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Capturing “First Honors”: Wisconsin Ratifies the Nineteenth Amendment on June 10, 1919

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“We found the men in charge of our city government, while always polite to us, had little interest in what we wanted because we had no votes.”
—*Jessie Jack Hooper*¹

“The careless world will probably continue to think that woman suffrage just happened . . . but we know that the changes in the opinions of society which made it possible are the result of ceaseless, unremitting toil. Stones wear away with constant dropping. So do prejudices, which are much tougher.”
—*Theodora Winton Youmans*²

On June 10, 1919, members of the Wisconsin Legislature voted to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which declared that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged . . . on account of sex.” This vote brought women one step closer to the ballot box after a decades-long struggle for the right to participate equally in American democracy. In the following year, Wisconsin women would cast ballots in presidential elections. This publication marks the centennial of June 10, 1919, by providing a brief narrative introduction to the events of that day. Part I sets the stage by describing how Wisconsin suffragists worked to sway public opinion and secure legislative support in the years leading up to 1919. Part II describes how Wisconsin legislators raced for the honor of ratifying the amendment first among the states.

I. “Ceaseless, unremitting toil” and the long road to ratification

Wisconsin legislators introduced bills relating to woman suffrage as early as 1856, but decades passed before any proposal stood a strong chance of enactment.³ Meanwhile, since statehood in 1848, Wisconsin women were active in reform movements, organized themselves in clubs, shared their opinions through the press, and toured the state to advocate for political equality.⁴ These grassroots efforts eventually prompted legislators to consider woman suffrage more seriously, and proposals on the issue were introduced on a regular basis from the 1899 session onwards.⁵

Although the movement had gained momentum, many still treated woman suffrage

1. James Howell Smith, “Mrs. Ben Hooper of Oshkosh: Peace Worker and Politician,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (1962–3), 124–135: 126.

2. Theodora W. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 5 (September 1921), 3–32: 31.

3. Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, “Summary of Events Leading to Woman Suffrage in Wisconsin,” Brief No. 51, (December 1956), 1. Note: this publication uses the phrase “woman suffrage” rather than “women’s suffrage,” following the usage of Theodora Winton Youmans.

4. For an in-depth examination of the suffrage movement in Wisconsin, see Genevieve G. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for Their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

5. Prior to this period, legislators had enacted [1885 Chapter \(Act\) 211](#), later approved by referendum, granting women suffrage with respect to “school matters” only; however, the law was a “dead issue” for several decades, as women voters were turned away from the polls. Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, “Summary of Events,” 2.



Wisconsin suffragists holding “Votes for Women” sign, c. 1903. WHS IMAGE ID 9381

as a subject of amusement. Consider, for example, newspaper coverage of 1905 Senate Bill 397, which proposed to “[extend] the right of suffrage to women in city, village and town matters.” (This was a proposal for partial suffrage rather than full suffrage, i.e., voting rights specific to certain elections rather than all elections.⁶) The *Evening Wisconsin* focused on suffragists’ appearance in recounting their testimony at a hearing on the bill: Dr. Maud Saunders “wore an exquisite tan dress trimmed with buff stripes down the front, and with inserted pleats and real Irish lace trimmings,” and the Reverend Olympia Brown sported “a red silk creation with pink epaulets.” The article’s subtitle reinforced the idea that women’s fashions warranted more attention than their words: “Exquisite Dresses and Gentle Words Stir Senate Committee to at Least Make Promises.”⁷ Ultimately, 1905 Senate Bill 397 was “indefinitely postponed” in committee.⁸

Undaunted by belittling media coverage, suffragists forged on, pressuring members of the legislature to do more than “make promises.” The 1911 legislative session looked especially promising, with more members “friendly” to the cause than ever before. Chief among them was Senator David James of Richland Center, whose daughter Ada James had become a leader in the suffrage movement.⁹ Senator James introduced 1911 Sen-

6. Other examples of partial suffrage legislation include 1899 Assembly Bill 166 to grant suffrage relating to liquor licenses and 1915 Senate Bill 412 to grant suffrage in local elections only. As mentioned above, one successful partial suffrage bill—1885 Chapter (Act) 211—was enacted but not enforced.

7. “Women’s Voice Pleads to Vote,” *Evening Wisconsin*, March 31, [1905].

