



## GGRWHC LAUNCHES DIGITAL SUFFRAGE EXHIBIT

BY RUTH STEVENS

Grand Rapids women's suffrage history comes alive in ***Taking Center Stage: Women's Suffrage in Grand Rapids***. This fascinating new digital exhibit draws on archival photographs, documents, and news articles to tell the story of five decades of suffrage activism in Grand Rapids. During this time, local women rose to prominence in state and national organizations and in 1899 hosted in Grand Rapids the annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

The new exhibit recreates this exciting event, describes the struggles of black suffrage advocates who faced discrimination both within and outside of the movement, and highlights the persistent and creative efforts of Grand Rapids suffragists to call attention to their work and to garner public support. Thanks in part to the momentum gained by their efforts, women in Michigan

won full voting rights in 1918, two years before the Nineteenth Amendment went into effect. (see pp. 2-3)

GGRWHC invites you to join us in celebrating the work of these determined women. Learn more through the timelines, vignettes, and resources at: <https://www.ggrwhc.org/suffrage-grand-rapids/>.

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## WOMEN'S HISTORY IN MUSIC - Check for tickets!

On March 7th the GGRWHC will join St. Cecilia Music Center to celebrate its significant women's history by honoring one of their patron saints, the late Stella Royce. We will also highlight Stella's mother-in-law, Maria Lund Royce, a composer, performer, and conductor especially during the 1930s, when she taught music to deaf children, directed a Campfire Girls orchestra, and composed music to be performed at WPA concerts featuring Michigan composers.

On Friday, March 13th, 8pm, at St. Cecilia Music Center, the Grand Rapids Symphony offers a program, "Clara's Circle of Friends," featuring the music of women composers Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn, performed by women musicians and conducted by Ruth Reinhardt.

And, finally, on March 14th and 15th, Opera Grand Rapids will present a comic opera inspired by the opinions and unlikely friendship of Supreme Court justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia! Conducted by Emily Jarrell Urbanek, Grand Rapids will be one of the first opera companies in the world to produce Scalia/Ginsberg.

# TAKING CENTER STAGE: THE CREATION OF A DIGITAL SUFFRAGE EXHIBIT

BY JULIA BOUWKAMP

To mark the anniversary of the certification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 2020, the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council approached me in early 2019 about creating a digital exhibit on women's suffrage history in Grand Rapids.

I was more than a little excited to take on this ambitious project. As a GGRWHC board member, I already knew that Grand Rapids suffragists played pivotal roles in both the state and national movements. And now here was a chance to share this rich history by creating an accessible and engaging digital platform.

But just what does it take to create a digital history resource like this? The necessary ingredients include hours of research, a lot of patience, some digital know-how--and the support of an organization committed to sharing women's history with the public. Often the necessary research is too much for one person to undertake alone. To ensure success and offer local undergraduates the chance to participate in a digital history project, the GGRWHC recruited two Grand Valley State University interns, Savannah Grodzicki and Emily Driscoll.

With the help of Savannah and Emily, we could highlight a few of the many stories within the local suffrage movement deserving of special attention. Over the course of a semester, our interns conducted historical research that helps inform three such stories now ap-

pearing as digital history vignettes: "NAWSA Comes to Grand Rapids," "A Resolution for Racial Equality," and "The 1914 Suffrage Edition."

As I explored the wider scope of the decades-long history of the suffrage movement in Grand Rapids, I found more than I could have imagined. The effort dates back to 1874, when Grand Rapids suffragists participated in the first statewide referendum on women's suffrage. In the lead-up to this important first attempt, Grand Rapids became a popular venue for notable suffrage leaders, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Julia Ward Howe. Although the referendum failed, Grand Rapids suffragists remained committed to winning women's voting rights. And in 1899, led by noted Grand Rapids leader Emily Burton Ketcham, local suffragists took center stage in the national movement, when they hosted the National American Woman Suffrage Association's annual convention. At this remarkable event, African American suffragist Lottie Wilson Jackson offered a bold resolution in protest of Jim Crow laws relegating black women to segregated smoking cars on southern trains. Her story is featured in the digital exhibit vignette "A Resolution for Racial Equality."

