

From Sidelines to Center Stage: Women and Arizona's Quest for Statehood

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Just prior to 9:00 am on February 14, 1912, when word reached officials in Phoenix that President Howard Taft had signed Arizona's statehood proclamation, a "wild chorus' of bells, whistles, and other noisemakers was sent up by Phoenix revelers." In Prescott the courthouse bell rang forty-eight times and in Bisbee forty-eight sticks of dynamite were ignited to celebrate the birth of the new state. A few hours later in Phoenix, newly elected Governor George W. P. Hunt walked from the Ford Hotel on Second Avenue and Washington Street to the State Capitol Building, where he took his oath of office. After the inaugural ceremony, a parade celebrating statehood made its way down Washington featuring local National Guard companies, students from local schools, boy scouts, war veterans, and representatives from local fire departments, labor unions, and male civic organizations. Some school girls were included, but no representatives from Arizona's numerous women's organizations participated. In fact, women were conspicuously absent from the statehood festivities largely because they could not vote. However, the statehood battle gave women an opportunity to convince Arizona's voters and politicians that they too deserved to become full-fledged citizens and march in a parade.¹

Arizona's battle for statehood was long and had left many territorial residents frustrated with their lack of clout at the national level. A territory has no voting representation in Congress, its governing officers are appointed by the federal government, and voters may only elect local officials and territorial legislators. In other words, territorial residents are severely limited in their ability to govern

themselves. Arizonans felt they were second-class citizens at the mercy of the federal government. As the territory's population increased and residents demanded statehood, woman suffrage advocates argued they too were treated as second-class citizens, without representation of any kind in government. The statehood battle and the woman suffrage battle would be closely linked in Arizona as both men and women sought to exercise their political rights on the national stage.²

In the nineteenth century most Americans, both male and female, believed that there were separate spheres of influence. Women, who were believed to be more physically and mentally fragile, were destined to prevail in the domestic sphere, overseeing their homes, the education of their children, and the moral well-being of their families. Men were viewed as physically and mentally superior, enabling them to go outside the home and work in the public sphere. Because men best understood the workings of government, they could represent women's interests, and therefore women did not need the vote. This notion of separate spheres was first publicly challenged in the United States in 1848 by Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and other women who demanded the right to vote at the first women's rights conference at Seneca Falls, New York.

In the decades that followed that first demand for suffrage, women's rights leaders in the western states and territories argued that women, especially Anglo women, were pioneers who had made tremendous sacrifices to help establish churches, schools, and libraries and had labored alongside men in the fields and in business, thereby earning the right to vote. Many members of the legislatures in western states and territories conceded the important roles women had played and granted women limited suffrage, often in municipal or school board elections. Several legislatures, including those of Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), and Colorado (1893), took it a step further and gave women the right to vote in all elections. Arizona's legislature first debated the merits of granting women full suffrage in

1883, but the notion failed to win sufficient votes because a majority of members believed it would “degrade women from their proper sphere in the home circle.” The issue became salient once again in the early 1890s when residents began to clamor for statehood.³

In 1891, Josephine Brawley Hughes, a prominent reformer in Tucson who had been president of the territorial Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, established the territory’s first woman suffrage organization because she believed “women could not wage effective battles for reform without political discourse.” Hughes was a former teacher who partnered with her husband, Louis Hughes, to run the *Tucson Star* newspaper, and their editorials argued for numerous reforms, placing a high priority on the prohibition of alcohol and woman suffrage. Although she was able to make some progress towards curbing alcohol abuse, Arizona’s male politicians told Hughes and her small band of followers that their demand for woman suffrage was “a revolutionary and untried question” lacking sufficient support among the territory’s population.⁴

Over the next few years, Hughes was joined in the suffrage campaign by Pauline O’Neill and Frances Willard Munds, both former teachers and temperance advocates active in the women’s club movement in Prescott. O’Neill was the widow of William “Buckey” O’Neill, a local Populist politician who had championed a bill in the legislature that gave taxpaying women the right to vote in municipal elections in 1897. During almost every legislative session between 1883 and 1912, a full suffrage bill was introduced, but invariably went down to defeat. Organizers from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) blamed liquor interests, but local leaders like Munds and O’Neill believed territorial politicians were the ones to blame. Democrats controlled Arizona politics prior to the 1950s, so they had nothing to gain by adding women to the electorate and, in fact, male party leaders worried that women would not be strong partisan supporters of the Democratic party.⁵