8. J. W. McMullin, “Brief Legislative History of the Woman’s Suffrage Movement in Wisconsin” (1915), unpublished manuscript, Theobald Legislative Library.

9. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 19. Confirming Youmans’ account, newspaper coverage from the start of that session noted that members of both houses had received “large numbers of letters” on the issue, and that “women suffragists have quite a substantial following in the legislature.” “Woman Suffrage Grows,” *Leader-Telegram*, February 9, 1911.

ate Bill 102, which proposed to extend full suffrage to women. To meet a constitutional requirement, the bill also made this extension contingent upon approval at a statewide referendum to be held at the next general election.¹⁰

The bill gained momentum, and some five hundred female supporters attended an Assembly hearing on the bill, where they heckled members who opposed it. Assemblyman¹¹ Carl Herman Dorner of Milwaukee elicited “roars of laughter” and “a volume of hisses” during his comments, which included the claim that only women “unsuccessful in their quest for suitable males” campaigned for the ballot.¹² In a departure from prior coverage, many newspapers now seemed to take suffragists seriously, depicting them as skilled rhetoricians who handily refuted their opponents’ claims. The *Milwaukee Free Press* noted that one woman “demolished” anti-suffrage arguments, including the notion that suffrage for women would result in “neglected homes” and “buttonless children.”¹³

The suffragists swayed legislators, too; the Senate passed Senate Bill 102 in March and the Assembly followed suit in April. Governor Francis McGovern—an “undeclared antisuffragist”—reluctantly signed the bill in early June as 1911 Chapter (Act) 227.¹⁴ On the heels of its enactment, the bill’s proponents projected confidence about the referendum that would now be held. Speaking in Racine, Rev. Olympia Brown promised “a very vigorous campaign ending only with November 5, 1912.”¹⁵ Brown and her compatriots delivered on that promise. “Abandoning ladylike measures to win the ballot,” writes historian Genevieve McBride, “they staged a startling display of publicity and press agency, taking to street corners and even cornering legislators.”¹⁶ Those publicity efforts included small town speaking events at which “the native Badger experienced the destructive shock of seeing a woman stand up in an automobile . . . and plead for political freedom.”¹⁷ Whether or

Pro-suffrage advertisement published in the *Wisconsin State Journal* a day before the November 5, 1912, referendum vote.

10. Since statehood, Article III of the Wisconsin Constitution has allowed the legislature to extend suffrage to additional classes of people, but has required that such extensions be approved at a statewide referendum before they can go into force.

11. Prior to the 1960s, representatives in the Assembly were referred to as “assemblymen.”

12. “Red Letter Day for Suffragists in Wisconsin,” *Madison Democrat*, March 15, 1911.

13. “Suffrage Bill to Pass, Say Speakers,” *Milwaukee Free Press*, April 12, 1911.

14. “Suffrage Bill Is Signed,” *Journal Times*, June 3, 1911; McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 204.

15. “Wisconsin Suffragettes Start State Campaign Here with Rousing Rally,” *Racine Journal*, June 6, 1911.

16. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 202.

17. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 21.

not these tactics would succeed with voters, they elevated the issue. As one editorial put it, “Woman’s suffrage [was] no longer a ‘joke’ or a ‘fad,’ but a ‘live issue’ that deserved serious consideration.¹⁸ Even a newspaper that declined to endorse woman suffrage commended suffragists for their “most creditable campaign,” which proved “if invested with the suffrage they will use it wisely and well.”¹⁹

On November 5, 1912, a majority of voters decided *against* investing women with the vote; the referendum failed on a vote of 227,024 against and 135,545 for.²⁰ Why? Suffragist Crystal Eastman Benedict pointed to the “far-reaching power of the great organized brewing industry in Wisconsin” and its “hostility to woman suffrage.”²¹ (Indeed, federal inquiries later confirmed that brewers’ organizations had bankrolled anti-suffrage campaigns.²²) The “liquor interests,” as suffragists referred to them, considered suffrage to be a Trojan horse that would usher in prohibition of alcohol with the support of temperance-minded female voters. Widely published advertisements had stoked these fears on the eve of the referendum, warning that “Woman Suffrage would make almost all of the state of Wisconsin ‘dry.’”²³ As suffragist and journalist Theodora Winton Youmans later admitted, women’s rights and temperance had been “inextricably intertwined” since statehood—a connection that exacerbated these fears.²⁴ Perhaps as problematic, no major political party had formally endorsed or campaigned for the referendum. Looking back, Eastman Benedict also noted that she and others had overestimated the support of the Socialists and Progressive Republicans.²⁵

