Woman's Suffrage Magazines: Did They Promote or Obstruct the Cause?

An Honors Thesis  
(HONRS 499)  

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on woman suffrage magazines and how they influenced the right to vote. Three factors are necessary in explaining the movement: the history of the woman's suffrage movement in the United States, the general history of magazines, and the development of women's suffrage magazines particularly, *The Lily, The Woman's Journal*, and *The Woman's Citizen*. The histories of each of these magazines was explored in order to explain the specific effects magazines had on the woman's suffrage movement.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. David Sumner from the journalism department, for his encouragement in finding a creative thesis idea in the magazine field and advising me on my thesis. I would also like to thank him for his countless advice in the magazine field and sharing his knowledge of magazines with me. Dr. Sharon Seagar from the history department should also be thanked because she was instrumental in providing my foundation in woman's history and helped me to organize my thoughts.

Without the continually support of my family, friends, and Frank, I would not have this thesis completed today. Thanks for listening, understanding, and pretending to like history.
Women have always been known for their communication skills. They have often gathered in social groups such as quilting bees, church organizations, or just simple tea parties in order to share the news of the community and spread information to other women around them. In order to reach a mass audience, women had to search for an effective source to get their message across. Women needed the media to do this.

More than 10,000 magazines exist on the market today, and the vast majority of magazine readers are women. In addition, many more magazines exist specifically aimed at women than at men. In order to understand the impact women’s magazines have on women today, it’s important to be knowledgeable of the woman’s rights movement, the evolution of magazines, and the development of women’s suffrage magazines. These factors help to explain why women had to find their own effective form of media to communicate. Also, the woman’s suffrage movement is a key time period in which women emerged as true journalists.

To fully understand how women’s suffrage magazines and the fight for woman’s right to vote are both linked together, it is important to study the growth and change of both separately. To trace the beginning of the woman’s suffrage movement in the United States would be virtually impossible, because women have been fighting since the United States was founded to have equal rights as men. According to women’s historian Nancy Woloch, “The greatest testimony to the symbolic power of the vote, to both supporters and opponents, was the length of the fight to achieve it, longer than any comparable reform campaign and certainly longer than any other campaign for an electoral reform” (Woloch 332). Woloch also said women gaining the right to vote was not the only benefit of the movement. The suffrage movement drew women together as one political unit aimed at fighting one common cause. Women began making addresses, holding conventions, printing petitions and resolutions, lobbying, and creating new forms of media that address issues related to their cause.
The formation of an organized call for woman’s suffrage began with a woman’s convention in New York state. In 1848, the Seneca Falls “Declaration of Sentiments,” given at this convention, included a broad spectrum of grievances and demands, including the first demand for the right to vote. During the Civil War, women put their energy into the abolition movement and woman’s rights came after the need for the vote for the black male, since the African American race was actually dying for their freedom. Suffragists realized their fight was of similar but different needs, and they would have to fight separately from the black male for their right to vote. In 1869, moderates in the woman’s movement joined the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone, while the radical faction formed the National Woman Suffrage Association, organized by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. By 1890, the growth of higher education for women and of women in the workforce revitalized the movement and caused the unification of the two organizations under the name the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The new NAWSA “streamlined its operations” and “ran more formal conventions, attended by delegates from state organizations; it ended internal debate; and it became more professional, especially in tactics and propaganda” (Woloch 341).

