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Women's suffrage lecture to highlight 100 years of activism



(http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/EFuggetta/index.html) By Emily Fuggetta, The Oregonian (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/EFuggetta/posts.html) on October 22, 2012 at 9:20 PM, updated October 23, 2012 at 8:54 AM

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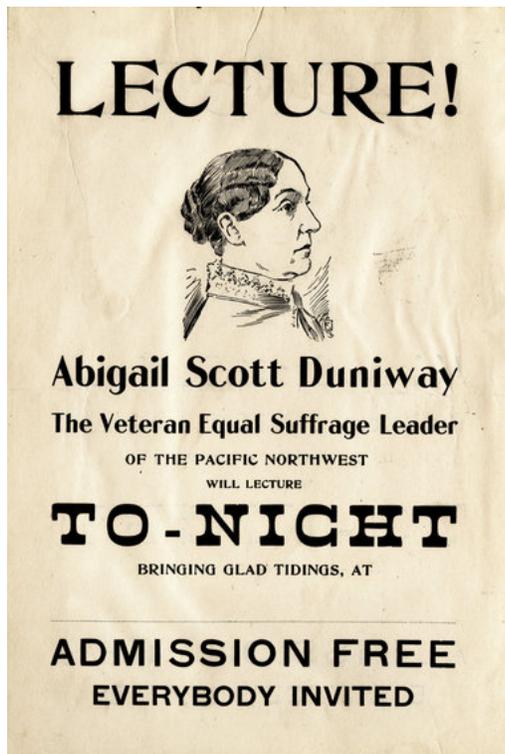
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This handbill advertises a lecture by women's rights activist Abigail Scott Duniway in the late 1800s. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries

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Tens of millions American women will mark their ballots in next month's elections, and in recent decades, more have voted than men -- but until a century ago, Oregon women weren't allowed to cast their votes, and for much of the country it took several more years.

"Everyone should be aware half the population at one point was unable to voice their opinion," said Janice Dilg of the Century of Action Project (http://centuryofaction.org/), which showcases 100 years of women's voting history in Oregon through exhibits and lectures throughout the state.

Dilg, treasurer of the Oregon Women's History Consortium's Board of Directors, will give an illustrated talk presented by the Washington County Museum (http://www.google.com/url?

sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CC8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wash at the Hillboro Civic Center on Thursday about the 1912 campaign for women's suffrage in Oregon and the work that continued long after women began to vote.

"Our mission is to tell the whole story of Washington County," said Krissy Rowan, spokeswoman for the museum. "The history of women's suffrage is an important part of our collective history."

In 1884, women's suffrage appeared on Oregon ballots for the first time and failed with only 28 percent of male voters favoring the idea. The issue appeared on ballots four more times before passing on the sixth attempt in 1912, when women's right to vote was approved by 52

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Starlight does a wardrobe change and gets ready for his second act backstage during intermission at his Neil Diamond Tribute Show.

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percent of voters.

"We're in an era of quick fixes, but these women kept going for 42 years because the right to vote was important to them," Dilg said. "Their perseverance is an important lesson -- if you want something, you keep going after it."

Oregon, Dilg said, was ahead of the curve, as was much of the West in terms of suffrage.

By the time the 19th amendment was ratified in 1920, only a handful of states east of Texas had voted for full suffrage, while nearly all Western states had.

"But it wasn't like attitudes changed overnight," Dilg said. "Initially the male electorate and probably many women, too, were concerned about whether women would be knowledgeable enough about politics or engaged enough to be a forceful voice."

Women began running for office quickly, but it took time to develop a power base and convince others to support female candidates financially and otherwise, Dilg said.

Some also worried after the 19th Amendment passed that women would band together to monopolize the political sphere.

"There was concern about too much change," she said. "People kind of wanted the status quo to stay the way it was."

The 1960s and 1970s were another major turning point for feminism and women's rights, when concerns arose about gender equality and laws related to women, Dilg said -- "That's when all the foundational work began to bear fruit."

Even now, there's work to be done, she said, and a goal of the Century of Action project is to raise questions and engage people in history and understanding the past.

In recent years, though voter turnout for women has been increasingly higher than for men, the number of women has decreased for the first time after decades on the rise, with women holding 16.8 percent of Congressional seats.

"The reasons for that are important to uncover," Dilg said. "Whatever your political perspective is, having women equally represented in all levels of government is important, and we're not getting there."

— Emily Fuggetta (mailto:efuggetta@oregonian.com); 503-294-5927

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