Although ultimately unsuccessful, the 1911–12 campaign took suffrage into the “political mainstream.”²⁶ U.S. Senator Robert La Follette supported women’s voting rights wholeheartedly and attempted to make suffrage a plank in the state Republican party platform, albeit unsuccessfully.²⁷ Several years passed before any major party supported a federal amendment to bring about woman suffrage nationwide, but “the tide was turn-

18. “Suffrage Cause Grows in Favor,” *Leader-Telegram*, February 9, 1912.

19. “A State Official Political Pamphlet,” *Racine Journal*, October 22, 1912.

20. Marilyn Grant, “The 1912 Suffrage Referendum: An Exercise in Political Action,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 64 (1980–1981), 107–118: 116. See also McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 228.

21. Crystal Eastman Benedict, “Why We Lost in Wisconsin,” *La Follette Weekly*, December 14, 1912.

22. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 224.

23. “Danger: How Almost All of the State of Wisconsin May Become ‘Dry’ Territory Through the Operation of Woman Suffrage,” advertisement, *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 4, 1912. See also “Scores League Making Fight on Suffrage,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 4, 1912.

24. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 4. Moreover, groups like the Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association descended from reform movements oriented around temperance. See, especially, Chapters 2 and 3 of McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*.

25. Crystal Eastman Benedict, “Why We Lost in Wisconsin,” *La Follette Weekly*, December 14, 1912.

26. Grant, “The 1912 Suffrage Referendum: An Exercise in Political Action,” 116.

27. See, for example, “La Follette Faction May Throw Its Full Strength to Suffrage,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, December 11, 1913; “Woman Suffrage Question Is Daily Assuming Greater Prominence in the State,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, September 19, 1914.

ing.”²⁸ At the state level, lawmakers became “less embarrassed” to associate with suffragists in subsequent legislative sessions.²⁹

Were voters shifting as swiftly as their elected officials? Governor McGovern hastily answered this question in the negative after another suffrage referendum bill successfully made its way through the legislature in 1913; McGovern vetoed the bill on the grounds that no change in public opinion had occurred since 1912. As he reasoned, “the general situation with respect to woman suffrage in Wisconsin has not changed,” and a second referendum would likely confirm the “decisive” outcome of the first.³⁰ This kind of objection had already divided leaders of the state suffrage movement. Whereas some continued to lobby legislators directly, others sought to sway public opinion—both to secure votes for a future referendum and to pressure legislators indirectly.³¹

Despite this split in the movement, suffragists remained active in the state capitol, where Jessie Jack Hooper became a persistent presence during the 1915 and 1917 legislative sessions.³² In press coverage of suffrage bills, Hooper took center stage and often overshadowed legislators themselves. In one hearing, she directly refuted McGovern’s claim that woman suffrage was an “experiment” whose results were inconclusive.³³ “Woman suffrage is not an experiment,” she declared, citing ten other states and one territory (Alaska) with full suffrage for women.³⁴ Legislators often repeated her arguments, both in committee meetings and on the floor. For example, in a floor debate for 1915 Assembly Bill 212, Assemblyman John Ofstie of Eau Claire referred to other western states such as Idaho where suffrage had been enacted with promising results.³⁵ This bill was voted down, but suffragists even leveraged failures in their favor; Ada James began publishing legislators’ votes on key bills, in effect inviting constituents who disagreed with their elected representatives to confront them.³⁶

By the start of the 1919 legislative session, major national changes had set the stage for the enactment of full woman suffrage. First, women’s “splendid war work” follow-

28. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 27.

29. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 26.

30. “Suffrage Referendum Bill is Returned by Governor Unapproved,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, May 27, 1913. McBride suggests that McGovern vetoed the referendum bill out of spite to “embarrass his foe,” Senator La Follette, whose “interference” in state-level politics, and especially the suffrage issue, he resented. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 238.

