



Summer 2020 Newsletter

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100th Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote

19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Passed by Congress June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, the 19th amendment granted women the right to vote.

The 19th amendment guarantees all American women the right to vote. Achieving this milestone required a lengthy and difficult struggle; victory took decades of agitation and protest. Beginning in the mid-19th century, several generations of woman suffrage supporters lectured, wrote, marched, lobbied, and practiced civil disobedience to achieve what many Americans considered a radical change of the Constitution. Few early supporters lived to see final victory in 1920.

Beginning in the 1800s, women organized, petitioned, and picketed to win the right to vote, but it took them decades to accomplish their purpose. Between 1878, when the amendment was first introduced in Congress, and August 18, 1920, when it was ratified, champions of voting rights for women worked tirelessly, but strategies for achieving their goal varied. Some pursued a strategy of passing suffrage acts in each state—nine western states adopted woman suffrage legislation by 1912. Others challenged male-only voting laws in the courts. Militant suffragists used tactics such as parades, silent vigils, and hunger strikes. Often supporters met fierce resistance. Opponents heckled, jailed, and sometimes physically abused them.

By 1916, almost all of the major suffrage organizations were united behind the goal of a constitutional amendment. When New York adopted woman suffrage in 1917 and President Wilson changed his position to support an amendment in 1918, the political balance began to shift.

On May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the amendment, and 2 weeks later, the Senate followed. When Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the amendment on August 18, 1920, the amendment passed its final hurdle of obtaining the agreement of three-fourths of the states. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified the ratification on August 26, 1920, changing the face of the American electorate forever.

*Article taken from:
Ourdocuments.gov*

Ankeny's Own Suffragist Mary Ankeny Hunter 1870—1954

By: Karla Wright

INTRODUCTION

In August of 2020 the nation will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution. ***“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”*** The city of Ankeny can lay claim to, and be proud of, one of its own for being an influential suffragist.



WHO WAS MARY BONNET ANKENY HUNTER?

Mary was a member of the influential Ankeny family. Her grandfather, Joseph, and her uncle, John Fletcher, purchased land north of Des Moines which we now know as Ankeny, Iowa. Mary was born in Illinois in 1870 to General Rollin Ankeny. The family moved to central Iowa and joined the rest of the Ankeny clan when Mary was a toddler. When only nine years old Mary's mother died. As her father traveled the nation, Mary lived with her older married sister, Harriet Louise Ankeny Conger. She spent many days with her grandmother, Harriet Susannah Ankeny, and her aunt, Harriet Louise Ankeny, at their home on the corner of 10th and Locust Streets in Des Moines.

Mary received an excellent education and had access to the latest books, current journals and daily newspapers. Conger household conversations were full of business dealings and politics. The conversations in the Ankeny household were filled with political debating, discussions of the latest agricultural practices, national news, and business and land deals. There were many gatherings of large groups of people with music, food and robust conversations at the Ankeny home.

Mary's sister died in 1889. Mary experienced much loss at an early age. The losses and how she managed shaped her life, beliefs, concerns and passions. Mary attended Callanan College and Capital City Commercial College. Mary met Frederick Heaton Hunter and they married on Christmas day 1892. Fred and his family greatly influenced Mary's life. Fred Hunter was the son of a prominent physician and social activist Eliza Hunter. Mary's already well-developed curiosity and ambition and understanding prepared her to absorb the progressive thinking of the Hunter family.

Many years later (in 1947), Mary wrote about the Hunter family influence on her to her suffragist friend and colleague, Alice Stone Blackwell (the daughter of the celebrated suffragist Lucy Stone). Mary wrote:

“I came into the Dr. & Mrs. Eliza Hunter's family in 1892 . . . having a tendency to more liberal ideals – I was ripe for this conversion to woman's suffrage – equity of education & all the train of freedom for the individual.”

Who Was Mary Bonnet Ankeny Hunter?

