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“More Than She Deserves”: Woman Suffrage Memorials in the “Equality State”

Victoria Lamont

Abstract: How is it that the first significant victory in the history of the woman suffrage movement—the enfranchisement of women in Wyoming Territory in 1869—is also the most poorly remembered and understood? This article argues that the terms by which woman suffrage was deemed memorable in Wyoming were at odds with the historical material itself: Political women were frowned upon in Wyoming; hence memorials were erected to women who had played a relatively minor role in the movement, while the most active suffragists were demonized as mannish office seekers. Buildings most closely associated with woman suffrage, such as the site where the first woman jurors deliberated, were allowed to go to ruin while monuments to early suffrage “mothers” were erected on sites of dubious provenance. This fragile foundation rendered these memorials vulnerable to critique by twentieth-century historians who characterized suffrage as a gift given to women by a chivalrous legislature. Meanwhile, the woman activists who had sacrificed their reputations for the sake of the cause have been all but forgotten.

Keywords: Esther Hobart Morris, woman suffrage, monuments, Wyoming, United States

Résumé : Comment se fait-il que la première victoire significative dans l’histoire du mouvement pour le suffrage féminin – l’octroi du droit de vote aux femmes dans le Territoire du Wyoming en 1869 – soit également le moins connu et le moins bien compris ? La thèse de cet article est que les conditions qui rendaient mémorable le suffrage des femmes dans le Wyoming cadraient mal avec la matière historique elle-même : les femmes politiques étaient mal vues dans le Wyoming, c’est pourquoi on a érigé des monuments à celles qui avaient joué un rôle relativement mineur au sein du mouvement, alors que les suffragistes les plus engagées étaient perçues comme des femmes masculines en quête de pouvoir. Les lieux les plus

étroitement associés au suffrage féminin, par exemple l'endroit où les premières femmes juristes ont délibéré, ont été laissés à l'abandon tandis que des monuments à certaines « mères » du mouvement ont été érigés sur des sites douteux. En raison de leurs fondements fragiles, ces monuments ont ainsi été exposés à la critique des historiens du vingtième siècle, qui ont caractérisé le droit de vote comme un cadeau qu'une législature galante aurait fait aux femmes. Pendant ce temps, les activistes qui avaient sacrifié leur réputation pour la cause ont été presque oubliées.

Mots clés: Esther Hobart Morris, suffrage féminin, monuments, Wyoming, États-Unis

“Comprised of statues donated by individual states to honor persons notable in their history” (National Statuary Hall [NSH]), the National Statuary Hall collection of 98 statues, located at the US capitol, includes only five female figures. One of these depicts Esther Hobart Morris of Wyoming, who in 1870 became a justice of the peace in South Pass, Wyoming, the first woman in the world to hold such an office. This accomplishment, however, is not what garnered Morris a place in the prestigious collection; rather, Morris is credited with having brought woman suffrage to Wyoming in 1869 by organizing a tea party designed to promote woman suffrage in the newly created territory (“Esther”). Present at the tea party were H.G. Nickerson and W.H. Bright, opposing candidates in the upcoming territorial elections, and a gathering of the town’s leading citizens. Morris had invited Bright and Nickerson, unbeknownst to the men themselves, in order to extract from both of them the promise, witnessed by all present, that whoever was victorious in the upcoming election would introduce a woman suffrage bill. The promise was duly made by both candidates, and the victorious William H. Bright introduced the bill in the first territorial legislature. When the bill was passed, on 10 December 1869, Wyoming Territory became the first modern state to grant women the right to vote. While citizens of the territory, male or female, could not vote in presidential elections, Wyoming’s “experiment” was nonetheless hailed by American woman suffragists as a significant victory for the movement. Fittingly, this first important suffrage victory was won in the American West, the birthplace of true freedom, through the efforts of a pioneering western woman.

Unfortunately, Morris’s tea party probably didn’t happen. The earliest account of it dates to 1919, fifty years after the fact,

when Wyoming “old timer” H.G. Nickerson published in the *Wyoming State Journal* a “historical correction” to accounts of the origins of Wyoming woman suffrage being published in recent local newspapers. In his article, he claimed to be the only surviving participant in the tea party (“Historical Correction”). Taking the story at face value, Grace Raymond Hebard, a University of Wyoming professor of political science and economics, devoted much of the next fifteen years of her life to promoting the tea-party story and memorializing Morris as “the mother of woman suffrage.” Thanks largely to Hebard’s efforts, the tea-party story was perpetuated throughout the state in school plays, textbooks, and monuments. Although there have been periodic attempts to debunk the story, including a publicity campaign spearheaded by Wyoming historian T.A. Larson in the 1950s (see Papers) and, more recently, an entry in James W. Loewen’s compilation of misleading historical sites (108–10), the legend persists and is still being promoted on the Web site for the National Statuary Hall.

The production of the Morris myth raises interesting questions about the memorialization of woman suffrage history in the United States. What imperatives drove memorialists like Grace Hebard to make Morris into a suffrage heroine with so little evidence that she had contributed at all to the movement? Why Morris, when Hebard—a trained historian—had other, far more politically active women to choose from as heroic representatives of the equality state? In this essay, I will map out a history of the formation of this mythology in order to shed light on the conditions, material and ideological, under which the history of women’s political activism in Wyoming was memorialized in the early twentieth century. My history of mythmaking will show that the history of woman suffrage in Wyoming was unrepresentable within the mythological framework that its memorialists had in mind: It lacked one heroic woman who could be singled out as the “mother” of suffrage in the state, it was populated with disreputable “political women” who were deemed threatening to the state’s reputation, and it involved concerted efforts to stifle women’s access to equal participation in the state’s political and judicial processes. The consequences of early efforts to sanitize this history for the sake of the state mythology resonate in our present moment: The emergence of woman suffrage in Wyoming remains poorly understood and inadequately memorialized, despite its undeniable historical importance.

