

F. G. Adams, "The Women's Vote in Kansas" (1882)

In this 1882 article, F. G. Adams described the positive aspects of the first election in Kansas in which women were allowed to vote. He also provided a tabulation of votes. Since the federal government had refused to include women in the amendments that enfranchised African-American men, women's suffrage leaders developed a strategy of organizing at the state level. Their efforts were productive in numerous western states, including Kansas. As you read this article, consider the following widely debated questions: Would women vote if given the franchise? If so, would they vote responsibly and independently? Would women's votes be indistinguishable from men's, or would they reflect different sensibilities and priorities, as many feminists hoped?

THE WOMEN'S VOTE IN KANSAS.

The footings of this list of 221 cities show: Population, 435,042; total vote, 89,635; vote of men, 64,573; vote of women, 25,062. This list, which embraces most of the towns, presents facts from which, by comparison, the best conclusions can be drawn as to the result of the experiment. From sixteen towns, not included in the foregoing list, we have the entire vote, but not the population.

They are as follows:

The totals of these last two lists make up the sum of the vote in the 237 cities, as first stated. Namely, total vote, 92,315; vote of men, 66,435; vote of women, 25,280. If we add to this, 309, the number of votes cast by women in the thirteen towns from which we have none but the woman vote, we have the sum of 26,189 votes that we know of, cast by women. Added to this, if it were possible to obtain the information, should be the vote cast by women in the eighteen towns from which we have procured no information whatever, and the thirteen towns from which we have the total vote only, thirty-one cities in all, of which we have no knowledge as to how many women voted.

How useful these figures may be made to be, workers for equal suffrage can judge. For myself, while engaged in compiling them, and in examining the newspapers in the search, and reading the discussions in the canvass in their various forms and bearings, I have been most thoroughly impressed with the conviction that the people of Kansas, at the last spring election, completely solved the woman suffrage problem. It is no longer a question whether women want to vote. They *do* want to vote. This is proven by the fact that they have voted the first opportunity given them. They have voted with an intelligent, zealous, earnest interest in the good of the community in which they have their homes. If the issue involved in the election in any town was one affecting merely the local material interests of the community, they voted with good judgment, and for the common welfare. If the question was as to better school management, they voted for the best; if it was for street, sanitary or other reforms, they voted prudently for what it would

seem the good of all demanded. If it was for a change of an administration notoriously involved in speculations with waterworks or other corporations, they voted to deliver the city from such corrupt entanglement. If political parties, controlled by saloon influences, put up candidates with the odor of whiskey on their garments, the women rebuked the party managers, and voted for candidates who would better promote the moral welfare of the community. In every instance they voted for home and fireside, for the freeing of the community from those demoralizing influences and temptations from which every good woman would deliver those of her own household.

I now desire to call attention to the proposed publication of a volume intended to exhibit fully the lesson taught by this Kansas experiment: a volume to contain a history of the movement for municipal suffrage in Kansas, and an account of the particular circumstances which led to the passage of the municipal suffrage law; and to contain such newspaper extracts as will show the peculiar character of the canvass in each city; showing how the people treated the subject when the time for action came; especially the manner in which the women of each community acted in view of the new and extraordinary responsibility imposed upon them.

In examining the newspapers for the numerical results of the election, the discussions and comments which the newspapers contained appeared full of interest, bristling with facts bearing upon the long mooted problem of woman suffrage. They contained reports of public meetings and caucuses of all complexions in preparation for the elections; comments upon issues involved and upon the character of candidates; speculations as to whether the women would vote, and if so, how they would vote; reports of meetings of women to consider how they should act in order that their newly acquired power for good or ill should be best employed; as to whether the women should nominate candidates, or should vote for the best of those which should be nominated in political conventions or in citizens' assemblages, in which women should participate or should not participate.

Then, as the election came off, there were comments upon the orderly and quiet character of the elections; there was no dissent from the testimony on this point; comments upon the unexpectedly large vote of women; upon the healthy influence of their presence in banishing riot and disorder from the polling-places; remarks upon the courtesies everywhere extended the lady voters-always spoken of as ladies; statements of how the men of all parties vied in activity in escorting the ladies to the polls in carriages; how the ladies came often accompanied by their husbands, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, quietly deposited their votes and returned as quietly to their homes; how sometimes they came by scores and fifties from points of assemblage, and in some instances from churches where they had met and prayed together before coming; the reading of these newspaper statements and the comments upon the incidents of this election - these all have impressed me with the conviction that the half of the lesson taught would not be made apparent by a mere exhibition of the numerical results. The figures, though potent and essential, are but the skeleton, the outline, and the newspaper reports, discussions and comments should be embodied with them.

With this conviction I set myself to the task of copying out and compiling extracts from newspapers with a view to the preparation for publication of a handbook of woman suffrage, for use not only in Kansas in future campaigns, but for use everywhere, as containing the best array

of facts bearing upon the subject anywhere to be found.

The work of making this compilation is not completed. It has involved the necessity of examining some half-dozen issues of most of the eight hundred newspapers of Kansas, and then of selecting and having copied out such extracts as seemed best for the object in view. The time I have bestowed upon it has been taken from a most peculiarly absorbing employment, that of gathering, compiling, arranging and cataloguing, for the use of the people of Kansas, the materials of the history of this most historical State work, too, which may be well said to have involved in it that of gathering the history of the entire country during the eventful past third of a century. The compilation of the materials of the history of this municipal suffrage movement is but work upon one of the most interesting chapters in Kansas history; a chapter which will be read in the historical future with little less interest than are now read the records of the struggles and sacrifices of our people in earlier times in excluding the curse of human slavery from our soil.

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