

Excerpt from "The First Battle for Woman Suffrage in Nevada: 1869-1871 – Correcting and Expanding the Record," Jean Ford and James W. Hulse. *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Fall 1995, Vol. 38, No. 3.

Regarding the convention in Battle Mountain, pgs. 181-183.

It was the Winnemucca newspaper that became the most conspicuous champion of the woman suffrage cause in 1870. One of the publishers of the *Register* was M. S. Bonnifield, who was also a senator from Humboldt County in the 1869 Legislature. On April 30, 1870, and for several weeks thereafter, the newspaper ran an advertisement that announced a "WOMAN SUFFRAGE Convention" to be held in Winnemucca on July 4. Invitations had been extended to many dignitaries, including C. J. Hillyer, the governors of Arizona and Wyoming, the editor of the *Reno Crescent*, and prominent female advocates of women's rights.²⁹

The long-planned Independence Day convention finally met not in Winnemucca but in Battle Mountain Station – a stopping point on the Central Pacific that had been established less than two years earlier and had taken on the status of a town only during the previous winter. It is not clear why the location was changed shortly before the date of meeting, but it may be related to the fact that Senator Bonnifield had recently moved there.³⁰ No record exists to indicate the number of participants, but it cannot have been large because no more than a few hundred people lived within a hundred miles of the place. Battle Mountain Township (which probably included adjacent mines) had a population of 261 according to the official census of that year.³¹

Participants came from as far away as Winnemucca and Elko, and Laura DeForce Gordon was on hand with another regional leader from California, Emily A. Pitts Stevens. Senator Bonnifield chaired the meeting, and John I. Ginn of the *Elko Independent* served as secretary.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Convention!

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AS THE last Legislature has proposed an Amendment to the State Constitution by which women may be enfranchised, therefore, in order that the issue may be fairly brought before the electors of this State at the ensuing election, the friends of the measure in Humboldt county are requested to meet in Mass Convention, at Winnemucca, on

Monday, 4th Day of July, 1870, for the purpose of effecting an organization. The friends of Female Suffrage throughout the State are respectfully invited to be present for consultation and to devise the best means of perfecting a State organization. The following distinguished advocates of the cause have been invited to address the convention:

Mrs. J. N. Hule, of Winnemucca; Miss Anna M. Dodge, of Chicago; Theodore Tilton; Gov. Safford, of Arizona; Miss Gordon Bennett; C. J. Hillyer, of Nevada; S. F. Lewis, of Reno Crescent; Gov. J. A. Campbell, of Wyoming.

Geo. W. Fox, T. V. JULIEN,
J. C. WATKINS, M. S. BONNIFIELD,
Committee of Arrangements.

April 16, 1870 25-tf

An announcement for the Woman Suffrage Convention in Winnemucca. (*Humboldt Register*, 16 April 1870)

²⁹ *Humboldt Register* (30 April 1870).

³⁰ *Humboldt Register* (2 July 1870).

³¹ Ninth Census, vol. I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States . . . (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 199. In the "Third Biennial Report of the State Mineralogist" (Appendix to the Proceedings of the Senate, Nevada Legislature), the population of Battle Mountain Village for 1870 is listed as fifty.

Stevens opened the meeting by reading “A Woman’s Declaration of Independence.” Participants were encouraged to subscribe to the *Pioneer*, a newspaper that she published for the movement in San Francisco. Then Gordon delivered an oration that correspondent Ginn of Elko found most effective:

Taken as a whole the speech of Mrs. Gordon (given without notes) was one of those rare, intellectual efforts in which all the parts of a discourse were so completely put together that it might seem to have been created by a single stroke. The hearty applause elicited by striking hits, beautifully rounded periods, and eloquent perorations, soon merged into the most intense enthusiasm; and as the most chaste, elegant and forcible words in the language poured from her lips like a stream of liquid fire, and her eyes sparkled with animation, her graceful form swayed to and fro, and her taper fingers moved through the air in unison with her burning words, the whole audience became electrified and listened with bated breath, as if in fear a gem might fall unheeded.³²

The group proceeded to form a state organization to promote suffrage, with Gordon as president, Bonnifield as recording secretary, and Ginn as corresponding secretary. Several vice presidents were designated from the various counties, mostly politicians, journalists, or wives of jurists known to be sympathetic to the movement. (It is unlikely that any of those designated as a vice president was present in Battle Mountain on the occasion.) They formed an executive committee and another committee to draft a constitution for the state organization. Abbreviated reports of the meeting appeared in several newspapers, including the *Daily Appeal* of Carson City, the *Humboldt Register*, and the *Reno Crescent*.³³

³² *Elko Independent* (6 July 1870).

³³ *Carson Daily Appeal* (8 July 1870), *Reno Crescent* (9 July 1870), *Humboldt Register* (9 July 1870).