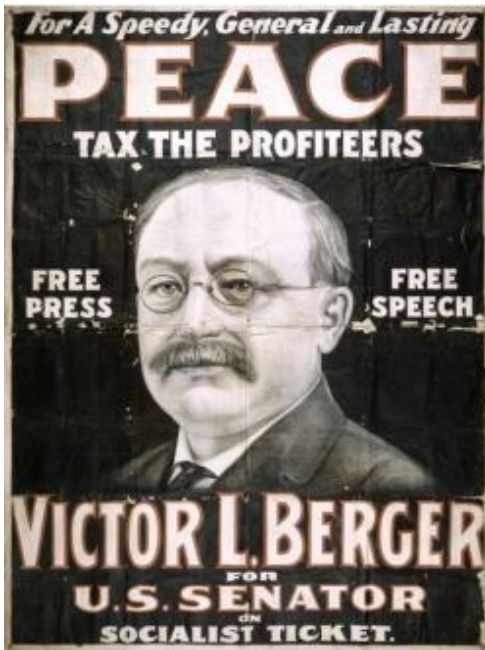
When Grace Garrison was in her teens, her parents moved to Lone Rock, Wisconsin, where at that early age, Grace ran a small millinery business. There was no high school in Lone Rock when Grace finished the grades, but by studying at home, she passed the examination qualifying her to teach a rural school. By saving her wages as a teacher, riding cross-country on horseback selling hats accompanied by her best friend, Nel Wallace, playing for dances at night, Grace earned her way through Platteville College and the University of Wisconsin. As a result of her business ventures, she became a skilled equestrienne and an accomplished musician, playing the guitar and mouth organ at the same time.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1899, Grace moved to Richland Center to become the first public school music teacher employed by the city. The same year she met and married a local young lawyer and University of Wisconsin law school graduate, Perl Lincoln. Shortly after her marriage, she became a member of the Woman's Club, an active suffragist and a civic leader in Richland Center.

Politically, Mrs. Lincoln was a socialist. For several months she wrote a column entitled, "Socialism," which was published in the Rustic until the editor received too much criticism against the column. Grace had been deeply influenced by Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward" and "Equality." She felt socialism offered a better way of life than the competitive struggle.

In 1901, the newly formed Socialist party endorsed unrestricted and equal suffrage for men and women and pledged itself to engage in an active campaign in that direction, a distinction it held alone until the Progressive party followed suit in 1912. In Wisconsin, suffragists and socialists cooperated on the enactment of woman suffrage because each believed that enfranchisement would benefit its cause. At this time, suffragists were accepting support from wherever they could get it and the socialists were hoping that equal suffrage would increase their size and strength. The Social Democrat Party was a "part of a state wide woman suffrage coalition that also included the State Teachers Association, the Federation of Labor, the Federation of Women's Clubs, Ladies of the Maccabees, the Grange, the Farmers' Society of Equity, the Ministerial Association, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union." Until the outbreak of World War I, none of these organizations showed any embarrassment over consorting with socialists. Women did swell the ranks of the party membership from ten percent to fifteen percent. Although the high point of women's agitation within the

Socialist party was the period around 1910 to 1912, Woman's Club members, Madge Waters, Alice Ball Loomis, and Grace Lincoln, endorsed the socialist philosophy for the remainder of their lives. Mrs. Lincoln wrote letters to editors for years espousing her philosophy and thoughts.



Victor Berger – Milwaukee Socialist - Wisconsin State Historical Society

On February 29, 1908, Ada James organized a Political Equality Club in Richland Center. This was the first suffrage club for girls in the state. It started with ten charter members of young women of late high school age who believed they owed a debt of gratitude to the women who had made sacrifices that they might enjoy their opportunities. The object of the club was to study the lives of women who had been instrumental in obtaining educational and political rights for females. As members, they pledged themselves to do all they could to continue the work. By 1911 the membership had grown to twenty three. Political Equality Club girls matured into members at the Woman's Club.

Females advocating votes for women in Richland Center disliked being referred to as suffragettes; they called themselves suffragists. Since these

early suffragists were conservative clubwomen and girls, the term suffragette had militant overtones to which they objected. Richland Center females crusading for privileges at the polls never lacked decorum, although they were those who accused them of it. Their meetings were distinctly moral and religious. The early Richland Center suffragists were not revolutionary radicals they were primarily interested in equal suffrage because they believed that home conditions and family life would be improved if women had a voice in law.

In November of 1908 David G. James was elected to the state senate by a majority of 977 in Richland County and 2020 in Vernon County. Mr. James soon gained a reputation as being one of the most effective workers in the senate. Suffragists all over the state were encouraged and excited. If anyone could help get a suffrage bill through the legislature, it would be the husband of Laura Briggs James and the WWSA was in need of help. By 1910, the membership of the state organization was down to fewer than seventy. Oftentimes, there was less than a dollar in the treasury and the WWSA was struggling to maintain its existence.

