



Episode 910, Story 2 – Suffrage Pennant

Elyse: This case investigates this pennant, a seamstress and a turning point in the fight for women's rights. 1909 – six decades after women stood tall at the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, the suffrage movement is in tatters. With the pioneering lions of the movement gone, grassroots campaigns from Oregon to New Hampshire flounder.

How will a new generation of activists revitalize their mission and turn history's tide?

Yvonne Crumlish from Chester, Maryland has a family relic that may date back to that historic campaign.

Yvonne Crumlish: My dad gave this to me over thirty years ago and I haven't been able to find anything else like it.

Yvonne: Hi Elyse. How are you? Come on in.

Elyse: Thank you.

It's in beautiful condition.

Yvonne: This was given to me by my late father. He kind of singled me out to give it to me because I was the only daughter.

Elyse: Votes for Women, Women's Suffrage Party. So clearly it's a pennant for women voting. Do you have any idea about how he got it?



Yvonne thinks the pennant belonged to her grandmother, who she spent time with when she was growing up.

Yvonne: Her name was Addie Marie Luther Blemly. She lived in Wolcott, New York. A very rural area. And very conservative there. She was a homemaker. She canned her own foods and was a seamstress.

Elyse: Did you hear, growing up, a lot about her being active in the women's right to vote?

Yvonne: There wasn't any discussion of her being political at all. I just can't imagine her being involved in something like this.

Elyse: Yvonne says she's always been intrigued by the imagery on the pennant.

So what exactly do you want me to find out?

Yvonne: I'd like to know more about the pennant and if my grandmother may have worn it.

Elyse: It's in fabulous condition. The colors are really strong. You would normally see a lot of cracking to the letters, and even under this magnifying glass I'm not seeing a lot of cracking. The only condition problem I see is there's a little hole at the end. And that could be from the pennant being worn as a sash. The other thing I immediately notice about this piece is that it was mass produced. It's not handmade. And I can tell that by the stitching and just by the overall look of the pennant.



I remember Gwen did a story on the Women's Suffrage Movement and a painting that was used in a parade in 1913. And I remember her saying that the color and imagery were really important to the movement.

The painting and this pennant share similarities: "votes for women," gold and purple, and both display a woman holding the clarion. The painting was made for a massive march led by a militant suffragette named Alice Paul. Was Paul involved with the Women's Suffrage Party also?

Okay. The Women's Suffrage Party was started in New York City in 1909. Oh, this is great. The Library of Congress has the group's mission statement.

The Women's Suffrage Party was a New York-based organization, attempting to win a Women's Suffrage amendment to the state constitution.

I don't see any list of images or members associated with the party, and nothing about pennants.

There's no mention of Alice Paul being involved with the party.

Instead, it looks like it was created by the more moderate Carrie Chapman Catt – a writer and activist close to Susan B. Anthony.

The Women's Suffrage Party seems to be a New York City group. And Addie was living 300 miles away, in upstate New York.

Let's see what I can find out about Yvonne's grandmother.



Ah, here's an obituary from when she died in 1988. She was 93 years old. That would put her year of birth around 1895. It says here that she lived most of her life in Wolcott, New York. And there's nothing about any activism, or anything about a political party.

Art Historian Lindsay Shannon is a specialist in Suffrage Iconography. She agrees to meet me at the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Trust in Old Greenwich, Connecticut.

Now have you ever seen this pennant before?

Lindsay Shannon: I haven't seen this exact pennant before, but I have seen another version of it. This was originally a statue that was created by an artist named Ella Buchanan. She was an art student at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Elyse: Lindsay shows me an article from the Women's Suffrage Party's newsletter – the woman voter - that describes the statue, created in 1911.

Lindsay: This image was used quite a bit by the Women's Suffrage Party. They not only put it on their pennants but they reproduced postcards for sale. They even made smaller statuettes, which they sold for the benefit of the cause as well.

Elyse: So if this image was created in 1911 that means our pennant would had to have been created after that time period?

Lindsay: That's right.



Elyse: What else do these figures tell us?

Lindsay: Well Buchanan has five figures here. You have vanity, prostitution and conventionality. And you have the wage earner here on the left who is actually being lifted up by the central image of the suffragists. She's really announcing to her sisters, the wage earners, that by gaining the vote they can use that to realize their full potential.