After exploring the more decorous 1880s and 1890s, I turned to the early-twentieth century, when "modern" Grand Rapids suffragists adopted new eye-catching spectacles in public arenas and in print to raise



awareness for the cause. As I began my research on this critical period featuring three hard-fought referendum campaigns, I found myself wading through hundreds of historical articles. Local suffragists were active and ready to finish the job that their forebears had started decades earlier. And with local leaders like Clara Comstock Russell and Alde Louise Tuck Blake, who were also crucial players in the state-level organization, Grand Rapids suffragists were well positioned to make a big impact. In 1912, Russell, as vice president of the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association, was chosen to lead the 1912 suffrage referendum campaign. The campaign headquarters for the state effort were in the Fourth National Bank Building in Grand Rapids, and its office circulated an estimated six tons of literature to suffrage workers throughout Michigan.

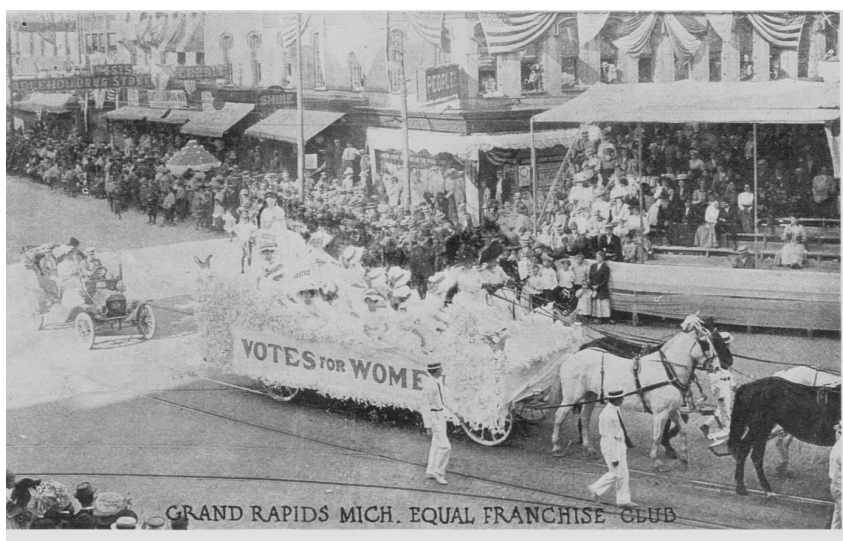
The 1912 referendum, despite early reports of victory, did not carry the day. It would take another six years before Grand Rapids women, in partnership with other Michigan suffragists, won full voting rights in 1918—almost two years before all American women won the right to vote with the certification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Having addressed the story of women's suffrage in Grand Rapids, I was confronted by my next challenge. Just how would I organize the history of this important movement in a clear and engaging way? Local suffragists were incredibly active, involved over time in numerous suffrage organizations (often with frustratingly

similar names), and had multiple objectives. For example, local suffragists focused early on smaller victories like the right to vote in school board elections, hoping that these more modest gains would justify their ultimate goal of obtaining full voting rights for all American women.

To create a resource that conveyed this history in all of its complexity, I divided the movement into three phases that are explored in three distinct timelines: "The 1874 Campaign," "Taking Center Stage: 1879-1907," and "Organizing for the Vote: 1907-1920." These timelines provide an overview as well as helpful context for the digital vignettes that focus on specific local suffrage topics. Finally, I created a timeline that juxtaposes major events in the Grand Rapids suffrage movement with the state and national movements to demonstrate how suffragists at all levels of the movement fought for the cause together.

*Taking Center Stage: Women's Suffrage in Grand Rapids* marks a new chapter in the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council's commitment to sharing the rich history of local women with the public. Now, anyone who wants to learn about the Grand Rapids women who fought for the right to vote can begin with this free online resource. It is my personal hope that this digital exhibit will inspire readers to conduct their own research into the rich history of women in Grand Rapids. There is always another story to uncover.



## GGRWHC's Annual Reception & "Suffrage Sampler"

Wednesday, March 25, 5:00 - 6:45 pm

Donnelly Center (157 Woodward Lane SE), Aquinas College  
Free admission & free parking—but let us know you're coming!  
RSVP at [info@ggrwhc.org](mailto:info@ggrwhc.org) or 616-574-7307

Mingle with friends, old and new, at GGRWHC's annual reception, and toast the 2020 centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment! After complimentary wine and hors d'oeuvres, we will offer a brief update on our past year and a celebratory "Suffrage Sampler"! Have a taste here, and follow us for the full course!