Olympia Brown, who was still president of the organization, was well acquainted with Senator James, having been a guest in the James home several times. This acquaintance made it easier for her to request of the senator that he introduce a woman suffrage bill into the state legislature. Being a member of one of the most pro-suffrage families in the state, Senator James was one of the most informed men in the country on the history and implications of the female suffrage movement. Not only had his wife given generously of her time and talent to the cause, his daughter Ada, had become one of the state's foremost suffragist, his daughter-in-law Eloise, was active in the local Woman's Club, and his youngest child Vida, was following the suffrage footsteps of her elders. President Brown mailed a copy of her proposed bill to the senator on January 16, 1911. Mr. James introduced the bill into the senate on February 3, 1911.

The next couple of months proved to be a busy and controversial time for both local and state suffragists. One of the most exciting events of the 1911 legislature was the general hearing of the joint session on March 14. Special reduced train fare was arranged for Richland Center women desiring to attend the hearing. Approximately fifty local women joined suffragists from all over the state to pack the assembly chamber in the capitol. Emotions ran high; when an anti-suffrage assemblyman declared that the suffragists wanted "everyone to obey them as their own hen-pecked husbands did," he was hissed. As he concluded his talk with the words, "The ideal woman is a housewife and mother," the band

hired by the suffragists played the Star Spangled Banner. This tactic must have brought everyone to their feet. The band had been a luxury for the suffragists. It was made possible because Ada James returned a dress she had just purchased, using the money to make up the difference in the amount the suffragists had and the amount needed to hire the band. Except for the hissing, the meeting was a success; suffrage leaders regretted that women in their ranks would stoop to such unladylike actions.



Miss Ada James - Wisconsin State Historical Society

There was much dissatisfaction on the part of the younger suffragists with the leadership of their president. This generation wanted to revitalize the suffrage movement and being convinced that Mrs. Brown would not step down from her presidency, wanted a new organization. While these younger women looked to thirty five year old Ada James for leadership, the majority of the older members remained loyal to President Brown. Miss James was reluctant to accept this new leadership, though she realized that the younger women would form a second organization with or without her help. Ada had a hearing impairment which she felt would interfere with her performance as a leader. Too, she had grown up in the suffrage movement and realized the plight of the older members, she had also had been a longtime friend of Olympia Brown. It was due to her father's encouragement that Richland Center's Ada James accepted the presidency of the state Political Equality League (PEL) on April 4, 1911.

The two suffrage organizations campaigned separately. WWSA already had affiliated societies around the state. The PEL made a vigorous effort to organize branches all over Wisconsin, encouraging both black people and men to form PEL chapters in their communities. Ada James had hoped that the two state organizations could work together but ill feeling existed from the time the PEL was formed. It was not the first schism where a group of women with new ideas had hurt the feelings of the older workers. The WWSA continued to rely on small parlor meetings while the PEL adopted political action. Both groups were plagued with financial problems. A lot of money was spent for brochures urging that Wisconsin adopt universal suffrage. Suffrage literature was distributed wherever there were people to accept it. Suffragists spoke at every conceivable meeting possible. Tents were erected at fairs where mothers could rest with their children. While the suffragists served refreshments and tended babies, they distributed information about their cause. Mrs. Robert LaFollette spoke at the Women's Club booth at the Richland County fair encouraging the male fairgoer to vote in favor of the referendum. Air balloons dropped pamphlets; theater managers were encouraged to allow speeches while reels were being changed. Women marched in parades, toured farms and small towns, made water tours around Lake Winnebago and on the Fox and Wolf rivers.

Miss Mabel Judd, an English teacher in the Richland Center schools, resigned her position in June of 1911 to become an organizer for the PEL. She was one of the pioneers in street speaking and was responsible for the formation of the first group of Black suffragists in the state.

Meanwhile, Ada James was busy planning an auto tour, which eventually covered eight southern Wisconsin counties. This type of campaigning proved to be very successful. Men, who would not go into a hall to listen to a speech, often stood on a street corner and listened to a talk given from the rear of an automobile. Ada James was considered to have good political sense; she knew how to persuade capable women to devote their time and talents to the suffrage cause

while she remained in the background. Due to her tactfulness and wide acquaintances with many prominent people, she was able to gain a hearing for her cause before groups not open to other individuals.