Elyse: So she's making a pretty strong statement.

Lindsay: Well when you put it next to the slogan "votes for women", it really is meant to appeal to the mainstream audience.-They're not trying to be elitists and they're not trying to be radical as well. They're really trying to encompass what white middle class society at that time would have found acceptable.

Elyse: Lindsay explains the suffrage movement at this period was at a crossroads. Since 1848, when the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls had demanded the right to vote, little had progressed. Only four sparsely populated western states had followed through, states where the shared work of homesteading meant women had more equality to begin with. Pioneers such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had passed away. A new generation of activists like Alice Paul and Women's Suffrage Party's Carrie Chapman Catt were taking over. But these two women approached their mission with very different mindsets.

Lindsay: They both wanted to gain suffrage for all women in the country but Alice Paul and her supporters were considered to be much more radical in their methods of spectacle and protest in public.



Elyse: Paul had spent time in England where she learned militant tactics like hunger strikes and civil disobedience.

Lindsay: And so they engaged in what was considered to be more radical protest measures. Picketing the White House for example.

Elyse: Catt took a different approach.

Lindsay: Carrie Chapman Catt really believed in appealing to mainstream men and women, trying to gain more of a popular credibility. And so they were more interested in being dignified, a little bit more conservative in their approach.

Elyse: Lindsay explains starting in 1913, Chapman Catt tried to separate herself from Paul and the color purple, which was also the color of radical British suffragettes.

Lindsay: The other version of this pennant that I've seen, is gold with black printing on it. There's a complete absence of purple. And so between 1913 to 1916 Carrie Chapman Catt's group really started to eliminate purple from a lot of their imagery because they wanted to distinguish themselves from Alice Paul. So I think what you have here is an earlier version.

Elyse: So it looks like Addie got this pennant sometime before 1916, when purple was completely phased out.

Elyse: And where would someone get a pennant like this?



Lindsay: Well, the Women's Suffrage Party would have distributed them and you could have gotten them probably at their organization headquarters or during events. They could have been worn attached to costumes or they could have been carried in parades.

Elyse: It seems Addie was just the right age for a woman to wear this pennant.

But the Woman Suffrage Party was based in New York City.

Did the movement have a presence near Wolcott?

Louise Bernikow has lectured and written extensively about America's suffrage pioneers.

Elyse: There she is. So, have you ever seen anything like this before?

Louise Bernikow: No. I've never seen a real one.

Elyse: Like Lindsay, Louise has seen different color variations of the pennant – but not our combination of purple and gold.

Elyse: I know the Women's Suffrage Party was based in New York City but how did this reach Addie? I mean it's the turn of the century. There's no telephones and computers. How did they get it out there? How did they get the message all the way up there?



Louise: Rochester is nearby and it was really another hotbed of industry and politics. This is not a backwater. This is an important commercial and political center in New York State.

Elyse: Louise explains how Carrie Chapman Catt's vision was to organize throughout the state, not just in urban areas.

Known as the general, she modeled the Women's Suffrage Party after traditional party politics, dividing the entire state into districts.

Louise: There were lieutenants and sub-lieutenants. There were precincts and there were precinct workers. Everywhere. All throughout the state.

Elyse: Why was New York so important? I mean why not just focus on a national campaign?

Louise: Because it was so full of people that winning the vote for women doubled the number of women who could vote in the whole country.

Elyse: Winning New York was key to turning the tide of popular opposition and countering conservative media.

Louise: Newspapers ridiculed the suffrage movement. The bystanders at the parades screamed obscene things at them. There was one man who wrote to the organizers of a parade saying, "I hope the sidewalks open and you all go to hell."

Elyse: Wow.



Louise: That's how bad it was.

Elyse: Despite the venom and ridicule, with Catt's organizational skills and moderate message, urban and rural women flocked to the party.

Membership jumped from 20,000 in 1910 to over half a million in 1917.

Louise: Thousands and thousands of American women whose names we don't know.

Elyse: Was Addie one of these anonymous suffragettes?

Her hometown of Wolcott, near the southern shore of Lake Ontario is still largely rural.