31. For a more thorough discussion of disagreements over tactics between Theodora Winton Youmans and Ada James, see McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 236.

32. As early as February 1915, Hooper was lobbying for three different bills relating to suffrage: full suffrage, suffrage for presidential electors only, and suffrage for local elections only. “Leaders in Votes for Women Movement Decide to Offer Three Separate Measures,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, February 5, 1915.

33. McGovern made this claim in his veto message in 1913. “Suffrage Referendum Bill is Returned by Governor Unapproved,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, May 27, 1913.

34. “Fight for Suffrage Is Started,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 18, 1915.

35. “Suffrage Bill Is Killed in Wisconsin Assembly,” *The Evening Wisconsin*, April 20, 1915.

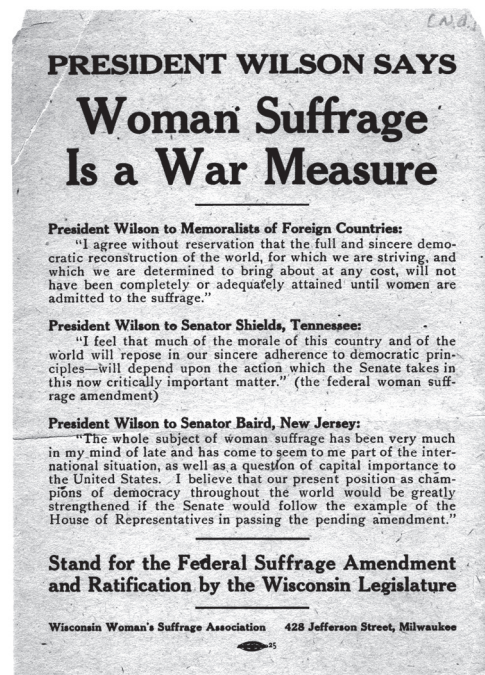
36. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*, 255. James herself confronted elected officials on their voting records, peppering former governor McGovern—on the stump for other candidates in Richland Center—with difficult questions. “McGovern Heckled on His Suffrage Record,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 22, 1916.

ing the country's entry into the Great War—especially as volunteers for the YMCA, Red Cross, and Liberty Loan drives—won support from the major political parties.³⁷ As an article in the *Janesville Gazette* later put it, “American women have shown during the war that they have those qualifications which a voter is supposed to have. They were loyal, independent and had plenty of initiative.”³⁸ Second, the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, prohibiting “the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors,” was ratified on January 16, 1919.³⁹ This development made the opposition of “liquor interests” considerably less fatal to woman suffrage at the state level.

Wisconsin legislators passed several significant pieces of legislation during the 1919 session; 1919 Chapter (Act) 5⁴⁰ granted women the right to vote for presidential electors, and 1919 Chapter (Act) 120⁴¹ extended full suffrage to women, if approved by the voters in a November 1920 referendum. Finally, 1919 Joint Resolution No. 8 urged Congress to adopt an amendment to the constitution to establish woman suffrage nationwide.⁴² When Congress convened in May 1919 to consider such an amendment, the Wisconsin Legislature seemed poised to ratify it.

II. A “race” to ratify in June 1919

Although an air of excitement would eventually envelop the ratification process, passage of the federal amendment felt “anticlimactic” to many suffragists nationwide.⁴³ On May 21, 1919, Theodora Winton Youmans watched from the galleries as members of the U.S. House of Representatives voted in favor of woman suffrage, but felt something closer to



WHS ARCHIVES, WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION
FILES, BOX 26, FOLDER 1

37. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 29. Granted, the war also divided the women’s movement because an older generation of suffragists resented the notion that women should “earn” suffrage through war work; they considered suffrage a right, rather than an earned privilege. Moreover, many suffragists were sworn pacifists. See Genevieve G. McBride, “Theodora Winton Youmans and the Wisconsin Woman Movement,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 71 (1988), 242–275: 244–5. Still, women like Jessie Jack Hooper simultaneously campaigned for Liberty Loans while advocating for the right to vote in Washington. See James Howell Smith, “Mrs. Ben Hooper of Oshkosh: Peace Worker and Politician,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (1962–3), 124–135. For more on Hooper, see Lawrence L. Graves, “Two Noteworthy Wisconsin Women: Mrs. Ben Hooper and Ada James,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 41 (1958), 174–180.