After 1896, Congress no longer considered a woman’s suffrage amendment, so the NAWSA directed its efforts toward winning the right to vote at the state level. “These campaigns usually failed--between 1896 and 1910 not a single state granted women the vote” (Woloch 341). Membership levels continued to climb across the nation, and a new generation of leaders emerged with Anna Howard Shaw acting as president of NAWSA from 1904 to 1915 and Carrie Chapman Catt serving as president from 1900 to 1904 and 1915 to 1920. The organization became largely a propaganda tool, promoting through hearings, speeches, and suffrage publications, the benefits women would bring to the country if they had the right to vote and as a way to fight the large anti-suffrage movement.
The turning point came after 1910, when the woman's vote was endorsed by the Progressive party, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and a string of western states (Woloch 355). Influenced by President Woodrow Wilson's support of woman suffrage, by the NAWSA's large membership, and by woman's support in the World War I war effort, the House of Representatives finally passed a woman suffrage amendment on January 10, 1918 and the Senate approved it in June 1919 (Woloch 359). Three-fourths of the states needed to ratify the amendment for it to become into effect. Fourteen months after the Senate suffrage vote, on August 26, 1920, the 36th state, Tennessee, ratified the amendment, and the woman's enfranchisement was finally legal nationwide (Woloch 360).

Throughout the woman's suffrage movement, magazines became an important link in getting the different associations' messages out. Magazines were a medium to reach the nation, but as the movement was evolving so were magazines. The debate over how effective magazines are will probably never end. Whether they positively affect the public or negatively influence the public, magazines have played a part in the formation of key events in history. Magazines "were the means for constructing and maintaining shared sensibility, collective action, and allegiance among women who were, at the least, geographically and socially isolated" (Steiner 66). Probably one of the most important roles it played was during the woman's suffrage movement.

To the publishing industry the nineteenth century became known as the golden age of magazines (Mott 5, Vol 3). "To the women's suffrage movement, magazines provided a new opportunity to reach and influence a large, diverse, and geographically separated audience" (Jolliffe 126). During this century, women became key consumers of household goods, and they gradually expanded their concerns from strictly family affairs to the world beyond their households (Jolliffe 125). Women's magazines became part of a growing trend of nationalism promoting "all things American" and what the cultured woman should have (Jolliffe 127). Edward Bok, editor of the Ladies' Home Journal from 1889 to 1919, was quoted in the Womans' Column as saying in 1890 that "an examination of
subscription lists of magazines' showed seven-eighths of the subscribers to be women-an almost incredible figure even when we realize how many of the big-circulation periodicals were among those designed for women and the home” (Mott 353, Vol 4).

Magazines also grew during this time not just because of an economic shift, but because of postal changes and technological advancements. Postage rates were lowered continually through the nineteenth century, but the most important postal changes came in 1885 when the postal rate dropped to 1 cent per pound and in 1897 when the rural free delivery system was instituted. Both postal improvements helped women’s periodicals reach every corner of the nation, and circulations rose to the millions (Johnson and Prijatel 70). The audience changed from just the “prosperous urban professional” who before had been the primary audience to developing magazines designed for the “average working man and women” (Johnson and Prijatel 70). With national circulations, magazines then drew greater advertising revenues, which helped to defray expenses that were originally charged to the subscribers (Jolliffe 127).

In addition to the postal changes, the end of the Nineteenth Century brought mass production methods such as “timed production scheduling, conveyor systems, and assembly lines” (Johnson and Prijatel 71). This century also introduced the linotype machine in 1885, which eliminated the need to set type by hand. In 1886, photoengraving allowed the inexpensive reproduction of halftone photographs and in 1887, monotype arrived. “In 1888, photographic film became available to replace the more expensive and awkward plates” (Jolliffe 127). The first successful color printing process in the United States for large-scale press runs occurred in 1893.