Ruth Stevens - The Early Days  
Melissa Fox - High Times in the 1890s  
Sophia Brewer - Diversifying Suffrage History  
Ruth Van Stee - Hijinks in the Teens  
Katelyn VerMerris - The Final Push  
Julia Bouwkamp - Digitizing Suffrage History



## EVENTS, EVENTS, EVENTS!

GGRWHC programming during 2020 builds on twenty years of local research that has changed received notions of state suffrage history and revealed Grand Rapids women on national and state stages. Above on this page, read about the appetizer program at our annual reception on March 25th, a sampling of three periods of suffrage history from 1) a city abuzz with activity during Michigan's first statewide campaign for equal voting rights in 1874, to 2) local suffragists striding onto the state's center stage during the 1880s and 1890s, to 3) their promotional hijinks, but steadfast leadership, statewide during the last decade. (And see the digital exhibit on our website!)

On the other side of this sheet, please find programming on March 12th, March 26th, and May 7th giving a fuller picture of the heyday of Grand Rapids history in the 1890s, as well as a conference panel on May 12th or 13th illustrating the last decade's spectacle in print and parading. Speaking of print, each of our events features tables laden with takeaway information.

You'll see that, if you watch for RSVP information, you can sign up for a bus tour of women's history sites on March 26th and a suffrage artifacts tour on April 16th! If in the past you have missed Melissa Fox on local women's awe-inspiring WWI activity, catch it on April 2nd in Rockford. Suffragists were heavily involved on the home front. And if you missed Ruth Van Stee's program in February on the suffragist takeover issue of the 1914 *Grand Rapids Press* by suffragists, stay tuned! We're not finished scheduling for this year.

Beyond "Events": Keep up with us through our next hard copy and electronic newsletters, on our Facebook page and website ([ggrwhc.org](http://ggrwhc.org))! We will be reporting on a new Girl Scouts badge, an upcoming suffrage book club, programs in the schools, and submissions to a National Trust project and national suffrage exhibits. Celebrate with us all year!



# UPCOMING EVENTS FOR SPRING

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The following programs on local women's history are all free and open to the public. Check for fuller program descriptions, RSVP information, and updates on our website ([www.ggrwhc.org](http://www.ggrwhc.org)) and Facebook. And sign up for electronic and hard copy newsletters on our website – as well as to support our mission financially.

**Thursday, March 12th:** "Susan B. Anthony Brings the National American Woman Suffrage Association to Grand Rapids," Melissa Fox, 1:00 pm, Lowell Area Historical Museum & Friends of the Englehardt Library in Lowell, Lowell Township Hall, 2910 Alden Nash SE. Free & open to the public. *Susan B. Anthony visited West Michigan many times beginning in 1873. Her last appearance was at the 1899 NAWSA convention held at the St. Cecilia Music Society, the only time it ever met in Michigan.*

**Wednesday, March 25th:** GGRWHC annual reception and "Suffrage Sampler: Celebrating the Centennial of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment," 5:00 – 6:45 pm, Donnelly Center (157 Woodward Lane SE), Aquinas College. Hors d'oeuvres & wine; Free & open to the public. (Please RSVP at [info@ggrwhc.org](mailto:info@ggrwhc.org) or 616-574-7307) *Mingle with friends and lift a glass for the centennial of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the constitutional guarantee of universal suffrage! More on p. 5 here.*

**Thursday, March 26th:** Women Changemakers, GVSU Kutsche Office Roundtable – 11:30 am, "A New Digital Exhibit on Women's Suffrage in Grand Rapids," GGRWHC's Julia Bouwkamp; & 1:15 pm, "It Took a Family: Domestic Roles and the Civic Engagement of Alde Blake," Blake descendants Moana Kutsche & Robert McArdle, with GGRWHC's Jo Ellyn Clarey, GVSU Kirkhof Center, R. 2204, Allendale. For the full schedule from 8:30 am – 3:45 pm and to register (free) through March 19th, see <https://www.gvsu.edu/kutsche/annual-local-history-roundtable-11.htm>

**Thursday, March 26th:** Grand Rapids Women's History Bus Tour, including a range of stops, but highlighting local women suffragists – Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council sponsored by Athena Council of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce. Free & open to the public. For time information and to register, follow on our website, Facebook, & electronic newsletter; numbers will be limited.

**Thursday, April 2nd:** "Kent County Women and WWI Home Front Defense," Melissa Fox, 7:00 pm, Rockford Area Historical Society, Rockford Community Cabin, 220 N. Monroe St, Rockford. Free & open to the public. *Hear the story of American women during the largest wartime mobilization of our young country and dispel myths that women's lives were led only in their homes.*

**April 16th:** Grand Rapids Public Museum suffrage artifacts tour by GGRWHC's Julia Bouwkamp, 1:00 pm & 6:00pm. To register, follow on our website, Facebook, & electronic newsletter; numbers will be limited.