The tea-party story emerged during a moment that was particularly ripe for claiming the historical importance of woman suffrage in Wyoming. During the final stages of the national campaign to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution in 1919, Wyoming figured as the birthplace of modern American civilization in the national publicity surrounding the campaign. A 1916 cover of *The Suffragist*, for example, depicted Liberty striding across a map of the United States, bringing enlightenment from the West to the East. Its caption read, "Ever farther West men have migrated seeking freedom; it has been left for woman to turn back to the East bringing the gift of freedom" (see Figure 1). As Margaret Finnegan has shown, highly stage-managed public performance and display figured prominently in the strategies of woman suffragists in the latter stages of the movement (45–66). Once the Nineteenth Amendment had passed, Wyoming was chosen as the stage for the first meeting of the League of Woman Voters, an organization formed by Carrie Chapman Catt, former president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), as a post-suffrage women's political organization (Finnegan 172). Leaders of the national campaign were highly cognizant of the importance of portraying Wyoming as a leader in the national movement even though they often found that Wyoming women needed extra prodding to participate in national events. According to Beverly Beeton, "[M]ore often than not, there was no representative from Wyoming at the national suffrage conventions" (17). Responding to a request from NAWSA's national press bureau for help publicizing a 1913 march on Washington, Mrs. M.C. Brown wrote, "We are so established in equal suffrage in Wyoming that we forget the need of those who are struggling for it." In her speech to the 1919 League of Women Voters convention entitled "Wake Up Wyoming!", Catt urged Wyoming citizens and legislators to "make the [Nineteenth] amendment safe" by holding a special session of the Wyoming legislature, then in recess, to ratify the amendment (qtd. in "Carrie"). Another speaker at the same meeting summarized the symbolic importance of Wyoming in the national campaign: "Look to the west, to the crimson west, for the things that are done" (qtd. in "Carrie"). In his speech at the special session of the legislature, Governor Robert D. Carey echoed concerns that Wyoming live up to its role as a Mecca for the movement, describing the special session as necessary to "answer the charge that suffrage is a failure in Wyoming" ("Address"). Even after Wyoming boosters began capitalizing on the publicity garnered through the state's role in the suffrage movement, they continued to

The Suffragist

FIVE CENTS

WEEKLY ORGAN OF THE
CONGRESSIONAL UNION FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

JANUARY 8, 1916



Ever farther and farther West men have migrated seeking freedom; it has been left for woman to turn back to the East bringing the gift of freedom

Figure 1: From the Cover of the *Suffragist*, 8 January 1916. Reproduced with the permission of the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum.

drag their heels when it came to offering more than symbolic support for the American women's movement. Indeed, a year after the Wyoming meeting of the League of Women Voters, a league representative wrote Hebard that Wyoming was "a little late in getting started" on its share of work for the organization (Paige).

Coincident with the interest of NAWSA in featuring Wyoming in its publicity were the efforts of the Wyoming Oregon Trail Commission to commemorate local landmarks related to the trail. It enlisted the services of two prominent citizens: Colonel H.G. Nickerson and Grace Raymond Hebard. The Ohio-born Nickerson was a Civil War veteran who had lived in the area since 1868, arriving, in search of gold, in the mining town of South Pass via the overland trail. He was a member of the second territorial legislature and thereafter

held various political and judicial appointments in Wyoming ("Capt. Nickerson"). In addition to her work for the University of Wyoming, Hebard was the author of numerous works on Wyoming history, including an article about Wyoming's first woman jurors¹ and was the secretary of the Oregon Trail Commission when a NAWSA representative contacted her for assistance in incorporating the example of Wyoming into NAWSA's national publicity campaign in September of 1916 (Boyd). The previous year, Hebard had made a trek to South Pass, where she joined Nickerson in the midst of his field-work for the trail commission. It was on this trip that Hebard, with the advice of Mrs. Sherlock Smith, one of the last remaining residents of South Pass City, determined the location of Esther Morris's home, which was to become the site of the first woman suffrage monument in Wyoming (Hebard, Letter to Peter Sherlock; Hebard, Letter to C.W. Brandon 8 Sept. 1933). In January 1916, shortly after the expedition to South Pass, Hebard wrote in a letter to Nickerson about the possibility of erecting a monument to woman suffrage: "Inasmuch as this is a woman suffrage [*sic*] state, and the conception of woman suffrage originated at South Pass City, I thought that perhaps there was some appropriateness in this idea [of having a monument]. I doubt whether our present appropriation and the work we have set for ourselves will warrant this expenditure." In September of that same year, NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt wrote Hebard asking for information about women voters in Wyoming for use in NAWSA publicity material. Thus began a life-long friendship between the two women, as well as Hebard's fifteen-year campaign to commemorate woman suffrage in Wyoming. The confluence of local efforts to memorialize Wyoming history in public monuments and the symbolic importance of Wyoming in the late stages of the national suffrage campaign, created an opportunity for publicly memorializing the history of woman suffrage in Wyoming that Hebard was quick to recognize and take advantage of.