38. Original text from the *Janesville Gazette* reprinted in “Win Long Fight,” *Leader-Telegram*, June 7, 1919.

39. For an overview, see, Robert P. George and David A. J. Richards, “The Eighteenth Amendment,” Constitution Center, accessed April 29, 2019.

40. It is unclear why this act did not provide for a referendum, as required under Article III of the Wisconsin Constitution.

41. After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, this act would be repealed by 1919 Chapter (Act) 607.

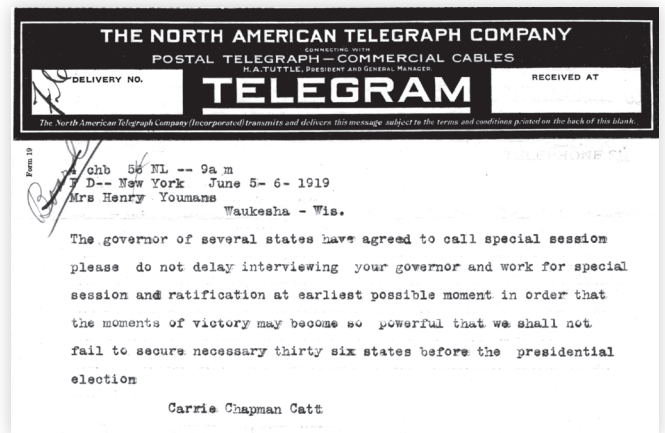
42. For a useful summary and timeline, see “Chapter XLVIII: Wisconsin,” in Ida Husted Harper, ed., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Volume VI (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922), 699–708.

43. Doris Weatherford, *Women in American Politics: History and Milestones* (Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2012), 20.

exhaustion than exultation. “The victory had come so gradually,” Youmans remarked, “that it was difficult to grasp.”⁴⁴ The work of Wisconsin suffragists over the prior decade had resulted in disappointment as often as progress, and looking back, Youmans saw only a “sober record of doing the day’s work as well as one could.”⁴⁵ The battle for suffrage was not won in a single, decisive moment, but rather by small, imperceptible advances, “with no appearance of advancement sometimes.”⁴⁶ Against this backdrop, the amendment’s passage felt surreal to its most ardent supporters.

But their battle was by no means over. To be effective, the amendment still required approval in the U.S. Senate, by a two-thirds vote, and ratification by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states.⁴⁷ Significant barriers stood in the way. Above all, the timing of the U.S. Senate’s approval, on June 4, 1919, jeopardized the amendment’s prompt ratification—as scholar Doris Weatherford points out, “senators were very much aware that legislative sessions in most states had adjourned by the time that they passed the amendment.” In the Florida Legislature, for example, which was scheduled to adjourn at the end of that same week, legislators never voted on ratification. Only a handful of states, Wisconsin included, would remain in session through June, but after that, timely ratification depended on governors calling special sessions for legislators to vote on the issue.⁴⁸ Suffragists recognized that speedy success would require stirring state legislators into action before regular sessions ended.

To this end, supporters of woman suffrage touted the bragging rights of being the first state to ratify, transforming the process into a competition between Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. “A race will ensue,” the pro-suffrage *Wisconsin State Journal* predicted, “for the honor of being the first state to ratify.” The same paper talked up the possibility that Wisconsin would win, but cautioned that Illinois might just as easily claim “first honors.”⁴⁹ Sensational headlines—such as “Wisconsin Races to Gain Woman’s Suffrage”—may have



Telegram from Carrie Chapman Catt to Theodora Winton Youmans urging her and her allies to work for prompt ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. WHS ARCHIVES, WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION FILES, BOX 22, FOLDER 1

44. McBride, “Theodora Winton Youmans and the Wisconsin Woman Movement,” 270.

45. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 24.

46. Youmans “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 20.

47. For an overview of the ratification process and a discussion of Wisconsin’s ratification of various amendments to the U.S. Constitution, see Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, “U.S. Constitution: With annotations prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau,” revised November 2012.

48. Otherwise, suffragists would have to wait over a year before many state legislatures reconvened for their subsequent sessions. Weatherford, *Women in American Politics*, 21.