Congressional attitudes toward Arizona also played an important role in both the statehood and the suffrage campaigns. Many members of Congress viewed the territory as too sparsely populated, the desert environment insufficiently hospitable, the economy based on extractive industries incapable of supporting steady economic growth, and the residents too un-American and uneducated to merit statehood. Opposition to statehood was led by Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana, chairman of the Committee on Territories, who stated that the “‘great American desert’ was inhabited by culturally incompatible Spanish-speaking residents and dominated by a few large absentee-controlled mining corporations and the big railroads.” Beveridge complained that courts required the use of Spanish interpreters to conduct business—proof to him that it was insufficiently Americanized-- and many of the saloons in towns operated twenty-four hours of day. Beveridge was one of many prominent Anglos who believed that Mexicans were inferior to Euro-Americans and held back the development of western territories. Similar arguments plagued New Mexico, whose predominantly Hispanic residents were also demanding admission as a state. Additionally, Beveridge complained that Arizona’s population was “of a transient character, going there to work in the mines or for other purposes, but who have not permanently settled and adopted the family life.” President Theodore Roosevelt concurred with Beveridge’s conclusions and refused to consider statehood for either Arizona or New Mexico. Over the next decade, as territorial politicians waged a public relations campaign to improve Arizona’s image, suffrage leaders joined the chorus, arguing that enfranchising women would help change the public perception of the territory as a cultural backwater.⁶

Concern with Arizona’s and New Mexico’s unsuitability for statehood led congressmen in the spring of 1902 to debate whether or not the two territories should be admitted as one large state named Montezuma or Lincoln, with the capital located in Santa Fe. The plan found favor among members of Congress who believed that New Mexico was not Anglo enough and Arizona’s economy was

not diversified enough for the two to survive as independent states. The response to the joint statehood recommendation, or jointure as it was commonly referred to, was swift and almost universally negative in Arizona. Residents were appalled to think they would have to travel hundreds of miles to the capital in Santa Fe and their primarily Anglo population would be overwhelmed by the predominantly Hispanic population of New Mexico.⁷

The jointure movement in Congress was opposed by mining companies, local businessmen, labor leaders, but it also was opposed by the territory's leading writer, Sharlot Hall of Prescott. Frances Munds had introduced Hall to the local community in 1901 when she asked Hall to recite her poetry to Prescott's Monday Club, a woman's organization led by Munds. Hall went on to become a nationally known writer through her poetry publications and as an editor for Charles Lummis's popular literary publication, *Out West*. Her writing focused on the history, culture, and geography of the West, and, according to her biographer, Margaret Maxwell, Hall was anxious to her use her talents to "prove that though Arizona might be in the West, it was not Wild."⁸

Hall decided to devote an entire issue of *Out West* to defeating the jointure campaign. To rebuff the outside negative image of Arizona's frontier extractive economy, she wrote a painstakingly researched and detailed sixty-four-page article describing how the copper mining, ranching, forestry, and farming industries had brought steady employment and income to the territory, rebutting Beveridge's opinion that the territory was nothing but a mining camp. Her extensive statistics built a strong case that Arizona was ready to stand on her own, but it was her impassioned poem printed in the same issue that struck a nerve with many readers. She argued Arizona was no longer a young territory, but rather had grown to become "a fair-browed, queenly woman." This queenly Arizona was mature enough to make her own decisions and was better off to remain "with shackles on wrist and ankle and

dust on her stately head” as a territory than to be forced against her will into a marriage with another, New Mexico, as a requirement for joining the union.⁹

While she waited for the poem to be printed in the next edition of *Out West*, Hall brought a copy of it to Phoenix and shared it with newspaper publisher Dwight Heard who believed it might help Arizona’s efforts to defeat jointure. He had the entire piece reprinted on the editorial page of the *Arizona Republican* (the forerunner of the *Arizona Republic*) and then paid for the poem to be printed as a broadside to be distributed to each member of Congress and reprinted in the *Congressional Record* in early 1906. Hall’s poem and article were credited by some observers for convincing sufficient numbers of senators to eventually vote against joint statehood. One Pennsylvania newspaper editor wrote, “Sharlot M. Hall perhaps put out the strongest papers that were issued to show why Arizona should, when admitted to statehood, be admitted as a great commonwealth singly.” With the jointure issue put to rest in March of 1906, Arizona residents returned their attention to the statehood and suffrage battles.¹⁰

