

Reader's Theater: Utah Suffrage Story

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

1. Narrator #1
2. Narrator #2
3. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
4. Frederick Douglass
5. Audience (All)
6. Narrator #3
7. Narrator #4
8. Anti-polygamists
9. Brigham Young
10. Seraph Young
11. Sarah M. Granger Kimball
12. Emmeline B. Wells
13. U. S. Senator George F. Edmunds
14. Mormons (All)
15. Jennie Froiseth
16. Susan B. Anthony
17. B. H. Roberts
18. Ruth May Fox
19. Franklin S. Richards
20. Orson F. Whitney
21. Martha Hughes Cannon
22. Hannah Kaaepa Lowe

Narrator #1: In the early years of the United States, women had voting rights in some states, but over time these states did away with women's suffrage. For a long time, only white men were allowed to vote. But after slavery was abolished in the 1860s, black men were given the right to vote in 1870 through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution.

Narrator #2: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized a women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. There, Stanton read their "Declaration of Sentiments" to an audience of 300, demanding all the same rights that men had, including voting rights. After hearing Stanton speak, one hundred women and men signed the Declaration of Sentiments. This small convention began the women's suffrage movement in the United States.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Women have been oppressed and deprived of the rights that men enjoy. We insist that we immediately be given all the rights and privileges that belong to us as citizens of the United States, including the right to vote!

Frederick Douglass: As a free black man fighting for the end of slavery and for the rights of all people, I support Mrs. Stanton's brave and startling demand for the ballot! I will boldly sign her Declaration of Sentiments.

Audience (All Students): Votes for Women! Votes for Women! Votes for Women!

Narrator #3: While the women's suffrage movement developed in the Eastern States, newly created territories in the West were exploring new ideas and developing their own laws and practices. The territory of Wyoming was the first to grant women's suffrage, in December 1869. Utah Territory did the same several weeks later. But these two territories gave women voting rights for different reasons.

Narrator #4: In Utah, where the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was established in 1847, some husbands had more than one living wife, in a marital system called polygamy, or "plural marriage." The Latter-day Saints, or "Mormons," considered polygamy a religious belief. But there were many people who did not like polygamy and wanted to do away with it.

Anti-Polygamists: We think polygamy is wrong and oppressive of women! If we give Utah women the vote, we think they will use that political power to end polygamy.

Brigham Young: So be it. Utah's legislature will grant women the vote. Our women will use the franchise to show that they are not oppressed and that they, too, support plural marriage.

Narrator #1: Utah's territorial legislature unanimously voted to grant suffrage to women in Utah. Would giving them the vote mean the end of polygamy?

Narrator #2: Utah women were the first women to vote in the modern nation, doing so in a local election on February 14, 1870.

Seraph Young: I became the first woman to vote in the early modern nation. I voted with twenty-five other women that day, as I was on my way to teach school in Salt Lake City. Years after this historic vote, a painting of me casting my ballot was hung in the Utah State Capitol!

Narrator #3: Once Utah women had the vote, they became very involved in political life even though they could not yet hold political office.

Narrator #4: The Relief Society, the woman's organization of the LDS Church, developed programs to educate women throughout Utah about the political process and civic engagement.

Sarah M. Granger Kimball: In 1842, before the Mormons came to Utah, my idea to organize a women's charitable group led to the creation of the Relief Society, my church's formal organization for women. I've waited patiently a long time since then, and now that Utah women

have the right of suffrage, I openly declare myself a woman's rights woman! Besides being a Relief Society leader, I became president of the Utah Woman's Suffrage Association.

Emmeline B. Wells: I believe in women, especially thinking women. I know women must be educated in politics and civic involvement so they can be knowledgeable voters. My newspaper, the *Woman's Exponent*, the longest-running women's suffrage newspaper in the nation, informs women about current events and lobbies for women's rights.

Narrator #1: Utah women also formed strong ties with some national suffragists like Susan B. Anthony. But Mormon women did not use their newly granted political power to end polygamy like anti-polygamists had hoped. Instead, they continued to support it.

Narrator #2: Since giving Utah women the vote did not end polygamy, anti-polygamists worked through Congress to pressure the LDS Church to end the practice of plural marriage through a series of anti-polygamy laws.

Anti-Polygamists: We really must do something! Polygamy is oppressive to women and must end! And those Mormons have too much voting power. Come on, Congress, do something!