49. “Suffrage Vote Is Certified,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 7, 1919.

struck some suffragists as ironic, given the fact that legislators had so long resisted ballots for women. But leaders in the movement appealed to legislators' competitive instincts; Jessie Jack Hooper urged them "to place Wisconsin at the top of the list," by acting fast. As Hooper pointed out, Pennsylvania and Ohio were also in session and liable to ratify.⁵⁰

Although observers predicted "practically no opposition," several delays slowed the process of ratification on Tuesday, June 10, to the consternation of suffragists and their supporters.⁵¹ First, the Assembly convened late in the morning, at about 10:30 am, as the pro-suffrage *Wisconsin State Journal* was quick to point out.⁵² Second, Assemblyman John Donnelly of Milwaukee staged a "fight" to delay the vote. His colleagues had proposed to suspend the rules in order to address the suffrage resolution ahead of other matters scheduled for debate that day. Although he claimed to support the amendment, Donnelly protested against suspending the rules to compete in a "race of states" to pass a resolution on "too serious a matter to take up at this time."⁵³ Assemblyman Thomas Nolan of Janesville characterized Donnelly's remarks as "frivolous" and alleged that Donnelly and another colleague "could not appreciate the value of woman suffrage, as they were both unmarried, but that when they did marry they would realize that woman can vote just as intelligently as man."⁵⁴ Ultimately, Donnelly succeeded in gaining permission to draft an amendment—to refer ratification to voters at a November 1920 referendum—and "kept the lower house in suspense" for some thirty minutes before returning to the floor.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the Senate had also failed to pass a ratifying resolution. In their case, legislators lost time as they competed for the honor of first authorship. Senator George Skogmo of River Falls had introduced several suffrage bills in prior sessions, and intended to introduce the ratifying resolution, but Senator Roy Wilcox of Eau Claire had introduced his own version first. This manoeuver precipitated a gentlemanly dispute, during which Skogmo pointed to his "leadership in the suffrage fight [when] . . . suffrage was the most unpopular measure to favor." He also assured his colleagues that authorship was not a matter of "personal aggrandizement"—as if suggesting that it was for Wilcox. Eventually Wilcox relented, announcing, "I am willing to concede first place to Senator Skogmo in the suffrage fight."⁵⁶ This exchange and others demonstrated the extent to which the perceived inevitability of ratification prompted some legislators to embrace woman suffrage more enthusiastically than ever before.⁵⁷

50. "Wisconsin Races Illinois to Gain Woman's Suffrage," *Leader-Telegram*, June 8, 1919.

51. "Ratification of Suffrage Already Up in the Senate," *La Crosse Tribune*, June 6, 1919.

52. "Only 3 Votes Oppose Move," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

53. Fred L. Holmes, "Wisconsin O.K.'s Suffrage; Illinois First," *Capital Times*, June 10, 1919.

54. Donnelly's colleague was Frank Graass of Door County. "Only 3 Votes Oppose Move," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

55. "Only 3 Votes Oppose Move," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

56. Fred L. Holmes, "Wisconsin O.K.'s Suffrage; Illinois First," *Capital Times*, June 10, 1919.

57. Members of the Assembly also competed to show their support for woman suffrage, making speeches to this effect while



Donnelly finally having returned, the Assembly passed 1919 Joint Resolution No. 64 as introduced on a vote of 54 to 2. (Forty-three assemblymen were absent and did not vote.) The Senate then concurred on a vote of 25 to 1, making the official time of ratification 11:42 am.⁵⁸ Although a newspaper headline announced that ratification was “All Done in 75 Minutes,”⁵⁹ legislators had not acted fast enough; the Illinois Legislature had ratified at 10:44 am.⁶⁰ “We wanted our leg. to ratify first,” a disappointed Ada James wrote in her diary, “but 2 Democrats played politics for over an hour & in the meantime Illinois telegraphed that they had ratified.”⁶¹ Competition aside, supporters celebrated the resolution’s swift passage, which brought nationwide woman suffrage one step closer. The *Wisconsin State Journal* ran a notice entitled “Well Done, Wisconsin,” congratulating the state. Although “it could have been first and should have been, it redounds to Wisconsin’s lasting glory that it promptly did ratify the Susan B. Anthony amendment.”⁶²