Another trend affecting magazines was the field’s turn toward specialization during the early twentieth century. Instead of magazines just aiming for the readership of all women, magazines emerged focusing on certain issues like temperance or suffrage. Women began starting magazines in areas important to them and readers interested in that subject flocked to them. To reach a large audience women needed the media and they had
The move to Ohio seemed to be advantageous for *The Lily* in that access to new type allowed the magazine to become more visually appealing. With this move to Ohio, the circulation of the magazine also increased from 4,000 to 6,000 copies (Bloomer 156). But, with Bloomer aging, her husband selling his newspaper, and the incapability of printing and mailing a large circulation magazine 3,000 miles away from the nearest railroad, Bloomer was ready to sell *The Lily*. The magazine died out a few years after it was sold, but Bloomer proudly defended her work:

...But this much is true, it did not die of 'fun poked at it.' It had long outlived fun and ridicule and was highly respected and appreciated by its thousands of readers. It had done its work, it had scattered seed that had sprung up and borne fruit a thousandfold. Its work can never die. You say rightly that the *Lily* was the pioneer journal in the Northwest for woman's enfranchisement. Other journals have taken its place, and the movement has gone steadily forward and nears its final triumph (Bloomer 187-189).

Bloomer could be recognized as the pioneer behind the development of a new genre of magazine, known as women's advocacy magazines. Bloomer also opened her pages to young women writers who were just beginning their careers as writers and reformers. While *The Lily* published contributions from many well-known reformers, it also served as a training ground for inexperienced female writers (Endres and Lueck 183). At its peak, *The Lily* boasted a circulation rate of six thousand, higher than that of some popular magazines for both men and women and any other advocacy magazine that followed in the nineteenth century (Marzolf 221).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Bloomer's contemporary, could probably best tell you what sort of impact the magazine made on woman's suffrage:

Mrs. Bloomer was publishing a paper at that time called the Lily: a rather inappropriate name for so aggressive a paper, advocating as it did all phases of the woman's rights question. When she assumed her duties, the improvement in the appearance and conduct of the office was generally acknowledged. A neat little room adjoining became a kind of ladies' exchange, where those coming from different parts of the town would meet to talk over the contents of the last Lily and the progress of the woman's-suffrage movement in general. Those who enjoyed the brief interregnum of a woman in the post office can readily testify to the loss to the ladies of the village, and to the void felt by all.
In 1883, Stone and Anthony each received twenty thousand dollars left to them by Eliza F. Eddy (Blackwell 242). Stone used her share to publish a column and to make up the annual deficit of the journal. *The Revolution* clearly could not keep up with its competitor. Like many suffragist journalists, Stanton and Anthony felt pulled in two different directions, and therefore could not mature as journalists or devote all their time into making their magazine profitable. “Stanton and Anthony greeted the birth of *The Woman’s Journal* with a public declaration of support, while probably knowing that the well-funded Boston publication marked the end of their journalistic activities” (Endres and Lueck 473).

*The Woman’s Journal* had two main weaknesses that dimmed the magazine’s effectiveness. One of these weaknesses stemmed from the rivalry with its competitor *The Revolution* and the more radical suffrage organization the magazine represented, the NASA. The rivalry came out weekly in the journal and fiery articles helped to keep the suffrage movement separated. The journal also singled out anti-suffragists, often times alienating them more from the movement instead of persuading them to join the suffrage cause. Women historian and author Jane Jerome Camhi said, “In the suffragist journals, reactions to the Antis were obviously biased: at times they were considered inconsequential, and yet on occasion they were pictured as a real threat” (Camhi 179). The journal on describing a new national anti-suffrage organization said the organization “will be received with joy by the promoters of the white slave traffic, the exploiters of child labor, the liquor interest, the gambling fraternity, and all the enemies of good government” (Camhi 265). But, Camhi also stated that on occasion the suffragists were more than generous in describing their opponents siting this passage from *The Woman’s Journal*, vol. 13, no. 10 (March 11, 1882):

> They are women as intelligent, as philanthropic and as well educated as those who petition for Woman Suffrage; and there are more of them (Camhi 280).
The second weakness of the magazine, like the suffrage movement itself, is that it had a middle class bias. While The Revolution spoke to working women and their injustices in addition to middle class women, the Journal failed to break that barrier. When The Revolution folded at the close of 1870, it was not mentioned in the pages of The Woman's Journal (Endres and Lueck 474).

