

Lucia Grimes:



A teacher by training, Lucia Grimes took up the cause of women's voting rights in 1912. Her innovative lobbying system helped secure passage of suffrage amendments in the Michigan legislature and in Congress.

by Portia Vescio

A Suffrage Success Story

Lucia Voorhees was born in 1877 to an Illinois farming family where she developed leadership, courage, and the will to work for what she firmly believed. A good student, she was offered a position as a teacher at a country school shortly before her high school graduation in 1895. She spent two years at Illinois State Normal School and another year teaching before entering the University of Michigan in 1899.

She met her future husband George Grimes on the first Friday she was in Ann Arbor; he was an instructor in

The suffragists were furnished a car and driver every day for a month.

The association actively campaigned during the election year of 1912. Michigan Governor Chase Osborn had successfully urged the state legislature to put a suffrage amendment on the ballot. Though the women's right to vote was endorsed by many organizations, there was strong opposition to it among the citizenry.

When Election Day came around, the women of the Wayne County Equal Suffrage Association assigned

mechanical engineering and also from Illinois. Voorhees graduated in 1902 with a teacher's certificate in history and English. After working in Escanaba for two years, she returned to the University of Michigan to earn her master's degree. She married Grimes in 1907, and the two made their home in Detroit where he had been offered a job as a foundry superintendent. Their daughter Emily was born two years later.

It was in 1912 when a conversation occurred that changed the direction of Lucia Grimes' life. A friend and women's rights activist, Mary Thompson Stevens, asked her a simple question: Was she sympathetic to the suffragist cause? Grimes said no one had ever brought the matter to her attention, but the idea seemed a reasonable one.

As a result of that conversation, Grimes joined a group that would become the Wayne County Equal Suffrage Association. Six weeks later, she was named the recording secretary and chairman for publicity.

One of Grimes' first tasks was to arrange transportation for a speaker who was visiting from Boston. She decided to call a car company to arrange for a loaner. Her first call was to the E-M-F Company (Everitt, Metzger, and Flanders), where she spoke with a manager named Booth. In her memoir, Grimes writes of Booth's reaction:

"When I gave my name and said that I represented the Wayne County Suffrage Association, I could hear the sibilant sound of the quick intake of his breath.

He asked, 'Do you want me to tell you where I think the suffragettes ought to go?'

'Why, yes, of course.'

'H-O-M-E and take care of their babies!'

So I replied, 'I am at home, my housework is done, my baby has had her bath and is now asleep, and you know a woman can still talk.'

He was silent for a moment, then said: 'I beg your pardon. Call Mr. Louis Flint for whatever you want.'"

themselves to various voting booths to prevent cheating at the polls. (Stuffing ballot boxes or handing out improper ballots was not unheard of at that time; neither was rowdy behavior.) The chairman at the booth assigned to Grimes was not pleased to have a woman invade his territory. Grimes described the man as being "somewhat disturbed" and needing to "balance himself by putting his hand on the wall." As a former schoolteacher, she noticed that the clerk had perfect Spencerian handwriting. As she complimented the clerk, the chairman barked at Grimes and told her to stand outside the rail while the elections were taking place.

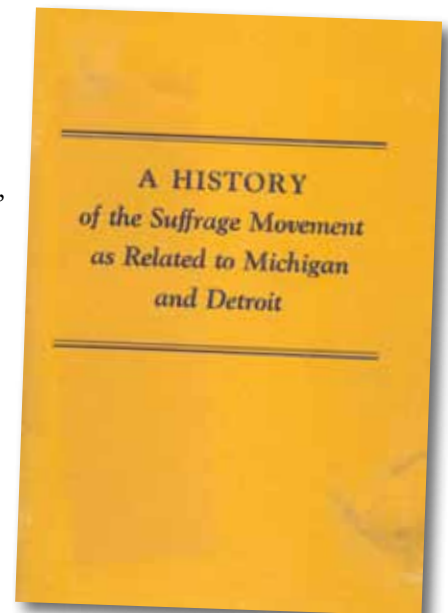
Grimes took her lunch break at noon. By the time she returned to the booth, the attitude of the men had changed.

