Biographical Database of NAWSA Suffragists, 1890-1920

Biography of Theresa Alberta Parkinson Jenkins, 1853-1936

By Robin Hill, independent historian, July 24, 2018

When Theresa Parkinson Jenkins arrived in Cheyenne with her new husband James F. Jenkins on December 20, 1877, she already had the right to vote in her new Territory. She became interested in education and promoted rural school buildings to replace homes. During the visit of Frances Willard to Wyoming in 1883, Jenkins joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union and promoted a law that required schools to teach the damaging effects of alcohol and narcotics. Gradually, she became more active in electoral concerns, as well.

In 1889, as Wyoming held a Constitutional Convention in its bid for statehood, she took an active part in preserving the clause "The right to vote and hold office shall not be abridged on account of sex," exercising her influence on reluctant members of the Unites States Congress, in particular, those from her native Wisconsin. The achievement of statehood in 1890 was celebrated at the Capitol where the women of the state presented a flag upon which was inscribed, "To Wyoming from her women in honor of the State Constitution." Jenkins was chosen to make the presentation speech, as described by the State Historical Society: "Mrs. Theresa A. Jenkins was then introduced to the audience. Proceeding to the front of the platform built over the steps of the Capitol building, the lady in clear, forceful tones, which penetrated to the very outskirts of a crowd of ten thousand, began and delivered without notes or manuscript an address, which in ability, logic and eloquence has rarely, if ever been equalled by any woman of the land. She was grandly equal to the occasion. At the conclusion of her address, Mrs. Jenkins received an ovation and a magnificent basket of flowers." Jenkins called for honor for Mrs. (Esther) Morris and Mrs. (Amalia) Post, as well as the men who were instrumental in retaining female suffrage in the Wyoming Constitution. The text of her oration, printed in the Cheyenne newspapers, may be found in Fleming 1990.

She later spoke several times in Colorado on behalf of the suffrage movement there, and also in Kansas and other states, as well as on behalf of prohibition. In 1892 she was elected to attend the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis. In 1894, she was the Superintendent of Schools in Laramie County.

According to Beach, at the WCTU World's Convention in Boston in 1911, when asked to present a flag representative of Wyoming, Jenkins gave a flag of white silk with a blue field in which there was one star marked "Wyoming." In her address, she said, "Ere a decade shall have passed away other stars shall encircle this star." (By that time, however, other Western states had granted female suffrage.) She attended the national convention of the National Suffrage Society in 1919. When the Wyoming legislators and Governor unanimously ratified the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in a special session on January 26, 1920, Jenkins was called upon to thank them. Jenkins was active in the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Auxiliary of the United Spanish War Veterans.

Sources