Fashioning the available historical materials into a suitably monumental story involved certain revealing decisions on Hebard's part. Where would the monument be located? Would it commemorate a place, an event, or a person? As early as 1916, Hebard had identified South Pass City as the place where woman suffrage was first conceived in Wyoming. The choice made sense insofar as this was the home of Bright, who had introduced the bill, and Morris, who, as the first woman justice of the peace, was the first woman appointed to such a high office under the provisions of the

new woman suffrage act. Following the already well-established tradition of celebrating heroic suffragists, Hebard chose Esther Morris as the subject of her monument, which was erected in South Pass in 1920. From a mythological point of view, Morris was also ideal. Having emigrated to Wyoming territory from Illinois in 1869 (Larson, *History* 90), she was a pioneer in both the literal and figurative sense of the term, exactly the figure Hebard needed to embody Wyoming's achievement as the "equality state." The problem was that there was little historical evidence connecting her to the passage of the woman suffrage bill, which was introduced by a man, at a time when no woman suffrage organization existed in Wyoming, debated in an all-male legislature, and passed by men. So laden was Morris with value as a mythological figure, however, that Hebard spent the rest of her life crusading on behalf of Morris's memory despite the fact that Morris was by no means the only candidate for the position.

Hebard's sources consisted mainly of legislative records, newspaper reports, and oral tradition, in which Morris's role in the passage of the woman suffrage bill is sketchy at best. According to legislative records, William H. Bright, a Democrat, introduced a woman suffrage bill in the first territorial legislature in 1869. A revised version of Bright's bill was passed in December of that year. In 1871, a bill to repeal it was passed in the legislature but vetoed by the governor despite considerable opposition (only one vote was lacking to override the veto) (Larson, *History* 79–89). What motivated Bright to introduce the bill—especially the extent to which he was "influenced" by activists for the cause—has been debated almost since the bill itself was passed. Aside from accounts of the visits to Wyoming of two popular woman suffrage lecturers, Redelia Bates and Anna Dickinson, shortly before the bill was passed, there is no evidence that women played a public role in early debates about the woman suffrage bill (*Revolution* 16 December 1869; *Cheyenne Leader* 18 May 1869; 18 September 1869). The first public mention of Morris's involvement appeared in a letter written by Esther's son Robert, appearing in the *Revolution* shortly after the bill passed. Robert Morris credited Bright alone with introducing the bill, claiming that "no woman suffragist" influenced him, but he also acknowledged that he and his mother were among the only "open advocates" of woman suffrage in the territory.² Echoing her son's account, Esther wrote a letter addressed to a woman suffrage convention in Washington, DC in 1871, in which she gave Bright full credit for bringing woman suffrage to Wyoming

(Morris Letter; "Our Washington Letter"). In later years, Bright claimed that he had not thought much about woman suffrage until both Esther Morris and his wife Julia "loaded me down with woman suffrage before I went to the Legislature" (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* 1 Mar. 1902). Rivalling Bright for credit was James H. Hayford, editor of the Laramie *Sentinel* who, in an 1871 editorial arguing the merits of the newly passed bill, claimed that "it was due entirely to the course pursued by this paper, and the individual exertions of its editor, that the Woman Suffrage bill was passed in this Territory" (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* 25 Mar. 1871). In 1923, descendants of Edward M. Lee, territorial secretary in 1869, claimed that he was the chief influence on Bright, who was actually reluctant to introduce the bill (Stark; Jensen).

Why the bill garnered enough support to pass is also in question: One of the more persistent motives attributed to the first legislators is that they believed the bill would generate publicity and attract investors and emigrants to the new territory. A competing explanation credited circumstances rather than individuals with the bill's passage; according to one such account, the woman suffrage bill began as a joke and was not expected or even intended to succeed. A variation on this version holds that the joke was meant to be on the Republican governor, who was expected by the Democratic majority in the legislature to veto the bill but turned the tables by signing it.³ After five years of woman suffrage in Wyoming, Judge John Kingman cited all of the above as contributing factors: "Woman suffrage was inaugurated without much discussion, and without any general movement of men or women in its favor. Some of the members urged it from conviction, others voted for it thinking it would attract attention to the Territory, others as a joke, and others in the expectation that the Gov. would veto the measure. When the law was enacted it was viewed with indifference by some, with dislike by others, and with warm regard by many" (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* 17 Oct. 1874).

Although Wyoming women were "given" the vote in 1869, they had to fight to keep it and to establish equal inclusion in the formal political process. This story is not one that Hebard chose to tell. In 1873, there were attempts to organize a Woman's Party, and although they were unsuccessful (Mead 43), records indicate, often scornfully, the continuing presence of "political women" in Wyoming. The most well-known female activist was Amalia Post, whose name enters the public record as a one of the first woman

jurors in Wyoming. In the archives, the names of Post and Morris are often linked, although Post was the more publicly active of the two. Whereas Morris made only one known public appearance—at a woman suffrage convention in San Francisco in 1872 (*Woman's Journal* 9 Mar. 1872)—Post was more comfortable with publicity. Early in 1871, she attended a woman suffrage convention in Washington, DC (*Woman's Journal* 11 Feb. 1871) where, she wrote, “I was made more of than any other lady in convention” (Post, Letter to Kilbourn 4 Feb. 1871). To delegates at this same convention, Post read a letter by the more reticent Morris, in which Morris described with humility her performance as justice of the peace—“I have often regretted I was not better qualified to fill the position”—and made modest observations on the “woman question” in Wyoming: “[W]hile we enjoy the privilege of the elective franchise, we have not been sufficiently educated to it . . . [although] I now think we shall be able to sustain the position which has been granted us” (Morris, “Mrs. Esther Morris”). In contrast to Morris’s reticence, Post was relatively prominent in territorial politics. By some accounts, she organized efforts to convince the governor to veto the 1871 bill repealing woman suffrage (*Cheyenne Daily Leader* 22 July 1890). In the midst of Wyoming’s application for statehood in 1889, Post chaired a ladies’ meeting organized to protect woman suffrage (“A Woman’s Meeting”). At this meeting, she warned Wyoming women that “eternal vigilance was the price of suffrage” and urged that a ladies’ committee attend primaries and make sure anti-suffragists were not elected as delegates (“The Ladies Resolve”). Both women were also honoured at the 1890 statehood celebration as Wyoming’s pioneer woman suffragists (*Cheyenne Daily Sun* 24 July 1890).