"They gave me a chair inside the rail," she noted, "and one reached up into the top of the booth and brought down a long, green box

which he handed me. They had been out and bought chrysanthemums for me! The police chief said that I was better [at keeping the peace] than a whole squad of police."

Though the outcome for the suffrage amendment looked good, the opposition prevailed by 762 votes.

This was a heartbreaking defeat for the women who had



Lucia Grimes documented the movement's history in this 1968 volume. Courtesy of the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

Olney, Richard, Jr., Mass. Sen. 14th Dist.

Political History

Party: Democratic
District: State Representative, Mass. House of Rep. 1902 from Leicester 14th Dist.
Congressional: Member of Congress, 14th Dist.
Has he served in state legislature? Yes.
Record on suffrage in state: Opposed, but voted "yes" at last state election.
Did he introduce any bill concerning suffrage? No.
How did he vote on suffrage bills in legislature? Opposed.
Record on suffrage in Congress.
Will he support the Susan B. Anthony amendment? Probably not.
What influences were paramount in electing him? A strong progressive candidate who has since rejoined the Republicans.
Felled more than enough votes to defeat the Republican candidate.
What is his present stand on suffrage? Has been regarded as an opponent of woman suffrage but it is understood he voted in favor at last state election.

Olney, Mr. Richard, Jr., Sen. Mass. 14th Dist.

Name: Richard Olney
Address: At present living in Washington, D. C. Has a farm on High St. Westwood, Norfolk County
Business address: 232 Summer St. Boston, Mass.
Telephone number: Main 6373
Occupation: wool merchant
Property interests: Farm in Westwood
Standing in community: "Honest Dick", of the best, some say. Would always follow party's lead. Is lacking in initiative.
Affiliations:
Fraternal: None, I think.
Newspaper: His uncle, Richard Olney is influential in the Boston Herald and was a trustee of it.

Information sent in by Miss S. F. Baxter, Holden, Mass.

Samples of Grimes' index cards may be found at the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum in Washington, D.C.

fought so hard, but they received some good news: The question of suffrage would be placed on the ballot again in the spring of 1913. The suffragists had one advantage—experience—and entered into the new campaign with a sense of optimism.

Grimes was now the executive secretary of the county suffrage association in charge of organization and publicity. She directed distribution of literature at factories and church meetings, made street corner speeches, and attended luncheons and teas. In an interesting tactic designed to disarm her audience, she learned to make lace, "to be able to sit in various meetings and look completely domestic even if I had to make a suffrage speech."

As the campaign drew to a close, the suffragists were anxious—and with good reason. "In some precincts, the officials counted us out," Grimes said. "In others they dropped the ballots in the mud and the farmers couldn't get to the polls because of the [impassable] roads. The good vote in the cities was still indifferent, so again we lost."

With two defeats behind them, the women were exhausted and disillusioned. Realizing that they needed to take a different approach, Grimes came up with an innovative idea: an index card filing system to keep track of how each member of the Michigan legislature felt about women's suffrage. This methodology, known internally as "the pressure system," is perhaps Grimes' most notable contribution to the suffrage movement. As she explained,

"You had to know who you knew."

In addition to each politician's view on suffrage, an individual's card also contained personal information about family, religion, health, and hobbies—information that could be used as talking points while lobbying legislators. Women took the cards with them and quickly identified arguments to pressure politicians to vote in favor of suffrage. For example, if a politician voted according to opinion in his home district, a rally might be scheduled to show that the district was in favor of suffrage.

The card system was so influential that it drew national attention. In the fall of 1915, Alice Paul, leader of the National Women's Party, invited Grimes to Washington, D.C. to create a card system to be used with members of the U.S. Congress. Grimes promptly left for the capital with her five-year-old daughter Emily in tow.

