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Editor's Introduction

Katherine Kitterman



I study the history of women's voting rights in Utah. For the past two years, I've been the historical director for Better Days 2020, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to popularize Utah women's history. The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of Utah women's first votes, the centennial of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, all important parts of the long struggle for equal suffrage in the United States. So this anniversary year is a golden opportunity to learn about women in history who fought for equality, spoke out on a national stage, and improved their local communities. **Better Days 2020** has created several resources available to anyone who wants to explore the story of suffrage in Utah.

Our team worked with local historians, community leaders, and educators to develop educational resources that highlight Utah women's role in the national suffrage movement and feature Utah women who made a difference in other ways. We also commissioned Utah artist Brooke Smart to illustrate fifty Utah women's advocates from history. She brought the stories of a diverse range of Utah leaders to life in vivid color, collaborating with subjects' descendants to represent the women authentically. The illustrations are available at www.utahwomenshistory.org along with biographies, primary sources, articles, and other materials. Additionally, two books by our team members share stories of leading Utah women: *Champions of Change: 25 Women Who Made History* and *Thinking Women: A Timeline of Suffrage in Utah*.

There's still a long way to go toward fully seeing and honoring women's contributions in history. Women's stories matter, but they're

often missing in the archives, history books, and popular culture—and this is even more the case for women of color. It takes effort and care to recover women's stories and restore them to their rightful place in the historical narrative. And doing so is only possible because of those who have preserved records, memories, and family stories across generations.

When we know about the women who have made a difference in our own communities, we can see that their influence is everywhere—in public health, business, art, education, government, and the very streets we walk. Suffragists worked to break down barriers that limited women's participation in public life. The doors they opened for women's education, careers, political participation, and personal development benefit us all. And that work is not finished.

Seeing students and citizens engage with suffrage history through classroom lessons, family stories, art, and public monuments has reminded me how history can play a crucial role in building community and generating needed change. By exploring the legacy of the past, we open up space for conversations about the present and the future. And the history of voting rights in particular should remind us that our voices and actions matter. This history challenges us to do our own part and make a difference where we live.

I appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with Susan Howe as a guest editor on this issue and address these topics from a Latter-day Saint perspective. As Latter-day Saints, we learn from our history about discipleship and fortitude, repentance and grace. When women's voices are missing, our view is limited and our conclusions are incomplete. When we integrate women's stories and perspectives into the history of the Restoration, we see a larger, richer picture.

The Latter-day Saint women who worked to advance women's rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw their work as part of the unfolding restoration of the gospel. In their eyes, building up the Kingdom of God required a restoration of women to their proper place as men's equals, as taught in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for many women, the Relief Society was a vehicle that aided in that necessary social transformation. As Sarah M. Kimball reflected, "The sure foundations of the suffrage cause were deeply and permanently laid on the 17th of March 1842,"¹ the day the Relief Society was first organized.

1. Sarah M. Kimball, "Reply to 'A Man's Advice about Woman Suffrage,'" *Woman's Exponent* 20 (December 1, 1891): 81.

Three generations of Latter-day Saint suffragists worked to open opportunities for women to participate in government and public life. Their political participation in Utah and active engagement in the cause of suffrage gave strength to the national women's rights movement. But the twists and turns of their story remind us that voting rights have never expanded easily, evenly, or permanently. Their achievements were the result of decades of sustained effort on the part of individual women and men, working together for a common cause.

Suffragists' legacy can inform our work in the world as people of faith. Their determination should encourage us to speak up and speak out for the dignity and worth of all people, and their mistakes should challenge us to build bridges of cooperation and understanding. Even as suffragists fought for women's political rights, their biases and world-views limited their vision of equality. They often excluded women of color from their campaigns and ignored their concerns. From this, we should draw a greater commitment to liberty and justice for *all*.

Elizabeth A. Taylor, a member of Salt Lake City's Trinity AME Church, organized the Western Federation of Colored Women in 1904 to support Black women and their families. "This is not our struggle alone," she said at the opening convention, "because we are only bearing the brunt of the battle of others to come."² She was right, in so many ways. We are the beneficiaries of generations past who have worked for better days. They laid the groundwork, but it is up to each of us to do our part. As we look around us, there are similar campaigns that need to be waged to fight injustice and make our communities and nations better.

The themes addressed in this issue matter because we are still wrestling with many of the same questions today: How can we use our voice and our vote to make our communities better? How can we ensure that all voices are heard and respected? And what can we do now to create a better future?

2. "Colored Women in Federation," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 6, 1904, 3.