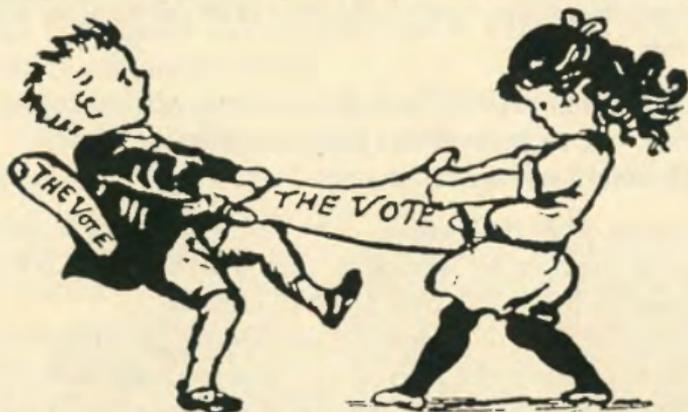


# 75 YEARS OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

## THE VOTE GIRL



I WANT THE VOTE, AND I MEAN TO HAVE THE VOTE. THAT'S THE SORT OF GIRL I AM.

*From Grain Growers' Guide, July 8, 1914*

# 20 YEARS OF THE NELSON & DISTRICT WOMEN'S CENTRE

## The Suffrage Parade

The Suffrage Parade was often used to spread the cause of "Votes for Women". Floats and women's marching bands, with women and children carrying colourful banners and handing out pamphlets and buttons were a familiar sight through the first two decades of this century.

The colours of purple, green and white were always present during these parades. Purple symbolized justice, white – honour and green – hope for the future.

## 75 years of women's suffrage

*"In my very early teens, as election day rolled around, I was astounded to find that my father voted, but my mother could not. It was incredible. I questioned my father about this 'rank injustice'. He agreed that it didn't seem reasonable, since women had a stake in the future of the country, just as men had."*

In 1913, for 14-year-old Elizabeth McConkey of Vancouver there was only one solution to this "rank injustice" –  
*"I became a suffragist on the spot."*

So did many other B.C. women. The first petition for women's suffrage, or the right for women to vote, was presented to the B.C. Legislature in 1891, with over 1,000 signatures!

It took 26 years of organizing, petitioning, parading and speeches to persuade the men of B.C. that a woman with a vote would not lead to the "disintegration of the home and the family." Nor would a woman with a vote suffer any ill-health from "the hurley-burley of politics upon the delicate female form."

In 1910, 60 women marched to the Legislature with a 10,000-signature petition, again demanding the right for women to vote.

Women in the Kootenays took up the suffrage call. The provincial suffrage newspaper *The Champion* carried regular reports of activities in Nelson, Kaslo, Grand Forks, Creston, Cranbrook and Rossland:

*"CRESTON is an example of the pluck women are ready to show when a vital question is at stake...."*

*NELSON – Mrs. Logie, Miss Pettit, Mrs. Crease and others are getting petitions filled...."*

*KASLO – The Branch is developing fast ... they are going to show the Province that Kaslo's women are as intelligent and determined citizens as she possesses...."*

In the April 1916 B.C. election a referendum question was put to voters: **Should women be given the vote?** Over one-half of the responses said **YES!**

On April 5, 1917, the province changed the Elections Act. Elizabeth McConkey's mother, and in time Elizabeth herself, had gained the right to vote.

Not all women in B.C. could vote, however. Asian-Canadian women were unable to vote until 1947. First Nations women didn't get the right to vote until 1952!

The year after the vote was won B.C. had its first woman MLA. Mary Ellen Smith won a by-election in 1918, and held the seat through two more elections.

By the early 1920s, the broadly based suffrage organizations had collapsed. Initially, however, the fight for the vote had been prompted by women's desire to improve social and economic conditions for women and children.

Over the next decades, women used their political franchise and participation to secure child protection and minimum wage laws, improve prison conditions, legalize birth control, and foster world peace. During World War II, women did the jobs left vacant by men. Afterward, women were persuaded by means both subtle and blatant to move out of the paid work force and back into their homes. While the gains made by the suffrage movement undoubtedly continued to have an effect, for about a generation women were once more relegated to the domestic sphere.

## 20th Anniversary of the Nelson and District Women's Centre

The Nelson and District Women's Centre opened in 1972 as part of the "second wave" of feminism which was growing throughout North America and Europe at that time. Women's consciousness about their restricted lives and lack of true social, political and economic equality led to an explosion of action, writing and culture.

The Women's Centre in Nelson continues to work to effect change in women's lives by offering groups ranging from natural childbirth preparation to self-defense, assertiveness, and handywomen workshops. We endeavour to raise awareness about women's issues in the community, and to promote the status of women through public education, lobbying, and advocacy.

The Nelson & District Women's Centre has operated in Nelson since 1972. Our purpose is to improve the status of women through education, skills sharing and lobbying on a local and national level.

The Women's Centre is a project of the West Kootenay Women's Association, a non-profit society. All women are welcome to use our services.

*Drop-in*  
*Resource files and library*  
*Information & referral*  
*Educational events*  
*Support groups*  
*Volunteer training*  
*Special events*

Nelson & District Women's Centre  
507 Hall Street  
Nelson, B.C. V1L 1Z1  
352-9916

**Hours:** Tuesday, Wednesday, & Friday • noon - 4pm  
Thursday • noon - 8pm

*Funding for the Women's Centre is provided by the Secretary of State, Women's Programs; B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality; and donations.*