Compiling a national file of index cards took Grimes five weeks to complete. During that time, her daughter was enrolled in kindergarten in Washington and celebrated her sixth birthday. Emily was also photographed holding posters promoting a Susan B. Anthony pageant—an image that was published in newspapers all over the country.

After Lucia and Emily Grimes left Washington, the National Women's Party dedicated a staff member to keeping the cards updated. The system was dutifully maintained for four years, until Congress passed the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. The "pressure system" is credited with being a great influence in helping to pass the suffrage amendment.

Grimes proved to be as dedicated to the family business as she was to the fight for suffrage. When World War I depleted the management ranks at her husband's firm—the Grimes Molding Machine Company—she took over as its vice president and purchasing agent. During this time, she limited her work on suffrage to the local and state levels. But she was in Lansing in the spring of 1919 when Michigan voted to ratify the suffrage amendment.

She did not give up her activism after women won the right to vote. Empowered by the amendment, she ran unsuccessfully for the state legislature in 1924. Several



Grimes is pictured with the system she made famous. All photos of her and her daughter courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

years later, she returned to her first career and became a social science teacher at Cass Technical High School in Detroit. Some of the causes she supported during her tenure at Cass Tech were a teachers' retirement bill and the consolidation of rural school districts. She remained there until her retirement in 1948.

A staunch supporter of women's rights to the end, Grimes made a speech on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment at a rally in Detroit in 1974, just days before her 97th birthday.

Grimes was celebrated later in life for her many accomplishments. The Michigan Federation of Republican Women honored her in 1968 for 50 years of leadership. In 1977, her 100th year, the University of Michigan bestowed upon her its Outstanding Achievement Award for her work as a teacher, business executive, and women's rights advocate.

In 1995, Lucia Voorhees Grimes was posthumously inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. **mh**

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MICHIGAN'S YOUNGEST SUFFRAGIST

At age six, Emily Grimes was called "Michigan's youngest suffragist." The daughter of Lucia and George Grimes, she distributed pamphlets and carried posters while attending suffrage meetings with her mother. A 1915 photograph of Emily taken outside the headquarters of the National Women's Party was circulated around the country.



Emily was also on hand to present tulips to former President Theodore Roosevelt when he visited Detroit in 1916. She had prepared a speech to accompany the flowers. When meeting Roosevelt, she told him, "Lots of little girls' mamas want to vote." However, Emily was so excited about meeting the president that she reportedly forgot what he said to her.

MANY MICHIGAN WOMEN WORKED FOR SUFFRAGE

It was 90 years ago this year that the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote was ratified by the requisite majority of states, and Michigan women were leaders in this effort. In addition to Lucia Grimes, the following women played a major role on the state and national stages:

- **Edith Vosburgh Alvord**—As president of the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs, she lobbied for suffrage.
- **Clara Arthur**—Arthur helped establish the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association and lobbied to change the state constitution to allow women to vote on tax and bond issues.
- **Olympia Brown**—A founder of suffrage associations in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Illinois, Brown promoted women's rights from her pulpit as well.
- **Caroline Bartlett Crane**—A minister and popular public speaker, she worked closely with both Susan B. Anthony and Anna Howard Shaw.
- **Emily Burton Ketcham**—Ketcham was the best-

known founder of Grand Rapids' suffrage groups, and served four times as president of the state organization.

- **May Stocking Knaggs**—This Bay City woman was an ally and friend of Susan B. Anthony; in 1894, they traveled through New York together making 60 speeches.
- **Eliza Seaman Leggett**—Her experience promoting abolition through word and deed served her well when she turned her attention to women's voting rights.
- **Mary McCoy**—As a prominent club leader in Detroit, she rallied black women to the suffrage cause.
- **Anna Howard Shaw**—A doctor and minister, she succeeded Susan B. Anthony as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.
- **Sojourner Truth**—An ardent social activist, her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech inspired generations to fight for their rights.

Source: Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.