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## Women's suffrage play here Friday honors centennial

Joanna Dodder Nellans  
The Daily Courier

This year is not only Arizona's centennial, but also the centennial of women gaining the right to vote in Arizona.

A short play and discussion about Arizona's suffrage movement will take place in Prescott Friday to commemorate this 100th anniversary. "Votes for Women: Right or Wrong?" starts at 7 p.m. at the Prescott College Crossroads Center, 220 Grove Ave.

The free play offers a sample of what the conversation might have been like at the suffrage booth at Arizona's first state fair, where women gathered signatures on the initiative petitions to force an election on Nov. 5, 1912.

The Arizona Women's Heritage Trail is putting on the event as part of its Woman Suffrage Centennial Forum, with financial support from the Arizona Humanities Council and Arizona Public Service. Heritage Trail historian Mary Melcher wrote it with the help of consultant Ben Tyler, director of the Arizona Theater Foundation.

Well-known local actors are performing the skit, including Jody Drake, Parker Anderson, Tedd DeLong and Pattie Conrad. Women's Heritage Trail Director Joan Meacham also will perform.

While an overwhelming 68 percent of the men who voted in the 1912 election supported women's suffrage, it was a long road to get there.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton made the first public demand for women's suffrage in 1848 in Seneca Falls, N.Y.

In 1883 Murat Masterson, a Mormon attorney from Prescott, introduced a bill in the Arizona Territorial Legislature to give women the right to vote, noted a summary of the Arizona suffrage movement from the Women's Heritage Trail. Mormon leaders often supported suffrage because they believed female voters would help outlaw alcohol and other vices.



Courtesy Arizona Historical Society - Flagstaff  
A poster for Arizona's first state fair in 1912 celebrated women's relatively new freedom to drive.

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While his bill failed, Josephine Brawley Hughes of Tucson started an Arizona suffrage movement in 1890. Legislators continued to reject bills, stating voting would corrupt and degrade women. But the coalition grew.

Prescott became a focal point of the movement as local residents Pauline O'Neill (widow of Rough Rider Buckey O'Neill) and Frances Willard Munds joined in and helped gain support in the Legislature.

Suffrage supporters hoped the new state Constitution would include the right of women to vote, but Constitutional Convention delegates feared that including suffrage in the Constitution would prevent Congress from approving statehood for Arizona.

Since the state's new Constitution included the right of initiative and referendum, suffrage supporters went straight to work and got the question on the ballot just nine months after Arizona gained statehood. They gathered many of their signatures during the first state fair in October.

Coincidentally, the first state fair poster featured a woman driving a car.

"Driving was a very liberating experience for women who had long depended upon men to drive teams of horses for a stage or carriage or buckboard," observed Women's History Trail Historian Heidi Osselaer. "I think it is telling that at a time when women were demanding the right to vote in Arizona, and popular sentiment was in favor of the idea, that the fair chose to use an image of a woman driving a car."

While Arizona's women gained the right to vote in 1912, women didn't gain the national right to vote until 1920 through the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

By then, Arizona already had elected Frances Munds to the state Senate, as well as Pauline O'Neill and Rachel Berry to the House.

To learn more about the Women's Heritage Trail, go online to [womensheritagetrail.org](http://womensheritagetrail.org).

March also is Women's History Month. To learn more about that, visit [womenshistorymonth.gov](http://womenshistorymonth.gov).

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Article comment by: **open book**

Good timing.

I read in the Best Fest display that the original Statehood application from Arizona included the right for women to vote, but the US wouldn't accept it that way.

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