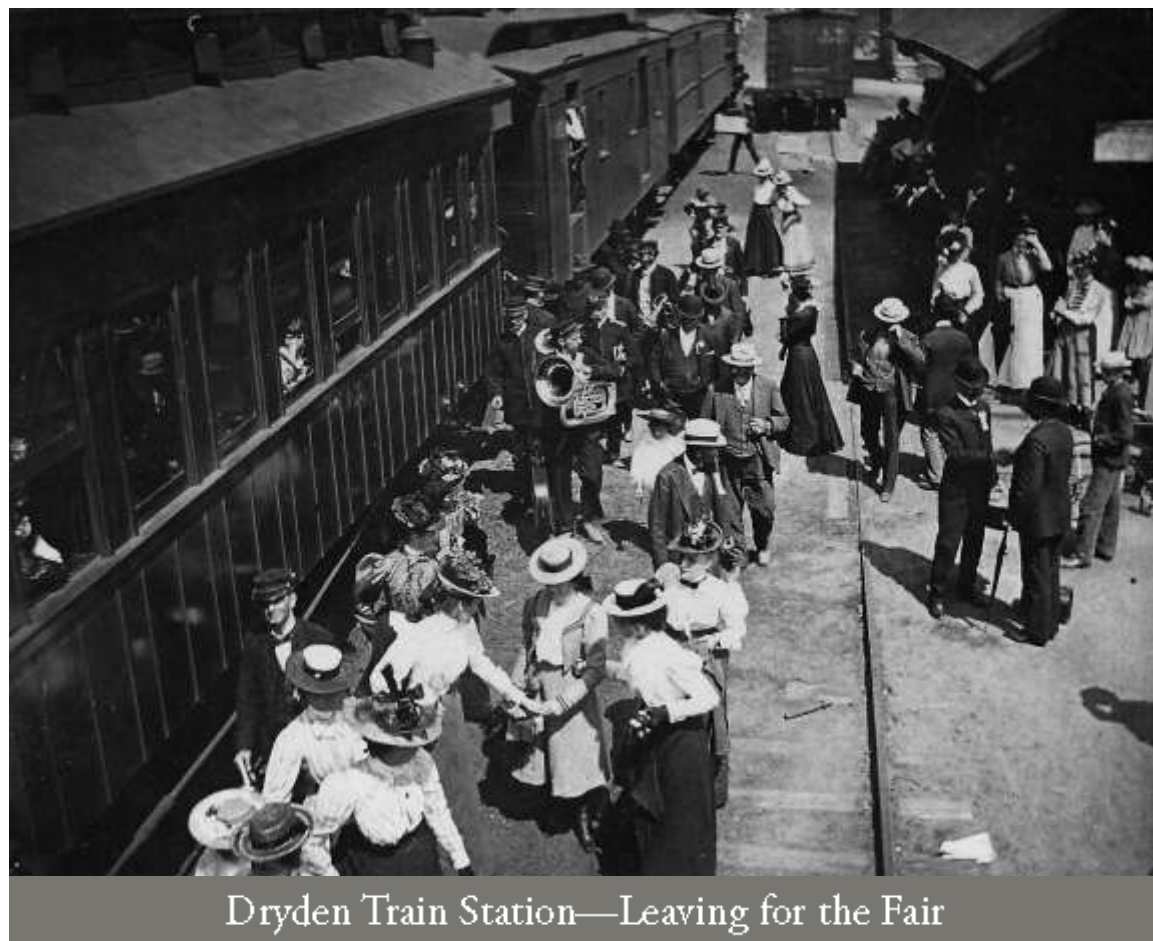


RURAL VOICES ON THE PATH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

RURAL LIFE FOR WOMEN IN THE EARLY 1900s



Tioga Street Trolley in Ithaca circa 1905



Dryden Train Station—Leaving for the Fair

At the turn of the century, life was beginning to change drastically across the state. In New York City, skyscrapers towered upwards and automobiles began to rule the road. In Ithaca, electric streetcars carried passengers through the city. As modern conveniences began to implement change, much of rural life began to revolve around the Main Streets in local villages. Here one could find thriving churches, stores, boarding houses, opera houses where traveling and local talent performed, bands and choruses, and the meeting places of numerous societies and organizations: the Grange, the Columbian Club, the Fortnightly Club & the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Freeville's Lyceum Hall drew audiences for speakers and concerts as well as hosting popular weekly skating events and dances, just as its grander counterpart in Ithaca. Meanwhile the nation was growing, spanning the North American continent and beyond. Distant Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Spanish Manilla had been claimed as American soil, and closer to home the wild territories of the west were becoming states. The whole nation was swept by a wave of optimism and faith in progress. So much had been accomplished, so much had been improved.



