



## Days Past: 1890s trio paved way for Arizona women's right to vote



Courtesy photos

Pauline O'Neill (1865-1961), Frances Munds (1866-1948) and Josephine Hughes (1839-1926) were contemporaries and partners in the suffragist movement in Arizona.

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As apathy toward the upcoming General Election in November escalates as the weeks go by, the struggles it took for one minority group in particular to go to the polls needs to be retold.

Women's suffrage in the United States, the right of women to vote and run for public office, was a 70-plus-year struggle, ending in 1920 by passage of the 19th Amendment, eight years after the state of Arizona took that step.

Three strong women were at the forefront of the suffragist movement in Arizona Territory in the late 1890s. Two of the women, Pauline Schindler O'Neill and Frances "Fannie" Willard Munds, both of Prescott, were good friends who became even better friends through the movement. Josephine Brawley Hughes from Tucson became friends with Munds and O'Neill through their years of working together.

Much has been written individually about these women, but the bottom line is that together, they were a formidable force. They had no qualms taking on any politician or a saloon owner, for that matter, concerning a woman's right to vote. Their combined goal was to protect the rights of women. To that end, Josephine Hughes, with the help of the National American Women Suffrage Association, started the Arizona branch of the organization in 1890 and became its first president. She then set to the task of forming local suffrage clubs in every county of the territory.

In 1898, Pauline O'Neill became the second president of the Arizona Territorial Suffrage Association. That same year, her husband, Buckey O'Neill, died at the Battle of San Juan Hill with the Roughriders, and two years later she married his brother, Eugene Brady O'Neill, and moved to Phoenix, where Eugene served as a Maricopa County council member (upper house) in the Territorial Legislature. Pauline became a liaison between the suffrage movement and the Legislature. She was able to feed important happenings to the next association president, Francis Munds (who bought and moved into Pauline's home on Mt. Vernon Avenue in Prescott when Pauline moved to Phoenix). While in Phoenix, Pauline also created and led the Phoenix Civic League. Francis Munds was involved in many organizations that had to do with women's suffrage, but her own personal motto, and one she passes on, is, "Do everything to protect women and children."

Her goal - and that of most suffragists - was to do just that. They fought to protect the property and custody rights of women and to raise the age of consensual sex as well as the legal age to marry. They also fought for education for women and advocated for workers' rights.

Because of the connection between the suffragists and the temperance leagues, men assumed that women just wanted the right to vote so they could close the saloons. As you can see, they had many more concerns. Drinking oftentimes led to the abuse of women and children, so, in that sense, drinking was not something tolerated by many. Temperance didn't always mean abstinence. The men in Arizona finally realized that fact and joined the

women in their efforts. The men, though, were afraid if Congress in Washington D.C., knew women were permitted to vote in the Territory, statehood would be postponed indefinitely.

The women had to bide their time until statehood was attained in February of 1912. The new state constitution did not include women's suffrage. That summer O'Neill, Munds and Hughes led an extensive campaign and obtained well over 3,000 signatures on a petition to put a suffrage initiative on the ballot for the first State of Arizona General Election of Nov. 5, 1912. When the (men's) votes were counted, the amendment passed by a 3 to 1 margin in all but one county of Arizona.

The vote for women was hard fought. There are men today who still don't think women should be involved with voting or politics. That's why the retelling of the suffragists' story is important. Each and every one of us has a voice in how our government is run. That voice is the loudest in the polling booth. Don't any of you, male or female, squander that right by staying home this November. To you ladies especially, make our past proud of our present.

Vote ... it's the right thing to do.

To see these important women in Arizona history come to life, come to Sharlot Hall Museum's Blue Rose Theater production of "We Will Vote," a timely and topically historic play. There will be seven performances, with opening night on June 22. Call 445-3122 for tickets and information. After seeing this play, you will get out and vote!

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