Suffrage leaders Josephine Hughes, Frances Munds, and Pauline O’Neill renewed their arguments in newspaper articles, speeches, and letters to legislators that enfranchised women would vote to close the saloons, gambling halls, and red light districts that contributed to crime and vice in towns, reforms that would appeal to Congress. In 1909, Hughes told the president of the legislative council, George Hunt, “For more than 30 years Mr. Hunt, a large portion of the most womanly women in Arizona have been working and hoping for the time when they could use their influence in assisting the molding and directing the affairs of our municipalities and territory. Nothing can be done at this time which would give a stronger impetus to the statehood movement than that of enfranchising the intelligent womanhood of Arizona.”¹¹

Hughes's choice of the terms "womanly women" and "intelligent womanhood" were shorthand references to educated Anglo women. Suffrage leaders both in Arizona and nationally often employed the tactic of suggesting that educated women were better qualified to vote than uneducated male immigrants who were unable to read or to understand democracy. Senator Beveridge and other members of Congress had complained vehemently about the high levels of illiteracy in Arizona. According to the U.S. Census in 1900, the literacy rate for native born residents was almost 97 percent, but for non-native-born whites, primarily from Mexico but also from Europe, it was only 70 percent. In 1909 Arizona's suffrage leaders urged Democrats in the legislature to pass a bill requiring a literacy test administered by voter registrars. The bill was heavily favored by labor union members wishing to minimize the influence of immigrant workers. Hughes, Munds, and O'Neill believed that Mexican American men did not support suffrage and, therefore, they also wished to minimize their influence at the polls. They obviously did not see the hypocrisy of their argument that women should be enfranchised because they had labored to settle the territory, while they were simultaneously working to disenfranchise pioneering Mexican Americans who had made similar contributions to Arizona's development.¹²

It was ironic that Beveridge and suffrage leaders were critical of Arizona's Mexican Americans since they had played significant roles in developing the territory's public education system. In 1871, Estevan Ochóá, a Mexican-born merchant and legislator from Tucson, co-sponsored a bill with Governor Anson P. K. Safford that established the basis for school funding in Arizona counties. The following year Ochóá donated a parcel of land for the first public school in Tucson. The daughters and sons of Mexican Arizonans, especially those from unions of Anglo men and Mexican women, were prominent among the earliest graduates of Arizona's colleges. Mercedes Shibell, the daughter of Mercedes Quiroz and Charles A. Shibell, was one of three members of the University of Arizona's first graduating class of 1895. Tempe

Normal School (the forerunner of Arizona State University) was built on land and with funds donated by James Priest and his wife Mariana Gonzales, and Manuela Sanchez Sotelo and her daughter, Maria Sotelo Miller, among others, also donated money to this cause. Education was not just supported by Mexican elites, but by all classes. Historian Laura Munoz has demonstrated that in Apache County Mexican Americans from all backgrounds--educated, skilled and unskilled workers, and even those unable to write their names--signed petitions to build schools in their communities and served as school trustees. This view of Mexican Americans is in sharp contrast to the view held by Beveridge and suffrage leaders who characterized Mexicans as uneducated. Clearly, Arizona's suffrage women, most of whom were teachers, were aware of the important contributions made by early Mexican teachers, school trustees, and families to support Arizona's educational system. However, in their quest to obtain the rights of full citizenship for women, they opted to side with powerful Anglo labor union leaders and politicians to disenfranchise what they called the "ignorant voter."¹³

With a significant portion of the state's Mexican American population neutralized by the literacy law, suffrage leaders next turned their attention to convincing delegates chosen to the constitutional convention that women should be granted the full rights of citizenship. Frances Munds and Pauline O'Neill knew that most delegates were progressives who supported direct democracy, including the initiative, referendum, primary elections, and the recall of elected officials. Many male voters believed corporations—especially mining companies-- had too much control over government, and if the electorate was given more clout in decision making with these mechanisms of direct democracy, then corporate power would be diminished. Laura Clay, a NAWSA organizer who spent much of the winter 1909 in the territory, reported back to her headquarters that many locals believed that woman suffrage would help Arizona gain statehood because it would enlarge the electorate with voters who would "not so easily [be] handled by grafters."¹⁴

