Biographical Database of NAWSA Suffragists, 1890-1920

Biography of Amalia Post, 1826-1897

By Robin Hill, independent historian, 27 July 2018

Amalia Barney Simons Nichols Post, an unlikely revolutionary, was born January 30, 1826, in Johnson, Vermont. She was raised in the mid-19th century ideal of separate spheres, the premise that men and women were different but complementary in their natures. Women were passive, nurturing and domestic. Men were aggressive, competitive and better suited to work outside the home. While it was the husband’s job to support and protect, it was the wife’s job to provide a refuge from worldly corruption. When Amalia Simons married Walker T. Nichols in Lexington, Michigan, in 1855, she expected her life to follow this pattern.

But after Nichols left her to fend for herself in Omaha and Denver, she divorced him and entered into business on her own, selling chickens and loaning money. In 1864, she married one of her business partners, merchant Morton Everel Post, and joined him in Cheyenne in 1868. She retained financial independence by keeping her property in her own name, as allowed by the laws of Colorado and Wyoming.

Until the passage of the suffrage act in Wyoming Territory in 1869, Amalia Post showed little interest in voting rights. The first tests of women’s new civic responsibilities came before the September election of 1870. Some judges ruled that, as jurors were selected from the voter rolls, women were now eligible for jury service. Accordingly, women, including Amalia Post, were called up for service on grand and petit juries in 1870 and 1871.

“I was Foreman of the Jury,” she wrote, “& the man was condemned & sentenced to be hung. [W]e found him guilty of murder in the first degree as found in indictment.... There is no fun in sitting on a jury where there is murder cases to be tried. [T]his one that is to be hung killed two.”

The brief experiment with women jurors may have been intended to discredit female suffrage. But Post and others observed that female jurors tended to be stricter and less inclined to accept pleas of self-defense in murder cases, and to impose heavier fines. Overall, it seems the women jurors simply applied the moral values of their domestic sphere to society at large.

In January 1871, Post traveled to Washington, D.C., as a delegate from Wyoming to the annual lobbying conference of the National Woman Suffrage Association. There she addressed the audience of thousands and conferred with such leaders of the national movement as Susan B. Anthony, Victoria Woodhull and Isabella Beecher Hooker. “I was made more of than any other Lady in convention,” she boasted when writing to her sister. But when Mrs. Hooker pressed her to stay on and “besiege congress,” she refused. Whatever Amalia’s reasons, they had nothing to do with deference to her husband’s political opinions. She was an active Republican, while he was a staunch Democrat.

Post served for four years on the Territorial Central Committee of the Republican Party. In the fall of 1871, the second Wyoming Territorial Legislature sent a bill to the governor to repeal women’s suffrage in the territory. Amalia Post is credited with making a personal appeal to Gov. John A. Campbell to veto the bill, and with helping to persuade legislators to vote against an override of that veto, an effort to sustain the veto that (barely) succeeded, thereby retaining the woman's vote.

Amalia Post remained in Cheyenne, managing her property and investments, as her husband pursued business ventures and political office. She died in Cheyenne on January 28, 1897.
Sources