Continued from Page 2 -

In September of 1892, Mary attended a conference in Des Moines where Eliza Hunter was chairman of the Executive Committee. Mrs. Carrie Lane Chapman (later Catt) was on the program along with Susan B. Anthony and other national leaders such as Henry B. Blackwell (husband of Lucy Stone). The 1892 conference event, along with Mary's heritage, childhood experiences, and marriage into the Hunter family influenced her strong convictions, dedication to seeking freedoms, and persistence.

By 1898, Mary was a mother and began the challenge of juggling small children, an ambitious husband, demanding in-laws, and her own deeply rooted passion for social justice and change.

It was the turn of the century and Mary was prepared, ready and eager to turn the next century around! One of her first orders of business was joining the Abigail Adams Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her "Aunt Hattie" was an active member and there was no doubt Mary would be eligible. Mary's great grandfather, Peter Ankeny, of Somerset, Pennsylvania was a Revolutionary War Patriot.

Fred Hunter was an ambitious businessman and politician. Mary Hunter was an avid supporter of local causes and followed her mother-in-law's example of advocating for women's suffrage and international peace. Their life was a whirlwind of new adventures and risk taking all while accomplishing much with tempered and common-sense decision making.

Eliza Heaton Hunter was a force and a well-known leader in Iowa advocating for women's right to vote. She was a member of the National American Suffrage Association. Eliza, like most of the early suffrage pioneers, did not live to see the 19th Amendment pass. Mary's mother-in-law, Eliza Heaton Hunter, died in 1906. Her passing was recognized at the national Suffrage Convention in 1907 along with the passing of Susan B. Anthony.

The deaths of prominent national leader Susan B. Anthony and prominent Iowa leader Eliza H. Hunter did not deter nor stop the increasingly noisy attempts to gain support for woman suffrage. This was particularly evident at one of the first suffrage parades in 1908 in Boone, Iowa. Mary wrote about the Boone parade to Carrie Chapman Catt and told stories about the Iowa suffrage pioneers Coggeshall and Gordon. Mary wrote: "*Mrs. Coggeshall walked in it . . . Quaker soul that she was, shrunk from it like a dose of poison, but march she did, when she found Miss Gordon was determined to carry it thru.*"

THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Mary was a strong and articulate spokesperson for women's right to vote. She was a member of the National Woman's Party. In November of 1917, one hundred women met and discussed a national suffrage amendment. "Mrs. Fred Hunter presided as toastmistress following the luncheon." They passed a resolution beseeching President Wilson to urge the national suffrage amendment.

Finally, in the summer of 1919, the United States Congress passed the 19th Amendment and sent it on to the states to be ratified. Carrie Chapman Catt quickly contacted the Iowa suffrage leaders and told them to get to the Iowa Governor now and demand a special session to ratify the amendment. Catt urged Iowa suffrage workers to not be complacent. After considerable arm twisting with Governor Harding by the Iowa suffrage leaders (including Mary), Iowa ratified the amendment on July 2, 1919.

In the midst of this monumental 19th amendment crusade, Mary Hunter also carried the banner for the Americanization of the nation's immigrants.

Continued on Page 4

Who Was Mary Bonnet Ankeny Hunter?

Continued from Page 3-

In October of 1919, the Abigail Adams Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, under the leadership of Mrs. Henry C. Wallace, chose to “follow along the lines outlined by the national organization, the study of Americanization and reconstruction.” Mrs. Fred H. Hunter (Mary) was a frequent speaker on the topic of Americanization. She was the Assistant State Americanization Committee Chairman. She addressed the Delphian Executive Council, the St. Paul’s Episcopal church, the Chautauqua Circle members, and the Political Equality Club. Mary’s lengthy and articulate essay on Americanization was published in January of 1920.

It must have been a glorious day for Mary when the state of Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment in August of 1920 which solidified the passage of the 19th amendment. However, this was one of many events in Mary’s life that can be described as either a great ending and victory or a new beginning and more challenges.

Women’s right to vote was now the law of the land – but Mary had more work to do.

Mary began her work to collect and save documents, journals, letters, programs, sketches, articles and everything associated with the work of the early Iowa suffrage pioneers. She stored her collections in what she frequently referred to as “the cabinet” in the Iowa Historical Museum.