Dryden Village circa 1905 Postcard



W. F. Lane Watering his Horse at a Roadside Trough, 1908. Verne Morton N1.1984.

ON THE FARM AND IN THE WORKPLACE



Mrs. Will Graves Driving a Horse Fork, 1907. Verne Morton N1.1650. Mrs. Will Graves showed herself as capable of handling horses and machinery as any man. And she had to do it in a long dress. The stereotype of the helpless woman wasn't common in rural upstate New York because there was ample evidence to the contrary.



Mrs. Will Graves, R. Graham, and T. C. Hollenbeck Hoeing Corn, 1908. Verne Morton N1.1909.



Mrs. Beach at Groton's Bell Telephone Office Desk, 1908. Verne Morton N1.1813. New communications technologies opened the doors of employment slightly for women.



The second industrial revolution had brought prosperity to the country. Factories churned out new products, while mail-order catalogues made them available to rural families. A wide array of luxuries and laborsaving devices were now within the reach of working class families. In the outlying towns of Tompkins County, where agriculture was king, life was still powered primarily by the hardworking horse. New inventions were changing the way of life for American women and easing farmers' toil and housewives' labor. Many women remained hard at work on rural farms and were expected to marry, raise a family, and take care of their home. However, the list of respectable occupations for women was expanding. Women operated telegraphs and telephone switchboards, or worked as secretaries. President Ulysses Grant appointed 5000 women to the position of postmaster, and by 1900 about 10% of the nation's 70,000 post offices were managed by women. Rose Hubbard Muncey of Dryden was one of these postmasters. More women were also practicing medicine. In 1880, seventeen women physicians were practicing in Tompkins County, with at least three of these in the Town of Dryden: Dr. Samantha Nivison, Dr. Mary Briggs, and Dr. Mary Montgomery. Women clerked in stores, especially those owned by husbands or their families. Many worked in jobs related to women's needs, such as dressmakers, milliners, domestics or even in the mills. They became type compositors and teachers.

IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE AND ON THE CAMPUS



Florence Kimball

At the turn of the century women's suffrage was limited to education. It was thought that because the care and education of children was a woman's responsibility, women could understand and take on voting responsibilities related to school matters. In 1880, New York granted women the right to vote in school board elections, and to serve on those boards. Not every woman qualified, only those who had children or paid taxes in the district. But this was a step towards universal women's suffrage. In 1892, women were permitted to vote and run for the post of county school commissioner. Ella Gale from Groton, New York was elected School Commissioner of Tompkins County Second District in that year, becoming the first woman to occupy that position in New York State. She won despite being a Democratic and Prohibition nominee in a primarily Republican county. Many women voted in this election- 150 in Dryden and 64 in Varna. By 1900, New York's educational system boasted nine female school commissioners.

Most women received their education from the common schools. Some continued on to the high school or to private academies. By the turn of the century, higher education was available to some women, though not universally. Emma Eastman was one of two women to begin taking classes at Cornell, with the expectation that her courses would count for credit when the Trustees officially voted to accept women in the spring of 1872. In 1873, Eastman became Cornell's first woman graduate. She worked for woman suffrage for much of her life, dying in California in 1932. In 1874, when Cornell University opened Sage College there were 37 women students who were often greeted with disdain, even by the faculty. But they persisted and by 1910, 397 women were enrolled, including several women of color. In 1880, Suffragist May Gorslin Preston Slosson earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy at Cornell, becoming the first woman in the U.S. to do so. The NYS College of Veterinary Medicine was an early pioneer in educating women, bestowing the first DVM degree on a woman in the United States, Florence Kimball, in 1910. Women who could not attend college found methods of self-education through clubs, lectures, and libraries. They used their local libraries and founded Literary Clubs.



Emma Sheffield Eastman Class of 1873



Morton School Spelling Class. Carrie Southworth, Teacher, 1907. N1.1568.



May Gorslin Preston Slosson (1858-1943) was a noted suffragist and the first woman to earn a PhD in philosophy in the United States (Cornell Univ 1880)