
Katie O'Rourke: Honoring Minnesota Suffragists

As a documentary producer with the Minnesota Experience team for Twin Cities PBS, I spend my days surrounded by the people, places, and events that have made us who we are as a state. Every project has a learning curve. Where is the most current scholarship? What combination of search terms will lead me to the perfect image or footage?



When I began researching women's suffrage in Minnesota, that curve was steeper than usual. For a movement that spanned over 70 years and secured such a fundamental right for women, the suffrage story in Minnesota felt thin. We have all heard of Susan B. Anthony and the East Coast leaders, but what happened in our own backyard? Why didn't I know their names?

Through our interviewees and months of research, these amazing women revealed themselves to me and I am in awe of them.

For example, African American pioneer Nellie Griswold Francis fearlessly navigated the complex racial landscape of the movement, started the Everywoman Suffrage Club, and spent her life working to bridge divides and protect her community against violence and discrimination. After helping to secure the vote, she went on to co-author Minnesota's legislation outlawing lynching.

She is one of the thousands of mostly unnamed women who dedicated their lives to this endeavor. Thousands marching in parades, organizing political clubs, and talking to their husbands, fathers, and brothers about what the vote meant to them. Millions of women who, over the course of seven decades, tipped the scales toward equity.

I have been thinking about them as we approach another historic election. What do we owe them in this continued battle for voting rights and representation?

To share your thoughts, email TPT at communications@tpt.org. To learn more about the women's suffrage movement in Minnesota, join Twin Cities PBS for the premiere of Citizen at 8PM October 5 on TPT 2.