Mary was President of the Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission and executed her managerial duties well. Carrie Chapman Catt was Honorary President and the two women corresponded regularly. Mary was instrumental in securing the funding, artist (Nellie Walker), archiving and programming for the Suffrage Memorial. This work continued to 1936 when the Suffrage Memorial was unveiled in the Iowa Capitol.

On May 10, 1936 the unveiling of the Iowa Suffrage Memorial took place. Carrie Chapman Catt returned to Iowa and spoke. Mary Hunter was in charge of the ceremony. Little Nancy Bristow, Mary’s cousin’s granddaughter, was given the honor of pulling the curtain to unveil the memorial.

Mary wrote a detailed report to a Des Moines newspaper titled “The State of Iowa Receives a Gift”. It provides a detailed description of the bas relief artwork, memorial purpose, and the events.

Mary’s leadership continued beyond the suffrage memorial dedication. She continued documenting and preserving artifacts and journals associated with the suffrage movement in Iowa. Her correspondence with Carrie Chapman Catt provides a record of her dedication.



Picture: Karla Wright with Iowa Suffrage Memorial

Their letters reveal their interests in and passion for world peace. They discussed war and peace, families and money, gardens and presidents, and the evolution of women’s rights.

Mary did not write about her need or struggle to balance family life with her work. Mary was extraordinarily busy and found a way to embrace family and public life. She did so without complaining, whining or expecting accommodations.

Carrie Chapman Catt founded the League of Women Voters on February 14, 1920. Catt depended on her friend, Mary Hunter, as an ally in the “Cause and Cure of War” movement. Mary wrote an anti-war position paper on behalf of the Iowa League of Women Voters in October of 1933. She advocated for a Department of International Co-Operation to Protest War.

Who Was Mary Bonnet Ankeny Hunter?

Continued from Page 4-

If only Mary could witness the magnificent and worthy fruits of her labor. Mary often mentioned the “cabinet” which she protected vehemently in order to preserve the history of the Iowa suffrage movement. Today’s researchers can now find her “cabinet” collection in a depository managed by the University of Iowa. Proof of Mary’s wisdom and foresight appears in her own words written over the years to her friend, Carrie Chapman Catt.

“We have many papers and records of things you [Carrie Chapman Catt] have done We file these records in the source material compartments and when we are finished they will all be catalogued and locked up for the research worker of some distant day”

“. . . [something] from the pen and mind of Carrie Chapman Catt would be something to attract the future, mythical historian we are expecting to have upon the scene when we are no more”

“. . . . which confirmed me in the determination to tell each story as it actually occurred, so far as I was able We are sure that history would be worthless if it took no account of the observations made within a movement by those who have been a part of it”

“I am going on determinedly for I believe the day will come when some one will ‘discover’ the rich source of human interest material within it.”

“I am enjoying ‘living in the past’; I wonder if this is a confession that something vital has happened to my mind. Some of my old associates are puzzled over my devotion to the past in these troubled times. I am willing to confess that the debacle of the Peace machinery after the marvelous institutions were going so well, since the World War ended has chilled my enthusiasm about trying to ‘make the world better’ as Lucy Stone’s last words commanded us. As to this ‘living in the past’ – I find myself rather thrilled over the idea of doing something well in my last spurt, as it were. Emerson’s sentence is my principle of life right now – ‘The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it.’ When people ask me who will reward you, I just smile – I need no reward. I have been asked several times, ‘Are you a P.W.A. worker?’ They just can’t figure any one being such a goose as to do a thing for love. Fondly and faithfully, Mary A. Hunter”

Mary worked from both her winter and summer homes. Her winter home was in the Brown Hotel in downtown Des Moines which was owned by the Brown family, descendants of John Fletcher Ankeny, the founder of Ankeny, Iowa. Her summer home was on the family farm, then located northeast of the small town of Ankeny. On today’s map (2020) their land would be located south of NE 36th Street, north of NE 18th Street, east of N Ankeny Blvd (Hwy 69), and west of NE Delaware Avenue. Mary inherited this land from her grandfather, Joseph.

Mary wrote a summary of her life and the following is a small section of her reflection.