On November 2, 1910, Frances Munds was asked by constitutional convention leaders to preside over a hearing on suffrage held at the territorial capitol. The gallery was filled to capacity as delegates heard testimony that women worked and paid taxes, yet had no voice in government. The primary anti-suffrage argument was “that suffrage was a dangerous and radical thing to put into the constitution and that it would endanger its acceptance both by the people and by President Taft.” Women’s leaders had argued that woman suffrage would help Arizona become a state, and now leading politicians countered that it would jeopardize statehood. George Hunt, who was president of the constitutional convention, told Munds that Taft and Congress would reject a constitution that gave women the vote and therefore Hunt would not throw his substantial political weight behind the issue. An editorial in the *Arizona Republican* pointed out the hypocrisy of the delegates who supported direct democracy, but not woman suffrage. They showed “precisely the attitude which they say is so objectionable in the members of the legislature—the attitude of denying to a considerable proportion of the population a chance to be heard.” The anti-suffrage delegates prevailed and the provision was defeated. The constitution was approved by the convention delegates, Arizona’s male voters, and eventually by President Howard Taft. Women came up empty handed.¹⁵

While George Hunt and other state politicians made speeches and celebrated their great accomplishment on February 14, 1912, women could only stand on the sidelines and note their exclusion not only from the festivities, but more importantly as citizens. Suffrage leaders began a public relations campaign reaching out to the voters. Sharlot Hall once again put her considerable writing skills to the cause as guest editor of an edition of *Arizona: The New State Magazine*, a promotional publication dedicated to portraying the new state in a positive light, and dedicated the entire February 1912 issue to the state’s women. She gathered prominent Anglo women to write on a variety of topics that highlighted Arizona’s womanhood. One article expounded on the accomplishments of the woman

homesteader, whose “permanency of her home creates the need for school and church, the establishment of social order.” Other articles were dedicated to the women who attended the state’s colleges and to members of the Arizona Federation of Women’s Clubs. Munds wrote a piece that was widely reprinted in state newspapers entitled, “Do Arizona Women Want the Ballot?” telling her readers, “the men of Arizona are not going to deny their women the right to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in helping to launch this new state of ours.” Pauline O’Neill wrote about the contributions of European nuns titled “The Early Catholic Sisters,” and pioneer Yuma teacher Mary Elizabeth Post wrote about the accomplishments of white teachers.¹⁶

Missing from the publication was any account of Mexican American, African American, or Asian American women and their accomplishments. One piece did highlight Native American female students, explaining how white teachers had brought education to the reservations that allowed many native women to escape from the poverty and primitive conditions in their lives. But no one wrote about the important roles played by women of color who belonged to their own organizations, like the black women who formed the Arizona Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs because they were excluded from the Arizona Federation of Women’s Clubs, or the Mexican American women who worked in women’s auxiliaries of the mutual aid society *Alianza Hispano Americana* or in *La Junta*, dedicated to the Catholic Church. And although the Anglo wife of Governor George Hunt was featured, there were no articles about women like Trinidad Meija Escalante Swilling, the wife of Jack Swilling, despite her numerous contributions to Phoenix’s early development.¹⁷

The new state constitution gave voters the right to amend the constitution by initiative, so suffrage leaders launched a petition drive in the summer of 1912 and collected signatures from over 4,000 registered voters-- including a significant number of Mexican American, African American, and

Chinese American voters--enough to place a suffrage amendment on the ballot. They then lobbied labor unions leaders, state political party chairmen, and newspaper editors and won their support—these male leaders took note of the popular enthusiasm for suffrage and the willingness of suffrage leaders to side with Anglo labor leaders on important issues and no longer tried to resist. Among the more conspicuous supporters was John Lorenzo Hubbell, head of the Republican party and a prominent Mexican American leader, who pledged his party's support of the suffrage amendment. Just days before the fall election, Josephine Hughes wrote an editorial titled, "A Pioneer Woman's Appeal for the Ballot" that was printed in newspapers throughout the state. In it she stated:

Does anyone believe that without the joint labors, the joint struggles, the joint suffering and the privations of the pioneer men and women in thus achieving and establishing the civilizing conditions for which Arizona has been struggling for more than thirty-five years, we would have been a sovereign state today? What hope would there have been for Arizona's admission to statehood had there been no conquest of the Apaches, mining stock or farm industries? No schools, churches, no social conditions, no community life? ¹⁸

Hughes's arguments resonated with Arizona's male voters, who for so many years had resented their own lack of self-government as residents of a territory. On election day, November 5, 1912, the suffrage amendment passed with a resounding 68 percent of the popular vote. Their victory was celebrated on May 3, 1913, with a parade held in New York City. Ten thousand women marched down Fifth Avenue with a half million spectators watching as Arizona's "fair-browed, queenly" representative Madge Udall, a recent graduate of the University of Arizona, rode her horse carrying the Arizona banner. After almost thirty years of campaigning, Arizona women were finally leading the parade, not just standing on the sidelines. Although Sharlot Hall, Josephine Hughes, Frances Willard Munds, and Pauline