A third important Wyoming woman suffragist was Theresa Jenkins, who, along with Post, led efforts to ensure the inclusion of a woman suffrage clause in the state constitution. In addition to organizing the ladies’ meeting about the issue, Jenkins assisted woman suffrage campaigns in Colorado and Kansas and was active in the temperance movement (“Noted”). A popular orator on the issues of temperance and suffrage, Jenkins was known for her humour, a sample of which survives in this 1889 letter by Jenkins to a local newspaper: “It has been frequently remarked that marriage is a failure, but the ladies keep on risking it notwithstanding. Gentlemen, we’ll take suffrage.” Jenkins was also among the most daring political women in the state: Reminiscing about the “early days” of woman suffrage in a 1919 article in the *Cheyenne Leader*,

Jenkins describes the barriers to acceptance as equal participants in the political process that Wyoming women faced and explains her willingness to openly challenge them. She relates an incident in which a friend, Fannie Foss, was nominated as a delegate to the county Republican convention but was ordered by her husband to send a male friend in her place. Jenkins persuaded Mrs. Foss to attend and accompanied her to the convention, where they were the only women present.

Everything went off quite easy until it came to [nominating a] county superintendent of schools. Then we thought we must do something for the good of our country. Mrs. Foss nominated Miss Anna Schule. Had a bomb from an aeroplane dropped there could not have been more surprise. A doctor had the job and the doctor wanted the job, so somebody moved recess, and the way the men got out of that court room was a caution, and then they discussed and cussed us ("Woman").

Angered by their reception at the Republican convention and the defeat of their nominee, Jenkins attended the Democratic convention, where a woman was successfully nominated for the same position and went on to win the election (Jenkins, "Woman").

Also excluded from consideration for memorialization was the history of women jurors in Wyoming, despite the fact that Hebard had conducted extensive research on the subject and despite the fact that the building in which woman jurors had served still stood in Laramie, making it far more accessible to potential suffrage pilgrims than the remote town of South Pass. However, the story of women jurors was a thorny one from the point of view of boosting Wyoming's reputation because women's participation in the judicial process was not tolerated for very long. Although the Suffrage Act was initially interpreted to allow and even *require* that women serve on juries, women were barred from jury service in 1871, less than two years after the practice had begun (Hebard, "First Woman" 1325). To remind the citizens of Wyoming that women had once served on juries risked the possibility of opening up for debate an issue that had long ago been put to rest, as well as compromising efforts to enshrine the state's reputation as a leader in the progress of women's rights. Female jury duty, which took women away from their families, exposed them to unseemly testimony and put them in close quarters with male jurors, was among the most controversial outcomes of the Woman Suffrage Act.⁴ Defenders of the female jurors argued that they were no office seekers, but that jury duty was

foisted upon them: “[The] very men who were the most active in passing the Suffrage Bill were the loudest in their cry ‘that if the women would vote’ they must perform some of the duties consequent” (*Woman’s Journal* 8 Aug. 1874). Hebard herself uncovered evidence that Andrew Howie, convicted of murder by a jury comprised of six women and six men, was quietly pardoned by the governor after serving less than a year of his ten-year sentence, suggesting that the governor at the time was unwilling to back the convictions of the mixed juries (McDonell). A letter from juror Amalia Post to her sister suggests the historical importance of this fleeting moment when women exercised judicial authority in Wyoming. Post regarded jury duty not as the price of full citizenship but as an exercise of her newly acquired franchise—as significant an act as casting the ballot: “I suppose you are aware that Women can hold any office in this territory . . . I was put on the Grand Jury. I am intending to vote this next election [word missing] makes Mr. Post very indignant as he thinks a Woman has no rights” (Post, Letter to Kilbourn 4 Apr. 1870). Other than a marker erected in 1922, the building in which Post served as one of the first woman jurors was virtually ignored in favour of the far more remote location of South Pass (“Building”).

Hebard’s choice for the subject of the monument was the one most directly linked to the origin of the woman suffrage bill, but she was also the most politically reticent of the likely candidates: Esther Morris had not run for public office but was appointed during a period of perceived shortage of “respectable” citizens to fill such positions. Dutifully serving her term, she quietly returned to domestic life, making only a few public appearances before her death in 1902. Hebard managed to find two eye-witnesses, one of them Esther’s son, Robert Morris, to attest that Esther had influenced Bright to introduce the bill. Influence, however, is difficult to prove in historical terms; Hebard needed something more concrete on which to base her historical claims. The story of the Morris tea party for suffrage provided Hebard with a means of representing this “influence” in the form of a “real” event. The story was first published by H.G. Nickerson on 4 Feb. 1919. At the time, Hebard was already involved with the national ratification campaign (“Historical Correction”): The Laramie meeting of the League of Women Voters was held in November of 1919, and Hebard, in her address to the convention, told of how Bright’s “ideas . . . crystalized from his association with Mrs. Morris” (Hebard, “Fifty Years Ago” 8). She was also at work

on her pamphlet, "How Woman Suffrage Came to Wyoming." In July of 1920, Hebard travelled to South Pass, where she erected a makeshift monument to Esther Morris and arranged for an engraved bronze slab to be added later ("Monument"). Two months later, Nickerson wrote to Hebard about the engraving, enclosing a copy of the "tea-party" article, and told her of his plans to "record in our County Recorders office a sworn statement of the facts contained therein relative to Esther Morris being the author of female suffrage in Wyoming" (Letter to Hebard 28 Sept. 1920). Although Hebard's own research on Morris had turned up no mention of a tea party and no corroborating source supported Nickerson's claim, she became its main proponent. (Years later, she claimed that Nickerson published the article at her own insistence, but her correspondence with him suggests otherwise.)

