



# HARRIET TAYLOR UPTON'S *change of heart*

By Shirley Wajda

**Harriet Taylor Upton (1854-1945)  
was against women's suffrage  
before she was for it.**

Upton's father Ezra Booth Taylor, a confirmed suffragist, could not persuade her, though he fought for women's right to vote when he served as the Republican Congressman from Ohio's 19th District from 1880 to 1893. He had even been elected in 1884 as the first president of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association, a position he did not take due to his duties in Washington. Yet he didn't sway his daughter's stance as, in her terms, a "violent anti." While Upton served as her father's hostess in busy Washington society, she published her views against women having the franchise—even as she was befriending the great suffragist Susan B. Anthony.

In the course of writing a second article on the topic, however, Upton changed her mind. "How I labored!" she recalled in her reminiscences of her life and career. "I read and wrote, rested and wrote,

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**"I know the woman feeling  
throughout the West better than  
you do, and much better than any  
of the men who surround you do."**

*-Harriet Taylor Upton*



Harriet Taylor Upton House

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revised and destroyed; and at the end of three weeks study, found myself believing that women as well as men should vote.”

From that moment forward, Harriet Taylor Upton was a force in Ohio and the nation—and in her own household. She, along with her mentor “Aunt Susan” Anthony, persuaded her husband George to support the suffrage cause. In 1891, Upton was elected president of the Warren Suffrage Club. By 1899, she was president of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association, serving several terms from 1899 to 1908 and from 1911 to 1920, while leading two unsuccessful state suffrage referendum campaigns in 1912 and 1914 and a successful campaign for Ohio women’s municipal suffrage in 1916.

Upton’s skills in organization quickly propelled her into national leadership soon after she joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890. She was a born writer and had already gained fame for her literary works in national magazines. She chaired NAWSA’s Press Committee, edited the Association’s annual convention reports, and edited *Progress*, NAWSA’s newspaper, for which she sought only union labor in its production.

From a desk in the upstairs hallway of her fashionable Mahoning Avenue home in Warren, Upton served as NAWSA’s treasurer from 1893 to 1910, tending to the financial gears to keep the suffrage machine going until the 19th Amendment became law in 1920. Indeed, Upton’s

home served as NAWSA’s national headquarters from 1903 to 1905, when the organization moved down the avenue to a house formerly owned by automotive inventor Warren Packard. NAWSA’s headquarters were moved again to New York City in late 1909.

Upton called herself a “wax figure” in her first days as a suffrage lobbyist, but she grew to embrace politics. Her well-known down-to-earth sense of humor and her approachability belied a seasoned strategist who became the first woman member of the Warren Board of Education (1898-1913), the first woman to serve as vice chairman for the Republican National Committee (1920), and the first woman in Ohio to run for the US Congress (1926).

Harriet Taylor Upton conversed with presidents and congressmen, persuading them of women’s political equality. She understood women as a voting bloc with distinctive and important interests. As she declared in 1920 to then-presidential candidate, her fellow Ohioan Warren G. Harding, “I know the woman feeling throughout the West better than you do, and much better than any of the men who surround you do . . . I do know the woman situation and the woman logic and the suffrage condition as well as most women in the United States. I ought to know it because that is all I have done for thirty years—working at it and working with it.” ♥



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