The journal was much more effective in bonding women in the movement together, than it was harmful. The pages were filled with information women were eager to read and share with fellow women. The information the Journal contained was by no means as radical as it rival. Its style was aimed at catching the attention of middle-class female readers, but it did not ignore men, since many men were supporters of the movement. The magazine was published every Saturday in Boston and Chicago and covered women's interests in education, industrial news, legal and political equality particularly with woman's right to vote. The Journal contained departments such as "Gossips and Gleanings," "Notes and News," "Concerning Women," "Foreign Correspondence," and "Humorous," which never mixed information with entertainment pieces. The front pages of the magazine carried news of suffrage activities throughout the country, but its columns contain articles on broader issues effecting women, such as dispelling gender bias. Alice Stone Blackwell wrote this about The Woman's Journal in the biography of her mother:

Not only did the suffragists look to it for news, counsel and inspiration, but innumerable articles from it were reprinted as tracts and leaflets and circulated far and wide. It was the great source of ammunition and information to the friends of the cause. It represented the Massachusetts, the New England and the American Woman Suffrage Associations; but as Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt truly said, "It was much more than the organ of any society; it was the Voice of the woman's movement" (Blackwell 240).

The Woman's Journal did not end publication like many suffragist journals, but found itself in a merger with the Woman Voter, and the National Suffrage News to become The Woman Citizen in 1917. The divided factions of the movement combined to
form the NAWSA and needed a voice to represent their organization. *The Woman Citizen* became this voice. Each of the previous publications contributed to the voice of the new weekly journal. *The Woman's Journal* brought its long, respected history as well as a contributing editor, Alice Stone Blackwell; Lucy Stone had died two years before the merger of the two woman’s organizations. *Woman Voter* was known for its editorial and graphic excellence, but none of their staff joined the *Citizen*. The *Voter* also gave the new journal access to membership lists of the Woman Suffrage Party in New York City and the extensive advertising that appeared in their journal. The *National Suffrage News* was best known for its extensive reporting and the news it brought to its publication. The *Citizen* reflected the strengths of each of the predecessor publications, and became a well written, news oriented, graphically appealing magazine (Endres and Lueck 430).

From the beginning, the weekly enjoyed one major advantage over many other suffrage publications in that it was well funded by the Leslie Woman Suffrage Commission. The Commission was made possible by a bequest from Mrs. Frank Leslie, a New York magazine publisher, to Carrie Chapman Catt which made Catt the primary heir to an estate valued at $1.8 million (Endres and Lueck 429). Not only was Catt responsible for providing the funding for the *Citizen* as head of the Leslie Woman Suffrage Commission, she was the link that brought the three publications together, organizer of the Woman Suffrage Party in New York City, and president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

*The Woman Citizen* reached an influential female audience by sending the magazine to members of the NAWSA and the Woman’s Suffrage Party of New York City. In addition, the Leslie Commission sent the *Citizen* free of charge each week to the members of Congress (Endres and Lueck 430). The editorial content reflected this audience helping to “secure votes for women under every flag that floats and its challenge is to the attention of the general public by right of being the official organ of a group of 2,000,000 women who are demanding exactly that link with the public” (Endres and
to reflect the new content and draw more subscribers and advertisers. In 1927, the *Citizen* changed its name back to the *Woman's Journal* and in 1929, also began to offer short fiction and articles dealing with investing (Endres and Lueck 433). Although the magazine was able to increase its circulation to twenty thousand, a circulation of forty thousand was needed to make the magazine profitable, since the publication could no longer rely on the Commission for funding (Endres and Lueck 432). In the end, the *Journal* became a victim of the Great Depression, even though both its subscriptions and advertising had increased, it still couldn't cover the costs.

During the final stages of the fight for suffrage, it was perhaps the most important journal of all because it reached suffragists in all states—and every person in Congress...Its work was not complete, but that work would have to wait for another magazine and another generation of women (Endres and Lueck 434).