Catherine Waugh McCulloch - 1912 suffrage campaign
Wisconsin State Historical Society

Suffragists used every means possible to finance the referendum campaign. The first week of October in 1911, all women who were sympathetic to the cause were asked to abstain from luxuries and give the money saved to the woman's suffrage campaign. Attics, basements, and closets were cleaned for white elephant sales. Women crisscrossed the state in an endless activity of trying to reach the people of Wisconsin. Miss James had a set of stereoscopic pictures assembled to illustrate social evils of the times. She believed women would demand the ballot when they could actually see the conditions which existed. This outlook on her part likely showed the influence of the Progressive Movement. Senator James made a number of speeches at fairs, wrote letters to GAR posts, propagandizing votes for women at every opportunity. Over \$13,000 was spent on the referendum campaign.

The opposition was strong. Early in December of 1911, the 38,000 member German-American Alliance made it known they were opposed to equal suffrage. The Germans were fearful that prohibition would be imposed if women were given the ballot. Brewers, distillers and liquor dealers were solidly against woman suffrage. Farmers were afraid of losing their grain market.

Saloonkeepers were afraid of losing their livelihood. There were the anti-suffragists, the women who did not want the responsibility of voting, the apathetic woman. The Progressive party, the Prohibition party and the Socialist party endorsed woman suffrage, the Republican and Democratic parties did not.

The year 1912 was a presidential election year. An unprecedented large vote was cast in Wisconsin that year. Woodrow Wilson won the Presidency but the referendum giving women equal suffrage in Wisconsin lost. The official count resulted in 135,736 for and 227,054 against; a difference of 91,318 votes. Voters in Arizona, Kansas, Michigan and Oregon felt differently. In those states, equal suffrage passed. Wisconsin suffragists attributed their defeat primarily to the German-American Alliance, the Brewer's Association, the failure to cultivate the Scandinavian vote and that they had overestimated the value of the Socialist vote. Wisconsin suffragists rested for a while after the referendum's defeat, they needed it.

Although Ada James had devoted herself to the leadership of the PEL and had spent over five hundred dollars she inherited from her mother for use the suffrage cause, she resigned as its president. This was the opening wedge for the two state organizations to forget their differences and unite as one single force. Likewise, Mrs. Brown resigned the presidency of the WWSA. In 1913, the two organizations joined forces under the name of the older organization with a new president, Theodora Youmans, former press correspondent for the PEL. The hardening of the opposition from the state liquor dealers strengthened the suffragists' resolve. This resolve contributed to a more militant suffragist.

The Richland Center Women's Club was still very much alive. In spite of all the setbacks, members stayed in good humor. The women thought if they kept wearing the patience of the opposition, the day would come when there would be equal suffrage. "They did not even lose their temper when a Richland Center assemblyman failed to acknowledge the

petition sent him by the ever active suffrage club. Later when asked about the petitions, he replied, 'Oh, I did get a scratch from the old hens.' Of course the Richland Center club was indignant. 'But, said Mrs. Madge Waters, 'maybe Mr. Bancroft meant to pay us a compliment. They say that the eggs laid by hens in the United States this year will be enough to pay off our national debt and that's more than the men have been able to do.' "

Almost all of the early Richland Center suffragists had died by 1919, but it was with hearts full of gratitude that members of the Woman's Club learned that a federal suffrage bill had passed Congress and had been sent to the states for ratification. Three fourths of the states had to ratify the bill before it could become an amendment.



David G. James holding Wisconsin's ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution - Wisconsin State Historical Society

It was Laura Briggs James' husband and daughter who made sure Wisconsin was the first to ratify. One day in June of 1919, the state legislature unexpectedly passed the referendum. Then there was a race to get the state's ratification recorded in Washington D.C. before any of the other states, especially Illinois. Senator James was appointed the messenger. Expecting to spend only one day in the legislature in Madison, Mr. James was unprepared to make a trip to Washington. Being without a suitcase or a change of clothes and with only six

dollars in his pocket, there was a flurry of quick activity. The Secretary of State loaned him the necessary money. His

daughter emptied her satchel, wrapped her personal items in a newspaper, and went out to purchase proper clothes for her father to appear in Washington. Packing the new clothes in the satchel, she sent her father on his mission. As he "boarded the train, Miss James sent the following telegram to the Washington suffragists: 'Father is on his way with valuable papers.' Just who 'father' was they didn't learn until later. The movies were waiting to snap Senator James as he alighted from the train in Washington." Wisconsin being the first state in the Union to ratify the federal amendment was a proper memorial for women like Laura James. Under the Nineteenth Amendment, early Richland Center suffragists, Madge Waters, Fidelia Pease, and Marie McMurtrey were able to cast their first ballot for a presidential candidate in November, 1920. The great struggle was over.

Women have reaped the reward of political citizenship for nearly 100 years. Some of our female ancestors worked extremely hard for this privilege. Are we, as a later generation, proud of this achievement, or just indifferent? Are we, as a society, willing to stand up for the rights of all people to vote rather than making it more difficult? It is doubtful if people today realize the time, work, hope and despair that the early suffragists had to bear for so long.