**Thursday, May 7th:** "Susan B. Anthony Slept Here! National Suffrage Strategy & 1899 West Michigan," Jo Ellyn Clarey, 7:00 pm, Rockford Area Historical Society, Rockford Community Cabin, 220 N. Monroe St, Rockford. Free & open to the public

**Tuesday-Wednesday, May 12th-13th:** GGRWHC panel: "Between 'Suffragette' Noise and Silent Stunts: Suffrage Print Culture in the Last Decade," Melissa Fox, Ruth Van Stee, Katelyn VerMerris (Sophia Brewer, chair), Sixth Annual Mid-western History Association conference, GVSU Hauenstein Center at DeVos Center, Free & open to the public. Stay tuned for more detail.

# HER VOICE HER VOTE

## A Celebration of the Centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment

7:00 pm, Wednesday, August 26, 2020  
St. Cecilia Music Center

HER VOICE HER VOTE, a Grand Rapids suffrage odyssey, will honor our American forebears who endured with resilience a decades-long fight to ensure that universal suffrage would become the law of the land. On the very date of the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment, August 26th, please join the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council to celebrate the spirit and relentless purpose of Grand Rapids women! We stand on their shoulders.

Our celebration will be hosted by St. Cecilia Music Society, as it was known in 1899 when the national movement, led by Susan B. Anthony, gathered in its auditorium. We expect a similar electricity among us today as we honor all women who have built on the right of enfranchisement and have run for electoral office. We will celebrate the continuing tradition of women working together for common purpose.

Before heading upstairs for a reception and toasts all around, you will witness from the auditorium stage actual words from the past performed in Grand Rapids and hear how early women orators also mixed the personal and political to drive home their earnest message. Historical reenactments and video montage will open windows onto the long suffrage movement stretching over two centuries--from the decorous oratory on Victorian stages to energetic modern spectacles of flamboyant parading and explosive print campaigns.

Color and sound will transport us into the past. During the 1890s, when Grand Rapids led Michigan onto the national stage and then brought the movement home for a conference, race came to the fore during the emerging Jim Crow period. And get a look at suffrage artifacts--a carpetbag taken on campaign, an issue of the 1914 *Grand Rapids Press* taken over by suffragists--and hear (maybe sing!) suffrage songs.

Please join us on August 26th! Hail the centennial of the day in 1920 when women were guaranteed by constitutional amendment full voting rights as American citizens. And recognize that another odyssey was just beginning. Victory opened the way to another journey. Celebrate with us!



Please join the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council for a celebration of the 19th Amendment.

## Her VOICE Her VOTE CENTENNIAL 2020



**WHEN** August 26, 2020, 7-9 PM

**WHERE** St. Cecilia Music Center  
24 Ransom Ave NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

More  
details  
to come



Greater Grand Rapids  
Women's History Council

Visit us at [ggrwhc.org](http://ggrwhc.org)



# FOLLOWING SUFFRAGIST PATHS, RUTH STEVENS HITS THE ROAD!

On November 6, 2019, GGRWHC board member Ruth Stevens started touring her program "Getting the Vote: Michigan Women and the Path to Suffrage" at the Dowagiac Area History Museum. Members and guests were interested that her talk highlighted Dowagiac's connections to the broader state and national suffrage movements and were inspired to share their personal connections to the suffrage story.

Audience included the great grandchildren of suffragists and descendants of the first woman on the Dowagiac schoolboard and of an 1870s minister serving the Dowagiac Unitarian Universalist Church. Now known as St. Paul's, this church hosted a speech given by Susan B. Anthony in 1874 to promote the passage of a state constitutional amendment aimed at enfranchising women voters. Fellow suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton occasionally joined Anthony to speak in other towns across West Michigan--information that the GGRWHC has been eager to share regionwide!

During the decades after the failure of the 1874 bill, Susan B. Anthony was in Michigan steadily, and her growing friendships culminated in the 1899 meeting in Grand Rapids of the entire national movement. [For more on this, see GGRWHC's new digital exhibit at

[https://www.ggrwhc.org/suffrage-grand-rapids/.](https://www.ggrwhc.org/suffrage-grand-rapids/)]

Susan B. Anthony's ideas had a lasting an impact in the area, and after her death in 1906 she was memorialized at Dowagiac's Beckwith Theater, the gift of Philo Beckwith's heirs. They decorated the ornate theater with reliefs of important writers and philosophers that Beckwith had admired, Anthony among them.