U.S. Senator George Edmunds of Vermont: Don't you worry! Congress will make the Mormons get rid of polygamy by passing laws to make it illegal.

Mormons: That's not fair! That is violating our religious freedom! The Constitution guarantees our right to practice our religion as we wish.

Narrator #3: Despite Mormons' arguments, Congress passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887 in an effort to end polygamy. Part of this legislation took away the voting rights of *all* Utah women, whether they were Mormon or non-Mormon, polygamous or monogamous, married or single.

Narrator #4: Many Utah women were outraged that Congress took their voting rights away. But some anti-polygamy women in Utah thought Mormons must be forced to give up their voting rights until polygamy was abolished.

Jennie Froiseth: I am a strong believer in women's suffrage, but I don't believe that Mormon women should have the right to vote until polygamy is outlawed and the LDS Church disavows the practice. That's why I created the Anti-Polygamy Society of Utah and why I publish a newspaper called the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*.

Narrator #1: Many Utah women worked hard to win their voting rights back. In 1888 they created the Utah Suffrage Association, a branch of Susan B. Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association, and created local chapters throughout Utah.

Susan B. Anthony: Though I am opposed to polygamy, I still believe that Mormon women should have the right to vote and participate with me and other national leaders in the women's suffrage movement.

Narrator #2: In 1890, LDS Church president Wilford Woodruff officially announced the end of plural marriages in Utah. Over the previous forty years, Utah had unsuccessfully applied for statehood several times, but with the end of polygamy it was in a position to successfully petition for statehood.

Narrator #3: During the 1895 Utah Constitutional Convention, delegates debated whether to include women's suffrage and their right to hold public office in the state constitution that Utah would propose to Congress.

Narrator #4: Now that polygamy was officially ended, most Utahns, including Mormons and non-Mormons, supported a woman's right to vote and hold public office. Both political parties in Utah supported these rights in their party platforms, and women's suffrage organizations throughout the territory lobbied delegates to include these rights in Utah's constitution.

Narrator #1: But even though most delegates supported including women's suffrage in the state constitution, there were a few who debated against it, fearing that Congress would not accept a constitution that included women's suffrage.

Delegate B. H. Roberts: Suffrage is privilege and not a right. And including women's suffrage in Utah's Constitution might make Congress deny Utah statehood yet again. Women's suffrage is not worth losing statehood.

Ruth May Fox: When I heard B.H. Roberts's argument against women's suffrage, I felt frustrated. I immediately circulated petitions demanding the inclusion of women's suffrage in the Constitution, then presented them to the convention. Fortunately, most of the delegates stood up for women's rights.

Delegate Franklin S. Richards: Women are taxpayers, and like men they deserve the right to vote for those who represent them. They are just as intelligent and able as men. Giving women the vote is the right thing to do even if it means Congress rejects our state constitution.

Delegate Orson F. Whitney: I believe in woman suffrage. I have always believed in it. I look upon it as another step, another impulse of humanity toward perfection.

Narrator #2: Despite the minor opposition led by B.H. Roberts, the delegates voted to include a clause in the constitution that guaranteed women's suffrage and right to hold office. Utah voters, all of them male, then voted overwhelmingly to approve the proposed constitution.

Narrator #3: Utah women were then given back the vote in 1896, after Congress accepted Utah's constitution and granted Utah statehood.

All Students: Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!

Narrator #4: Utah women then began to run for political office.

Martha Hughes Cannon: I was not only a doctor, but I was the first female state senator in the nation. I even defeated my husband in the general election. I passed bills to found Utah's first State Board of Health, developing the state's sanitation laws.

Narrator #1: Even after Utah women won their voting rights back, they remained committed to helping other women throughout the nation win those rights.

Narrator #2: They continued to work with national suffrage organizations, helping to fund these organizations, serving as leaders in these organizations, and attending national and international women's rights conventions.

Hannah Kaaepa Lowe: I am an immigrant to Utah from Hawaii. In 1899, I traveled with Emmeline B. Wells and other Utah suffragists to Washington, D.C., as delegates to National Council of Women's Congress. There we lobbied for women's rights, and I spoke about the rights of Hawaiian women.

Narrator #3: In August of 1920, Congress finally ratified the 19th Amendment, granting women's suffrage throughout the United States.

Narrator #4: The Amendment states: "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."

All Students: Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!

Narrator #4: Even though there was now an amendment granting women's suffrage nationally, many minorities were still not able to vote. The fight for universal suffrage rights was not over.