Morris was a suitable suffrage heroine despite her tenuous links to the movement not only because of her links to W.H. Bright but also because her very reticence protected her from the accusations commonly levelled at political women in Wyoming. "Public women"—a term sometimes used to refer to prostitutes (Finnegan 48)—were held up in anti-suffrage rhetoric as examples of what would happen to all women were they to be burdened with the responsibility of full citizenship: Women would be transformed into mannish, self-serving office seekers. In 1871, Rev. H.C. Waltz of Wyoming wrote an article for the *Western Christian Advocate*, in which he attacked

the character of most of the female advocates of woman's franchise . . . Most of them are unbelievers and infidels, ready for divorce, free loveism, and all kinds of badness. Such women make conspicuous lobbyists. Button-holing men becomes their delight . . . One of the most respectable female suffragists in our town, a handsome delicate married lady, and a mother at that, boasted she could do anything a man could, and so on a wager walked around the chief business square of the city, all the while smoking a strong cigar! (3)

Women's clubs were trivialized in "The Kissellaneous Klub," a series of satirical articles published in the program for the Cheyenne New Opera House that depicted clubwomen, who claimed to engage in service projects and educational activities, as engaging in trivial activities that revolved around the subject of kissing ("Kissellaneous").

In contrast with these images of the frivolous clubwoman was that of the unsexed political woman of the West, who figured prominently in anti-suffrage propaganda. In the first decade of Wyoming's woman suffrage "experiment," the following eyewitness account by a Captain S.H. Winsor circulated in the Eastern press:

As an instance of the demoralizing influence of politics on women, I remember seeing a lady, the wife of a candidate for office, standing at the counter of a beer saloon drinking beer with a parcel of colored men. I could mention her name, but will not. She was from Ohio, was well-educated, and entirely respectable; but she was so intensely interested in her husband's success that she resorted to this means of getting votes for him. I saw this same lady and a school teacher of Cheyenne in their buggies driving colored men and women, and even known harlots, to and from the polls. (qtd. in *Nine Years' 2*)

As woman suffrage took hold in additional Western states (Colorado in 1893, Idaho in 1896, and an additional seven states between 1910 and 1914), western women became a favourite target of anti-suffragist propaganda. Colorado, because of its large population and active populist movement, was particularly singled out as proof that woman suffrage had failed in the West (Mead 53–72). A 1910 anti-suffrage pamphlet quotes the observations of a "political manager" in Denver:

In this election about a thousand women are being paid as workers and 422 more women are sitting as officials at the polling places. Every single one of those women has lost something, that indefinable something that ought to set her apart. . . . High-minded men ignore the woman voter; to low-minded men she is—well, the less said about that the better. (Barry 15)

Montana voters were similarly advised to vote against woman suffrage "because woman can accomplish more good for her country in her womanly way at home than she can in a mannish way by mixing in the coarse political game," and "because, as a rule, the leaders in the woman suffrage movement do not represent the best element of womanhood." The same leaflet implies that where politics does not make women "mannish," their womanly irrationality will prevail: "Women are largely influenced by the

church and they are apt to take up fanatical reforms regardless of the results" ("Some of the Reasons").

Anxious to denounce anti-suffragist attacks and distance Wyoming from the turmoil in Colorado, Wyoming's state boosters claimed that Wyoming women were naturally disinclined to participate in politics beyond thoughtfully casting votes for the most righteous and upright candidates. They were quick to point out that Wyoming women did not neglect their duties as mothers, rarely sought public office, and were selfless rather than self-serving in their use of the franchise. Responding to criticism of the kind Waltz espoused, Governor Campbell told the *Woman's Journal* that there were no "female orators" in Wyoming nor did women of the territory wish to seek office (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* 30 Sept. 1870). Echoing Campbell's remarks, another observer declared, "[Y]ou might travel over our broad plains, and through our lovely valleys, and not find what you would call a 'Woman's Rights woman,' nor would you hear of one single instance where women sought or demanded the right of suffrage. But when it was forced upon them by their over-generous brothers, they quietly accepted the situation" (*Woman's Journal* 8 Aug. 1874). Ten years later, defenders of woman suffrage in Wyoming still measured its success in terms of how few women had entered politics:

It is generally admitted that the women of Wyoming show no desire for office. This is now brought forward by our opponents as an argument against woman suffrage. It seems to us just the reverse. The women of Wyoming are almost all of them pioneers' wives with children around them. We are constantly told that if women could vote, mothers would desert their children in order to hold office. We have always maintained that most women had too much common sense and maternal affection to do anything of the kind. An unmarried woman . . . might represent her district in Congress [if elected]. It would not hurt the women, and it might do Congress good. (*Woman's Journal*, 19 Jan. 1884)