But some believed that greater “glory” was still within Wisconsin’s reach. Jessie Jack Hooper “did not give up,” pointing out that “it is the state that gets the papers on file 1st at Washington that counts.” To this end, she asked Governor Emanuel Philipp to appoint former state senator David James to carry the papers directly to Washington, D.C., in hopes that he would arrive there before Illinois’s resolution did.⁶³ James approached his

Donnelly was preparing his amendment to the ratification resolution; Assemblyman Edwin Knappe of Milwaukee boasted that “the Socialists had always been in favor of suffrage,” even when support had invited ridicule. “Only 3 Votes Oppose Move,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

58. Fred L. Holmes, “Wisconsin O.K.’s Suffrage; Illinois First,” *Capital Times*, June 10, 1919. Holmes’ headline announced a 24 to 1 vote in the Senate, and grouped Senator Lawrence E. Cunningham among those legislators who were absent and did not vote. However, Senate journals indicate that Cunningham voted in favor.

59. “Only 3 Votes Oppose Move,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

60. “Illinois Ratifies National Suffrage Amendment,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 12 (July 1919), 285. Michigan ratified in the afternoon.

61. James was referring to Donnelly and possibly Graass, who was a Republican. Grant, “The 1912 Suffrage Referendum,” 117.

62. “Well Done, Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 10, 1919.

63. Grant, “The 1912 Suffrage Referendum,” 117.

mission with confidence, telling the press as his train departed on Wednesday, “I think I will be able to get Wisconsin’s ratified amendment filed at Washington in advance of Illinois.”⁶⁴ His chances of success soared after Illinois legislators discovered a small error in their resolution.⁶⁵ On Thursday, the *Capital Times* reported that “Wisconsin will probably have the honor of being the first state to [ratify],” as James was set to arrive in the nation’s capital that Friday.⁶⁶

Hooper’s plan paid off; on Sunday, the *Wisconsin State Journal* reported that James had delivered the papers to the U.S. secretary of state, vice president, and Speaker of the House of Representatives and that “[t]he state department today settled all disputes on the question by officially notifying the Woman Suffrage Association that Wisconsin had captured the honors by completing all formalities attendant upon ratification before any other state.”⁶⁷

Although Wisconsin suffragists had helped “[capture] the honors” for their home state, their hard work *after* this milestone suggests that they had only fueled competition as a means to an end, i.e., to ensure swift ratification nationwide. Rather than rest on their laurels, women like Jessie Jack Hooper continued to “[direct] the fight for suffrage from the sidelines,” debating legislators like Donnelly⁶⁸ and even travelling to several other states—Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah—to advocate for ratification there.⁶⁹ To Hooper and her allies, Wisconsin’s “first” only mattered insofar as it brought women to the ballot box sooner.

Unlike their allies in the legislature, suffragists did not clamor for credit, despite the fact that they had worked so tirelessly for suffrage over the past decades. Instead, they credited members of the legislature and heaped them with praise. Youmans, while acknowledging that the timing of the amendment’s passage by Congress had worked in Wisconsin’s favor, nevertheless commended legislators for their “spontaneous enthusiastic support”: “the convictions of the legislature, chosen representatives of the people of Wisconsin, were right on this great question. The spontaneous enthusiastic support of suffrage measures by the legislature of 1919 records the real triumph of woman suffrage

64. “Illinois Boner May Let Badger Ratify First,” *Capital Times*, June 12, 1919.

65. The first resolution included the phrase “all events and purposes” instead of “all intents and purposes.” The first resolution was House Joint Resolution 29, and the second was House Joint Resolution 31. *Laws of the State of Illinois by the Fifty-first General Assembly at the Regular Biennial Session* (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Co., 1919), 1020–1021.

66. “Illinois Boner May Let Badger Ratify First,” *Capital Times*, June 12, 1919.

67. “Wisconsin Is First to O.K. Suffrage,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 14, 1919. Illinois disputed this claim. According to prominent Illinois suffragist Grace Wilbur Trout, Illinois Attorney General Edward Brundage conducted “an exhaustive study of the case” and concluded that Illinois was first to ratify. Grace Wilbur Trout, “Side Lights on Illinois Suffrage History,” *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* (Springfield: Phillips Bros., 1921), 114.

