

Natalie Gray

The Freedom to Vote



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American women first won suffrage in the West – not the East. The territorial governments of Wyoming and Utah extended suffrage to women in 1869 and 1870 respectively, but Colorado was the first state where women gained the right to vote through popular referendum in 1893. This is a significant difference and a historic achievement.

Make no mistake, Colorado women fought for universal suffrage. Two key leaders were Elizabeth Piper Ensley, an African American educator, club woman, and brilliant organizer, and Ellis Meredith, a Denver-based journalist known as the “Susan B. Anthony” of Colorado. They founded the Non-Partisan Equal Suffrage Association with a mere \$25 dollars in the bank and only 28 members yet built a powerful grassroots coalition focusing on “Four P’s: Prohibition, Pulpit, Press, and Populism.”

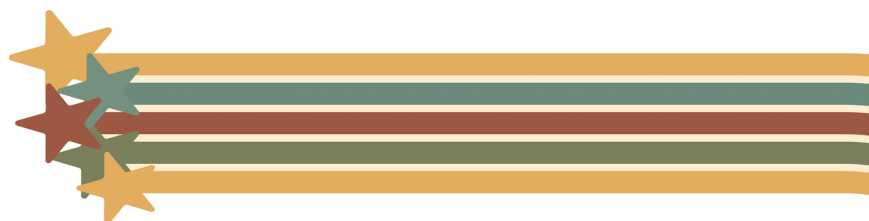
When hundreds of banks, mines, businesses, and farms closed, leading to widespread unemployment after the Panic of 1893, universal suffrage was promoted as a solution to working-class economic woes by doubling the power of the Populist Party. Additionally, suffragists outmaneuvered alcohol and saloon interests and prioritized personal appeals to clergymen and newspaper publishers. Their work paid off on November 15, 1893, with 35,698 voters approving universal suffrage and 29,461 against.

Yet, the work continued. Lillian Kerr and Bertha Fowler were prominent National Woman’s Party (NWP) leaders who located the state headquarters of the NWP in Colorado Springs. Lillian Kerr founded the Colorado Springs Civic League, was appointed to the City Planning Commission, and advocated for free kindergartens, public libraries and parks, in addition to promoting the Equal Rights Amendment. Three Colorado Springs’ suffragists: Dr. Caroline Spencer, Natalie Gray, and Berthe Arnold were arrested during the “Silent Sentinel” protests outside the White House in 1917. And finally, the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote was ratified in August 1920.

However, the campaign for universal suffrage continued. In 1924, Native Americans were guaranteed citizenship; in 1952, racial barriers preventing Asian immigration were removed; and the 1965 Voting Rights Act banned poll taxes, literacy tests, and “grandfather clauses.” It was not until 1970 that the right of Native Americans to vote was guaranteed in Colorado. Unfortunately, as recently noted by the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice – these “guarantees” are now under threat.



Colorado Springs
PIONEERS MUSEUM



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PEOPLE'S PARTY TICKET.

For County Clerk and Recorder, WILLIS H. DEARING.	
For County Treasurer, WILLIAM L. LINK.	
For County Sheriff, DANIEL H. WILSON.	
For County Assessor, MICHAEL A. MAHANEY.	
For County Commissioner—3d Commissioner's District, H. S. WITHERSPOON.	
For County Superintendent of Schools, GEORGE A. MILLER.	
For County Coroner, OLIVER J. MAYNE.	
For County Surveyor, WILLIAM H. POWLESS.	
For Justice of the Peace in 19th Justice Precinct,	
For Constable in 19th Justice Precinct,	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE APPROVED.	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE NOT APPROVED.	

FREE COINAGE TICKET

For County Clerk and Recorder, WILLIAM L. WILSON.	
For County Treasurer, JOSEPH W. SYKES.	
For County Sheriff, A. L. PETERSON.	
For County Assessor, W. J. HAMMOND.	
For County Commissioner—3d Commissioner's District, M. A. HANLIN.	
For County Superintendent of Schools, EDGAR KESNER.	
For County Coroner, WILLIAM B. FOWLER.	
For County Surveyor, A. W. CROOK.	
For Justice of the Peace in 19th Justice Precinct,	
For Constable in 19th Justice Precinct,	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE APPROVED.	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE NOT APPROVED.	

REPUBLICAN TICKET.

For County Clerk and Recorder, WILLIAM L. WILSON.	
For County Treasurer, JOSEPH W. SYKES.	
For County Sheriff, A. L. PETERSON.	
For County Assessor, W. J. HAMMOND.	
For County Commissioner—3d Commissioner's District, M. A. HANLIN.	
For County Superintendent of Schools, EDGAR KESNER.	
For County Coroner, WILLIAM B. FOWLER.	
For County Surveyor, A. W. CROOK.	
For Justice of the Peace in 19th Justice Precinct,	
For Constable in 19th Justice Precinct,	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE APPROVED.	
EQUAL SUFFRAGE NOT APPROVED.	

Ballot for Park County Colorado, with Women's Suffrage Choice at bottom left November 7, 1893
Courtesy of Lewis Suffrage Collection

Colorado Springs Headquarters, Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, 1914
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



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