Subsequent governors of Wyoming echoed this refrain. Quoted in the *Woman's Journal* in 1896, Governor Richards admitted that "there are some women who would like to make themselves disagreeably prominent in politics, but they are held in check by the others, the majority who say, 'These women do not represent us, and we will not help to elect them'" (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* 3 Oct. 1896). Although public women had gained more acceptance in Wyoming

in the early twentieth century, “office-seeking” remained a potentially unwomanly pursuit. In 1914, Governor Joseph M. Carey responded favourably to a query about woman suffrage, writing that it had “opened the doors for woman to obtain employment in places formerly closed to them. They have held important offices in the state, especially in connection with the schools” (Letter to Pfeiffer). However, Carey also wrote disapprovingly of more radically political women. In a letter cautioning national suffrage leader Anna Howard Shaw that the “Pankhurst crowd” of British militants was threatening the credibility of the movement, Carey described an incident at a recent election: “Two or three women appeared—I think they called themselves members of the Congressional Union—to fight men running on the Democratic ticket... They made a poor showing here.” Addressing the United States Senate in 1918, Wyoming Senator John B. Kendrick again argued that

the extension of the suffrage has not made ‘politicians’ out of [Wyoming women] nor has it transformed them into office seekers. The records of my State will show not only that they are disinclined to accept the responsibilities of office, but that they can rarely be induced to do so (Kendrick).

Grace Hebard’s correspondence suggests a slightly different reason why so few women involved themselves in politics. When Hebard was approached to run for governor on the Republican ticket, she declined for economic reasons: She could not afford to give up her position at the university (Letter to Keeney).

This was the cultural context in which Esther Morris was chosen as Wyoming’s “mother of suffrage.” She had played a womanly role in the advent of suffrage by quietly “influencing” William H. Bright to introduce the first woman suffrage bill. She also represented a rare example of the public woman who retained her respectability. Unlike those of the disreputable female “office seekers” disparaged by (mainstream) suffragists and anti-suffragists alike, Morris’s public record consisted of her early service as justice of the peace, served at a time when women were called to purify Wyoming’s corrupt judicial system (Larson, *History* 85). Morris had dutifully answered the call, remained in office until her term expired, and returned to private life. She was no strident “woman’s rights” woman, but could be cajoled into making the odd public appearance for the good of the movement. The very private and reticent nature of her involvement in woman suffrage was precisely what made her a suitable embodiment of the success of woman suffrage

in Wyoming and the West. She perfectly matched the model woman voter espoused by both local state boosters and mainstream suffragists who, Margaret Finnegan has shown, were anxious to distance themselves from their more radical counterparts (52).

The location of the monument similarly served more ideological purposes than it did historical ones. Hebard's choice—the site of the Morris home in South Pass—was in keeping with preservation practices of the period, which have since been shown to exclude crucial aspects of women's history from memorial representation. Political monuments and memorials focused on the founding fathers and were intended to function as shrines to American patriotism (Howe 18, 28). Early practitioners of historical preservation developed what many now regard as inadequate vehicles for memorializing women's political history. Historic house museums, Patricia West has pointed out, "have a long history of memorializing the economic and political activity of wealthy white men" (83). Moreover,

as the predominant type of site where women's history is presented to the public," the historic house "may buttress the myth of women's confinement in the domestic sphere while missing vital opportunities for marking women's history in the more public arenas of the paid labor force and the community" (Dubrow 6–7).

These constraints drove Hebard to preserve a site with rather questionable provenance, for Hebard's source for the location of Morris's home, the elderly Mrs. Sherlock Smith, proved an unreliable witness.⁵ Furthermore, the practice of commemorating historic individuals—especially founding fathers—rather than groups made collective achievements, such as the service of the first women jurors, less usable historically than the more singular achievements of Esther Morris, the first woman justice of the peace and "founding mother" of woman suffrage. Moreover, by depicting the first public woman carrying out her duties within the home space, the site not only domesticated the figure of the public woman but also symbolized one of the central themes of early-twentieth-century mainstream suffragism: that woman suffrage would purify politics by bringing it within the jurisdiction of female moral influence (Cott, "Domestication" 91). Finally, the geographic location of the monument in the relatively remote, but not entirely inaccessible, town of South Pass was in keeping with the function of historical sites as shrines. Hebard

envisioned the South Pass monument becoming the destination of future generations of pilgrims to the Mecca of American woman suffrage: "South Pass City will be a shrine or a Mecca to which pilgrims will make their journeys [*sic*] because it was the city of the birth of woman suffrage" (Hebard, Letter to Deming 4 Jan. 1935). I am not suggesting that Hebard deliberately skewed the historical facts when she lobbied for the South Pass monument, for her correspondence on the matter convinces me that she was sincere in her belief in the historical value of the site. Rather, I argue that, given prevailing standards by which certain sites were deemed worthy of preservation, the South Pass site was the *obvious* choice over sites that, in hind sight, have more substantial ties to Wyoming women's political history. Indeed, the public buildings where women jurors had deliberated not only lacked the aura necessary for a historical shrine, but also were a reminder of an aspect in which Wyoming law had *not* progressed. Wyoming's most active political women, meanwhile, were also unfit for the role of "founding mother" precisely because of their public activity; hence, it has occurred to no-one to preserve, say, the home of Theresa Jenkins, Wyoming's most active woman suffragist.