“. . . . It is difficult for me to say which of the activities of my life so far, I hold in highest esteem; I worked for the enfranchisement of women for many years; was identified as a prohibitionist; worked and for the Red Cross during the (first) World War; for the accumulation of the permanent fund for the erection of the Iowa Suffrage Memorial; and am probably best known for my activities to preserve World Peace since the (first) World War. I believe my liberal religion has proven the greatest influence in my thinking; it is the basis of my freedoms – to have the right to pursue TRUTH as I see it, THAT is the great gift granted to any human being. God grant Americans may never lose it! I still believe that the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, which includes the continued freedoms of women, is the greatest ideal of government on earth, for which we should all be willing to die that these rights may be preserved for our children and our children’s children. Signed, Mary Ankeny Hunter”

Continued on Page 6

Who Was Mary Bonnet Ankeny Hunter?

Continued from Page 5-

In 1950 a Des Moines newspaper reported on the history of suffrage workers in Iowa and profiled five women. Recognized were Mary Jane Coggeshall, Martha Callanan, Carrie Chapman Catt, Eliza H. Hunter and Mary Ankeny Hunter.



The caption reads: “These five women were among the first women suffrage workers in Iowa. Mary Ankeny Hunter is still an active member of the League of Women Voters.”

Mary Ankeny Hunter died in 1954. Sadly, there is no headstone where her remains are buried in Woodland Cemetery, Des Moines, Iowa. Ironically, Carrie Chapman Catt once kidded Mary about her frugal ways and relentless persistence to secure money for the Suffrage Memorial. Catt wrote to Mary:

“On your tombstone I propose that there shall be printed: Died as a result of the effort to get ungrateful women to show gratitude to the women who had led them to justice ! Lovingly yours, CCC.”

There is no tombstone for Mary.

A memorial tribute to Mary Hunter was published in the Des Moines Tribune on October 14, 1954 entitled “A Believer in Freedom”. The final sentence reads:

“Freedom is the great monument to those who love and cherish and serve it. Conspicuous among those of our time in that role is Mary Ankeny Hunter.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karla Wright is a retired Management Consultant who loves family history and genealogy. Karla’s connection to the Ankeny family is her fifth great grandmother Anna Maria Ankeny of Somerset, Pennsylvania. Karla wrote the book “Iowa’s Devoted Daughter – the Story of Miss Harriet Louise Ankeny and Her American Family”. Karla researched the life of Mary Ankeny Hunter and published Mary’s biography with an extensive appendix with transcribed letters and newspaper articles. Karla’s latest project was an illustrated children's book about the history of women’s right to vote -- “Harriet Wants to Vote”. Of course the Ankeny family is featured!

FROM THE AUTHOR

“It has been a most rewarding experience to learn about the life of Mary. I often lament that there is no headstone in Woodland Cemetery with Mary’s name on it. I do feel by researching and reporting Mary’s accomplishments I have provided a needed memorial to remember and honor her life. Mary’s writings on subjects of world peace, Americanization, and suffrage enlighten us about her and the times she lived. It was especially fascinating to read and enjoy the letters exchanged between Carrie Chapman Catt and Mary. Those letters were better than any history book. Reading their letters was like being in their living rooms.”

Karla Wright, June 2020

Thank you for helping us Raise the Roof!

With your generous donations we were able to put a green, stone coated, steel roofing on our historical house which will last 40+ years! We were also able to repair our west side porch entrance with a pier support system to keep our new roof and porch stable for years to come!

Thank you for helping us upkeep our beautiful historical house for future generations to enjoy!



Thank you so much for your donations!

Kari Bethel

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***Thank you so much for your yearly membership!
Without your yearly donation we wouldn't
Be able to keep our doors open
For future generations to enjoy and learn
About Ankeny's Amazing History!***



Dates for 2020

***Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic
Our Open Houses and Programs
Are On Hold***

***Please check out our website for
upcoming
dates and programs @
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Mission:

***The Ankeny Area Historical Society's mission is to
inspire in our community a sense of meaning and
belonging by sharing the history and culture of the
Ankeny area.***