68. Donnelly had argued that the amendment, as ratified by the Wisconsin Legislature, might inadvertently disenfranchise certain women. “Fights for Popular Vote on Suffrage,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 13, 1919.

69. James Howell Smith, “Mrs. Ben Hooper of Oshkosh: Peace Worker and Politician,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (1962–3), 124–135: 127.

Above the Battleground



With Bo Peep

"WE LOVE YOU SO," IS ARDENT PLEA OF G. O. P. TO SUFFRAGE

At 40 years of age, woman's suffrage has at last acquired a really frantic lover—the Republican party.

After 40 years of effort, the suffs are sitting comfortably back now, hugely enjoying the antics of their most passionate of Romeos.

The first action of the Republican party after it assumed power in Congress was the passage of the woman's suffrage amendment in the house by a large majority. A few days later the Republicans made another bow and advanced bearing bouquets. The Republican National Committee con-



ferred with the woman's executive committee in Washington and invited the woman voters to enter the management of the Republican national organization, not as a "ladies' aid society," but to be really "one" with them, until death should them part.

The very first action of the Republicans in the senate was an effort to bring the suffrage amendment up in that body for a vote. The delay was occasioned by a few of the antis on the Democratic side.

A whirlwind courtship, the women have been experiencing the last two weeks.

in Wisconsin.”⁷⁰ Moreover, Hooper sent baskets of flowers to both houses, expressing particular thanks to the most “loyal friends” of the movement.⁷¹

Granted, Hooper and other suffragists likely knew that politics, rather than principles, had motivated swift passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment; at both the national and state level, party leaders increasingly recognized women’s potential importance as a political base.⁷² Later in June, the *La Crosse Tribune* poked fun at this reality, playfully singling out the state Republican party for “wooing” women voters: “At 40 years of age, woman’s suffrage has at last acquired a really frantic lover—the Republican party. After 40 years of effort, the suffs are sitting comfortably back now, hugely enjoying the antics of their most passionate of Romeos.”⁷³ Conversely, newspapers depicted those who failed to embrace suffrage as out of step with the times. Caricaturing Herman Bilgrien, the sole state senator who voted against the resolution, one article put the following words in his mouth: “A house wife belong [*sic*] to home near her children to keep hous [*sic*] and not in open public Politics.” Woman suffrage, the article’s Bilgrien worried, would lead to women’s election to office, and then there would be “hair pulling” and other bad behavior.⁷⁴

After this flurry of activity in June 1919, Wisconsin suffragists would wait more than a full year before the Nineteenth Amendment was successfully ratified by three-fourths of the states. On August 20, 1920, Tennessee narrowly ratified in a “nail-biter vote,”⁷⁵ and on August 26, 1920, the U.S. secretary of state announced that the Nineteenth Amendment had officially become part of the U.S. Constitution.⁷⁶

70. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 32.

71. “Baskets of Flowers for Legislators,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 19, 1919. Afterward, the legislature passed a resolution in Hooper’s honor, [1919 Joint Resolution 71](#), thanking her for her “persistent and courageous efforts . . . in behalf of woman’s suffrage.”

72. Weatherford, *Women in American Politics*, 22.

73. “We Love You So; Is Ardent Plea of G.O.P. to Suffrage,” *La Crosse Tribune*, June 19, 1919.

74. “Herman Had Reasons For Not Voting For Woman Suffrage,” *The Representative*, June 19, 1919.

75. Nancy Gertner and Gail Heriot, [“Amendment XIX: Women’s Right to Vote.”](#) Constitution Center, accessed May 2, 2019.

76. “Women’s Suffrage: Tennessee and the Passage of the 19th Amendment,” Tennessee Secretary of State, accessed May 2, 2019.

Conclusion

Wisconsin achieved an important milestone on June 10, 1919. But this moment represented the culmination of many decades of struggle. As Theodora Winton Youmans observed, support for woman suffrage did not simply materialize “in the air” one day; rather, it had been gradually brought into existence and led forward by “the burning flame in the souls of a few women which lighted and led the way.”⁷⁷ ■

77. Youmans, “How Wisconsin Women Won the Ballot,” 31.