With its explicit allusions to the American Revolution, the tea party was a well-established symbol in woman suffrage political culture. Fashioning a story of a suffrage tea party, meanwhile, served rhetorical uses of its own: It was Morris's "influence" manifest as a historical event—on the one hand, situated in the feminine, private sphere, but, on the other hand, causally connected to the male-dominated political sphere. By connecting the separate, gendered spheres, without collapsing them, the tea-party story made Morris into both a womanly and a historical figure. Further, it relocated the moment of origin of woman suffrage from the male-dominated legislature to the feminine sphere. Moreover, it was a story that resonated with woman suffragists across the nation. Tea sets were often presented as ceremonial gifts at woman suffrage meetings and, as Edith Mayo has shown, "attest to the deliberate intention of women to infuse domestic artefacts with political meaning and to the use of the "tea party" as a powerful ritual of women's political culture" (122). Meanwhile, the promise allegedly extracted from Bright and Nickerson at the tea party mimics scenarios that were common in woman suffrage rhetoric during the late period of the movement, which, as Margaret Finnegan has shown, envisioned future male politicians competing for women's votes. A woman suffrage flyer asked, "Do you not think it would

be a good thing for the home and for the state if, wherever there was an election, we had two men competing with each other to see which could get into his platform the best proposals for legislation benefiting the homes and the children in order to appeal to the experts on homes and children—the women—with something in exchange for their votes” (qtd. in Finnegan 27).

The tea-party story also linked the advent of woman suffrage in Wyoming to America’s revolutionary origins, a link that Hebard exploited in order to buttress Morris’s entitlement to historical status. During the 1930s, Hebard became concerned that Esther Morris’s memory was fading and began lobbying for a better, “more permanent” monument in South Pass, which was dedicated in 1933. She publicized the new monument through a letter-writing campaign to the local media, urging its representatives to cover the dedication, publish Morris’s photograph, and remind readers of her historical significance.⁶ In one of these letters, Hebard expressed her wish that someone “not so vitally interested in woman suffrage” would champion the cause for the monument (Letter to C.W. Brandon 15 Aug. 1933), revealing that Morris still had not become entrenched as a historical figure in state culture. Hebard also lobbied energetically—and successfully—for the passage of “The Wyoming Day Act,” by which 10 December was declared a state holiday commemorating the advent of woman suffrage in Wyoming. To inculcate the memory of woman suffrage in future generations, Hebard co-wrote the play “Birth of Wyoming Day” in collaboration with her former student Marie Montabe, who had made a name for herself in Wyoming as an actress and writer. The play was written expressly for inclusion in Wyoming Day school curricula (Hebard, Letter to Leslie A. Miller).

“The Birth of Wyoming Day” again registers the ideological tensions that made depicting the origins of woman suffrage problematic. Whereas Hebard cited the tea party freely in her correspondence with the media, capitalizing on its obvious parallels to revolutionary national origin stories, “The Birth of Wyoming Day” stages the passage of the bill in the legislature as the moment of the “birth” of woman suffrage (Hebard and Montabe, “Birth”). Although Morris and her tea party are mentioned in the play’s prologue, these events are not dramatized on stage. Indeed, earlier drafts only mentioned the tea party in passing; the prologue was added after someone suggested to Hebard that “the whole story is not told without the dramatizing of that tea party” (Swain, Letter to

Hebard; Hebard, Letter to Montabe). Hebard's uncertainty about how to depict the tea party in the play suggests more than Hebard's doubts about its authenticity although it certainly suggests that she had them. The greater irony is that the tea-party story was instrumental in generating the support that Hebard needed to institutionalize the memory of woman suffrage in Wyoming, yet official historical models continued to privilege the movement's legislative origins and relegate women's history to the shadowy region of word of mouth.

Hebard's publicity campaign succeeded insofar as, following her death in 1936, there were those who were willing to go out of their way to defend the "Morris myth" despite its questionable beginnings. Morris's status as the "mother" of woman suffrage was disputed almost from the start by descendants of Edward M. Lee, territorial secretary in 1869, who claimed that it was Lee who had influenced a reluctant Bright to introduce the woman suffrage Bill. Appearing briefly in a Denver paper in the 1920s, doubts about the "Morris myth" were temporarily overshadowed thanks to Hebard's extensive efforts on Morris's behalf (Stark). They resurfaced again, however, in 1954, when Morris became the subject of a second publicity campaign, this time waged by University of Wyoming historian T.A. Larson, who fought as energetically to quash the "Morris myth" as Hebard had to establish it. The occasion was a campaign, launched in 1953, to place a statue to represent Wyoming at the national Capitol ("Movement"). It would be particularly opportune to make it a woman, given Wyoming's reputation as the "Equality State" and given that only one woman, temperance crusader and educator Frances Willard, was featured at that time in Statuary Hall. In the fall of 1954, Esther Morris's name was included in the list of candidates, the winner to be selected on the basis of a state-wide poll conducted in Wyoming newspapers ("State Poll"). In the ensuing months, Larson did his best to influence the decision in articles, editorial letters, and correspondence with sympathetic legislators, in which he pointed out the flaws in Hebard's historical methodology, challenged Morris's fitness for inclusion in Statuary Hall, and publicized his own list of suitable candidates (Larson, Letters in *Laramie Daily*; Letters in *Laramie Republican*). Wyoming author Mary Lou Pence responded with long letters to the editor of the *Laramie Republican-Boomerang* in which she both revived and defended the "Morris myth," supporting her position by citing several "authorities" whose own opinions were based primarily on Hebard's historical work (Pence, Letter 24 Nov.;

7 Dec. 1954). Larson was unable, in the short term, at least, to dismantle the publicity machine that Hebard had set into motion: The Morris statue was approved in 1955 and dedicated in 1963 (*Dedication*).