The current Dowagiac mayor, Donald Lyons, and his wife Joan also shared the suffrage connection of a building they purchased in 1991. It had housed James Heddon & Son, the largest manufacturer of bait and lures in the late-nineteenth century. According to the Lyons, Heddon's wife Elizabeth was active in the movement. Visit the Heddon museum and chat with them about it! [heddonmuseum.org].

GGRWHC's regional expert, Ruth Stevens presented in Sturgis in 2018; Dowagiac, in 2019; and Coloma, so far in 2020. She will continue her visits to Michigan local history museums and clubs with talks in Niles and Gun Lake in March; in Berrien Springs soon after; and the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center on July 28, 2020. Plan a road trip to southwest Michigan for a talk and a tasting. Local wineries are around every corner!

## WHERE IS THE HEAD OF SUSAN B. ANTHONY?



Dowagiac's Beckwith Memorial Theater was razed in 1966, but reports are that its portrait heads in sandstone were all saved. Some have been integrated into the pillars of Southwest Michigan College. Others were put into storage. But where is Susan B. Anthony's relief? And what other famous women did Philo Beckwith admire? Next time you are in southwest Michigan, spend a little time sleuthing for Susan B. Anthony's head!





# I AM HATTIE'S DREAM

BY SOPHIA WARD BREWER

In 1899 a beautiful young woman named Hattie Beverly walked into Congress Elementary School to fulfill her dream of becoming a schoolteacher. She had been described in the local papers as committed, ambitious, and intelligent. But because of her race, she was almost denied the teaching job.

Beverly was the first African American teacher for the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and I love to tell her story. So, imagine how excited I was last December to be invited to Congress Elementary to share it with the school's students and teachers exactly 120 years later. Hattie was a lovable woman who faced extreme challenges to realize her dream. She lived only until she was thirty, but her achievements paved the way for others, including me. I am Hattie's dream.

I felt Hattie's story would be perfect to tell as a picture book. So I wrote text based on her life for my presentation at Congress. Then one of my colleagues, GRCC's Mark Fortuna, created illustrations, and we had a book!

Besides wanting to pique student interest in the history of their school and in the civil rights history of their community, I wanted Hattie's story to resonate. I wanted students to know she was like them, that she had hopes and dreams that took hard work to achieve. She was a local hero, and I wanted them to see the hero in themselves, in their families, in their school, and in their community. I also wanted to inspire them to want to meet other local history heroes, especially women.

To loosen students up before the story, I started with a little call-and-response, to build pride in their school. I explained that call-and-response is still used in traditional African villages when leaders have important things to communicate. They have the whole village answer in unison to emphasize the information shared. One student came up after the presentation, excited because this was just how T'Challa in the hit movie *Black Panther* communicated with the people of Wakanda!

Energy released, we started Hattie's story. The students were transfixed, with their eyes glued to the images. Some even read along with me. Afterward, they had many, many questions about Hattie, her family, her daughter, even why she died. And I was advised by several students to publish my book.

My presentation was a joy. Congress staff, parents, and students from pre-K through fifth grade were a wonderful audience. I had a great time sharing Hattie's story with them and hope to continue offering local history to students. I would be happy to share my lesson plans and other curriculum about Hattie Beverly with other educators in the area. It is now being implemented at Congress Elementary. Finally, I extend a big thank you to Ms. Williams, Ms. Ransford and Ms. Merrilees for inviting me to Congress Elementary, where Hattie helped to open the door for African American women in Grand Rapids. I am Hattie's Dream.

Grand Rapids, MI 49516-8874

P. O. Box 68874

Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council



The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council was started in 1988 when founder Twink Frey was doing research for a paper on the role of women in the history of Grand Rapids. She found little or nothing either at the local or state levels about the many women who had helped found and shape the city and its surrounding area. Knowing that women had played an enormous role in the development of the region, Frey began to contact others who had a similar interest in systematic research, documentation, and preservation of the lives and contributions of former Grand Rapids and West Michigan women. In the ensuing 30 years many others joined Frey in this work. A great deal has been accomplished and many women who played important roles in Grand Rapids history continue to be discovered.

**Visit our website at [ggrwhc.org](http://ggrwhc.org)**

The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council is dedicated to educating the community and celebrating the legacies of local women, preserving knowledge of their past and inspiring visions for their future.