These three suffrage magazines were all reaching for the goal of encouraging women to become involved in the movement. Magazines proved to be the best way to accomplish this goal through the editorial and large circulations the magazines were distributed to. A subsequent goal of training women journalists also became accomplished in the process, making the women better writers and marketers and in turn better suffragists. Without the advancements in magazines, the information produced by the suffragists would have been greatly reduced, and it would have taken a longer time to get their movement accomplished. Magazines proved to be the best source of distributing this information.
## Appendix 1
### Suffrage Publications in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Dates of Publication</th>
<th>Frequency of Circulation</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Place of Publication</th>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Forerunner</td>
<td>1909-1916</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Charlton Publishing</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Charlotte Perkins Gilman</td>
<td>less than 1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lily</td>
<td>1849-1859</td>
<td>Monthly, Semimontly</td>
<td>Amelia Bloomer</td>
<td>Seneca Falls, NY, Mt. Vernon, OH, Richmond, IN</td>
<td>Amelia Bloomer, Anna C. Mattison, Mary Birdsall</td>
<td>6,000 at peak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Citizen and Ballot Box</td>
<td>1876-1881</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Toledo Woman Suffrage Association, Matilda Joslyn Gage</td>
<td>Toledo, OH, Syracuse, NY</td>
<td>Sarah R.L. Williams, Matilda Joslyn Gage</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Northwest</td>
<td>1881-1887</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Abigail Scott Suniway</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>Abigail Scott Duniway</td>
<td>1,000-2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pioneer</td>
<td>1869-1873</td>
<td>Weekly, Semimontly</td>
<td>Emily Pitts Stevens, C.C. Calhoun</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Emily Pitts Stevens, C.C. Calhoun</td>
<td>1,250-3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sibyl</td>
<td>1856-1864</td>
<td>Biweekly, Monthly</td>
<td>John Whitbeck Hasbrouck</td>
<td>Middletown, NY</td>
<td>Lydia Sayer Hasbrouck</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffragist</td>
<td>1913-1921</td>
<td>Weekly, Monthly</td>
<td>Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, National Woman's Party</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>Rheta Childe Dorr, Lucy Burns, Vivian Pierce, Sue S. White, Florence B. Boeckel</td>
<td>5,599 paid, 15,000 free compies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A True Republic</td>
<td>1891-1904</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Sarah M. Perkins</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>Sarah M. Perkins</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
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<th>Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Una</td>
<td>1853-1855</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Paulina Wright Davis, S.C. Hewitt</td>
<td>Providence, R.I., Boston</td>
<td>Paulina Wright Davis, Caroline Healy Dall</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Woman Voter</td>
<td>1911-1913</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Western Woman Voter Publishing Co.</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>Adella Parker</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Woman Citizen</td>
<td>1917-1927</td>
<td>Weekly, Biweekly, Monthly</td>
<td>Woman Citizen Corp.</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Rose Young, Virginia Roderick</td>
<td>20,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Woman's Column</td>
<td>1888-1904</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>A.S. Blackwell</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Alice Stone Blackwell</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woman's Exponent</td>
<td>1872-1894</td>
<td>Semimonthly, Monthly</td>
<td>Lulu Greene Richards, Emmeline B. Wells</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Lulu Greene Richards, Emmeline B. Wells</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Woman's Journal</td>
<td>1870-1894</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Henry B. Blackwell</td>
<td>Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>Mary A. Livermore, Julia Ward Howe, Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, Lucy Stone, Alice S. Blackwell</td>
<td>5,000 in 1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Woman's Tribune</td>
<td>1883-1890</td>
<td>Weekly, Monthly</td>
<td>Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association</td>
<td>Beatrice, NE</td>
<td>Clara Colby, Mrs. Theron Nye, Ida Edson, Clara Bewick Colby</td>
<td>9,200</td>
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Bibliography