For the remainder of his career, Larson insisted in letters and articles in the local and national press that the tea party never happened and that Morris had done little or nothing for woman suffrage in Wyoming. His campaign did not, however, involve replacing the Morris statue with a more truthful memorial; rather, he questioned whether or not woman suffrage deserved a memorial at all. In a letter to Bill Hosokawa, editor of the *Empire Magazine*, a publication of the *Denver Post* that published a feature article perpetuating the tea-party story, Larson wrote that “the [Wyoming] Governor, the Secretary of the Territory, two federal judges, Mrs. Bright, and two touring lecturers, Anna Dickenson [*sic*] and Redelia Bates, had more to do with the coming of woman suffrage to Wyoming than Mrs. Morris did, but there is no conclusive evidence that any one of them influenced the Legislature significantly.”

One premise that Larson did *not* debunk was that a good history needs a hero. For Larson, the lack of one, prominent, individual agitating for the cause undermined the very historical significance of woman suffrage itself. In a letter to the *Laramie Republican-Boomerang*, he wrote that although he was “proud that Wyoming is known as the Equality State,” his “study indicates that the men in the 1869 legislature, for reasons of their own, handed the women the right to vote on a platter with virtually no agitation on their part” (Letter in *Laramie Republican-Boomerang*, date illeg.). According to this rhetoric, woman suffrage itself barely counts as a historical *achievement* because it came about through the machinery of government rather than through “agitation.” Although woman suffragists did “agitate” to stop the 1870 repeal attempt and to include a woman suffrage clause in the 1890 constitution, Larson’s criteria nullified the historical significance of their efforts. Although he acknowledged his pride that Wyoming was known as the “Equality State,” his own all-male list of candidates included no one connected to the woman suffrage movement and privileged male adventurers and legislators. Larson’s statue favourites included Chief Washakie of the Shoshonis, who negotiated for safe passage of white emigrants to

Wyoming Territory (*History* 34); Jim Bridger, a guide, scout, trapper, and trader; Francis E. Warren, cattleman, Senator, and winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor; and John B. Kendrick, another Wyoming Senator known for championing the state in Washington ("Statue Favorites").

The consequence of Hebard's fabrications and Larson's debunkings is that very little of the early history of woman suffrage in Wyoming has survived in popular historical memory. Rather than Morris being replaced with a more appropriate candidate or the need for a hero being questioned, the very legitimacy of woman suffrage as a subject for memorialization has been compromised. For the rest of his career, Larson continued publicly to criticize Morris's appropriateness as a state representative at the Capitol, and as late as 1974, publicly reiterated his position that Hebard's 1920 booklet promoting Morris as the "Mother of Woman Suffrage" was "essentially a myth," created because Hebard rejected "the idea that a man could do this kind of thing [bring woman suffrage to Wyoming]" ("Mother of Suffrage"). The South Pass monument still exists, but with a recent addition that attempts to set the record straight by explaining that "controversy exists concerning Esther Morris and woman suffrage" and by itemizing the known facts of the case (Loewen 109). James W. Loewen "corrects" misconceptions about the origins of woman suffrage in Wyoming, not by suggesting that more truthful memorials are needed, but by writing women out altogether: "Unlike states that slight the role women played in their past... Wyoming has given a woman *more* space on the American landscape than she deserves" (109). Although T.A. Larson deserves credit for correcting misconceptions that Hebard promoted, he did not regard the more truthful history he uncovered as one of any great significance. Certainly, he believed it important to set the record straight and did so in the several scholarly articles he wrote on the subject,⁷ but he also took for granted the same individualist historiography that structured the "Morris" myth. Whereas the need to trace woman suffrage to a heroic, preferably female, individual led Hebard to propagate the tea-party story, it led Larson to minimize the historical importance of the movement. As Rebecca J. Mead observes, subsequent generations of historians built on this legacy by producing a body of scholarship about American woman suffrage that tends either to neglect or to oversimplify the significance of the West in the national movement (4). Meanwhile, somewhere in the gap

between Grace Hebard's mythological mother of suffrage and T.A. Larson's male-authored franchise, served to women on a platter, lies a richer history of woman suffrage in Wyoming that should be remembered.

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Notes

- 1 Hebard's most significant works at the time included *The Government of Wyoming: The History, Constitution and Administration of Affairs*, *The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean: The Story of the Great West from the Time of Coronado to the Present*, and "The First Woman Jury."
- 2 The letter is signed "R.C.M.," but was almost certainly written by Robert Morris.
- 3 These explanations were in circulation as early as 1872, when Rev. H.C. Waltz, who lived in Laramie at the time, cited them in an article written for the *Western Christian Advocate*; see Waltz 1-2.
- 4 A *New York Tribune* editorial opined that jury service "kept [women] out (in common with eight men) for four days" and took them away from their domestic duties (qtd. in *Woman's Journal* c1870).
- 5 In a 21 Oct. 1920 letter to Hebard, Nickerson describes Mrs. Smith as "badly mistaken" about the location of several South Pass sites.
- 6 See Hebard, Letter to W.C. Deming, 26 Aug. 1930; Letter to Warren Richardson; Letter to C.W. Brandon, 15 Aug. 1933; Letter to C. Watt Brandon, 8 Sept. 1933; Letter to John Charles Thompson; Letter to J.T. Thompson; Letter to B.B. Brooks; Letter to W.C. Deming, 4 Jan. 1935.
- 7 These include "Petticoats at the Polls: Woman Suffrage in Territorial Wyoming," "Woman Suffrage in Western America," and "Wyoming's Contribution to the Regional and National Women's Rights Movements."

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