O'Neill had helped Arizona "womanly women" gain the vote, it would not be until the civil rights movement that the laws circumscribing voting rights would be eliminated in Arizona and all men and women would obtain their full rights as citizens. As we celebrate Arizona's centennial in 2012, this time around the parade will feature all of those who contributed to statehood.¹⁹

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¹ Mark Pry, "Arizona and the Politics of Statehood, 1889-1912," Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University, 1995, p. 321; *Arizona Gazette*, Feb. 14, 1912; Dean Smith, *Arizona Highways Album: Road to Statehood*, Phoenix: Arizona Highways, 1987, p. 138; *Prescott Journal-Miner*, Feb. 14, 1912.

² Pry, "Arizona and the Politics of Statehood," pp. 2-3.

³ For a discussion of western suffrage, see Rebecca Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914*, New York: New York University Press, 2004; *Arizona Daily Star*, Feb. 21, 1883.

⁴ Aimee DePotter Lykes, "Phoenix Women in the Development of Public Policy: Territorial Beginnings," in *Phoenix in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Community History*, edited by G. Wesley Johnson, Jr., p. 34; Mark Pry, "Statehood Politics and Territorial Development: the Arizona Constitution of 1891," *Journal of Arizona History* 35 (1994): 409, 422.

⁵ William "Buckey" O'Neill to James McClintock, July 14, 1897, McClintock Collection, Phoenix Public Library. Before the law went into effect, a judge overturned it; *Woman's Journal*, 9 May 1903, p. 146; *Arizona Republican*, 21 March 1903.

⁶ Jay J. Wagoner, *Arizona Territory, 1863-1912: A Political History*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970, p. 408; Pry, "Arizona and the Politics of Statehood," p. 109; David R. Berman, *Reformers, Corporations, and the Electorate: An Analysis of Arizona's Age of Reform*, Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1992, pp. 9-11; Karen Underhill Mangelsdorf, "The Beveridge Visit to Arizona in 1902," *Journal of Arizona History* 28 (1987): 250, 252-4; Laura K. Munoz, "Desert Dreams: Mexican American Education in Arizona, 1870-1930," Ph.D. dissertation, Tempe: Arizona State University, 2006, pp. 17-18; Linda Carol Noel, "'The Swinging Door': U.S. National Identity and the Making of the Mexican Guestworker, 1900-1935," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2006, pp. 44-45.

⁷ Noel, "The Swinging Door," p. 60.

⁸ Margaret F. Maxwell, *A Passion for Freedom: The Life of Sharlot Hall*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982, pp. 91-93.

⁹ Maxwell, *A Passion for Freedom*, pp. 92-95.

¹⁰ *Out West*, Jan. 1906; Maxwell, *A Passion for Freedom*, pp. 93-96.

¹¹ Mrs. L. C. Hughes to George Hunt, March 3, 1909, Laura Clay Collection, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

¹² Statistics of Population, U.S. Census, 1900; Laura Clay to Miss Gordon March 3, 1909, Laura Clay Collection, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

¹³ Thomas E. Sheridan, *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854-1941*, University of Arizona Press, 1986, p. 178. Sheridan estimates that the literacy law resulted in a decrease in voting of around 30 percent among male Mexican American voters; Munoz, *Desert Dreams*, pp. 16, 17-18, 27, 197-200; Native Americans were barred by federal law from voting until 1924 when Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, but it was not until 1973 that all Native Americans were granted the full rights of citizenship in the state of Arizona, Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, and Jennifer L. Robinson, *Native American Indians, the Voting Rights Act, and the Right to Vote*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 7, 11, 15-18.

¹⁴ Laura Clay to Rachel Foster Avery, March 23, 1909, Laura Clay Collection, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

¹⁵ Frances Munds's report to the *Woman's Journal*, 1913, Women's Suffrage Collection, ASLAPR; Pry, "Arizona and the Politics of Statehood," pp. 263-265; *Arizona Republican*, Nov. 14, 1910.

¹⁶ *Arizona: The New State Magazine*, Feb. 1912, pp. 7-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9; Munoz, "Desert Dreams," p. 199.

¹⁸ Arizona woman suffrage petitions, Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, Phoenix; *Arizona Gazette*, Sept. 30, Oct. 3 and 5, and Nov. 4, 1912.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, May 4, 1913, p. 1, there is no evidence that Madge Udall was a member of the Udalls of Arizona politics. She served as Frances Munds's secretary during the final suffrage campaign and later married Munds's oldest son.