The county historian's office holds some of the town's archives.

Elyse: I've been looking through the Lyon's Republican. It's a local newspaper that was published around the same time as our pennant. And I'm finding a lot of articles about women's suffrage. Interestingly enough some of the editor or owner of the newspaper, Charles Betts, writes very positively about women's suffrage and the right to vote.

So there definitely was a lot of sense in this community of wanting women to vote. But I'm not finding anything on Addie at all. I think the next step is for me to talk to a local historian.



Marjory Perez is the longtime historian of Wolcott and surrounding Wayne County.

She meets me at the farmhouse Addie and her husband shared.

This is where Addie lived, quite a while. It's a beautiful, typical farmhouse from Wolcott.

Elyse: Next, we head over to the Wolcott Historical Society Museum.

So, I was wondering if you ever saw any pennants like this before in the Historical Society or anywhere.

Marjory Perez: No, I have not. But I'm not surprised that it would be here in Wolcott.

Elyse: Marjory explains that Wolcott was, and remains, a conservative community, but located only twenty miles from Seneca Falls, the town has deep roots in women's suffrage, with Susan B. Anthony attending a meeting in Wolcott as early as 1878.

What was the Women's Suffrage Party's role up here?

Marjory: They had divided New York State into districts. And Wayne County, and Wolcott was in district number seven, with its headquarters in Rochester, New York.

Elyse: Okay, and how do you think that Addie would have found out about it?



Marjory: I actually did some research for you, and I think you'll find this interesting.

Elyse: Marjory says Addie's parents were divorced, which was rare for the time, and that she bounced between homes. It appeared money was tight.

The photograph is of the Vaught family, with Addie in the picture. Addie was living with the Vaught family. And the reason I know that is the 1915 census shows her living as a lodger. She is a dressmaker and she's 20 years old.

That's about the right time that the pennant would have been made.

Marjory: The key here is that the Vaught family and the Betts family were related by marriage. And Charles H. Betts was Mr. Women's Suffrage in Wayne County.

Elyse: The very same Charles Betts who wrote passionately in favor of the woman's right to vote.

Marjory: I think it very likely that she would have been exposed to the concept of women's suffrage through him.

Elyse: Addie had been surrounded by the excitement and debate over suffrage, and Marjory has an idea where she might have gotten her pennant.

Thank you so much for bringing us this investigation. You know it kind of became personal for me because it reminded me of how much women had to fight for equality. I know the first thing you wanted to know was about the imagery.



I tell Yvonne that the statue on the pennant was created by a young woman in 1911, as the symbol of the 20th century Suffrage Movement.

Yvonne: I would love to see one of those statues. Or somebody should make one. But that's wonderful. It's a good strong image.

Elyse: I share that Addie may have been introduced to the fight for women's rights by an influential family friend and suffrage supporter.

Yvonne: That's wonderful to know. It really is.

Elyse: And Wolcott had been directly in the path of history in the fall of 1914.

Marjory: This is a Woman's Voter newsletter.

Elyse: Marjory shows us an article outlining a Women's Suffrage Party pilgrimage to Rochester, New York, for the 1914 state suffrage convention.

Marjory: Listen to this. A stop will be made in every village and hamlet, that eager workers may give suffrage literature to every man and woman. This is an exciting event. This is something that's happening all over New York State. These items, these pennants, buttons, pieces of literature are being handed out to everyone. And if you look at this map, the route goes right through Wolcott. And that is very likely where Addie got her pennant.

Elyse: So Addie was connected to one of the most important women's suffrage movements in our country. She was there, right in the thick of it as a young woman. It's a lot to be proud of.



Yvonne: She was a very determined woman. She really was.

Elyse: And you should know your pennant is really rare. It's in great condition and more besides having an unbelievable personal connection to history, you have a really great historical piece.

Yvonne: I will definitely treasure it and take care of it.

Elyse: In 1917, the New York State legislature passed a women's suffrage amendment. Political leaders pronounced the victory a political miracle, and by the end of 1917, six additional states had given women the right to vote.

Congress passed the Federal Suffrage Amendment on June 4th, 1919. And on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th amendment, making universal suffrage constitutional law.