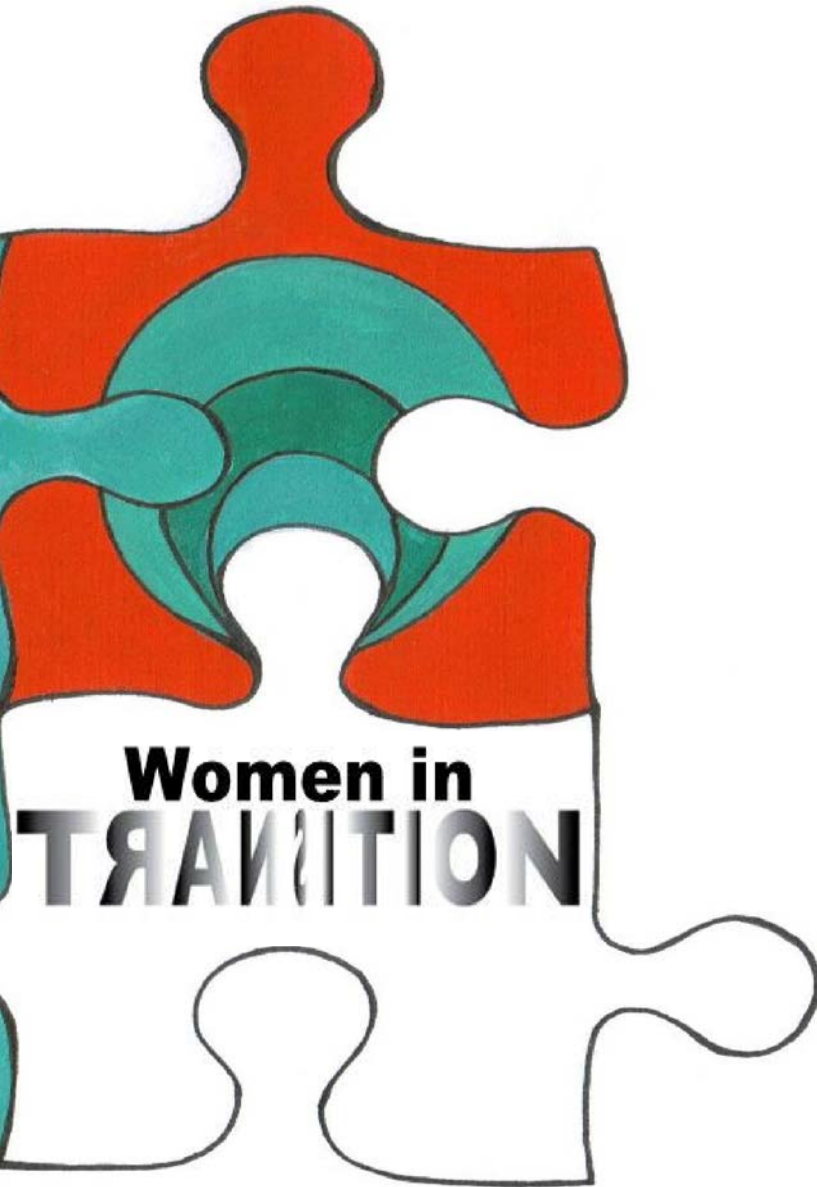


**Change is a constant** in our lives – in fact, it has been said that the only constant is change! Not only are our personal lives in transition, but changes are occurring continuously in politics, business, science, the arts, in fact—everywhere. One particularly important transition that occurs in January is the installation of new governing officials. It is really hard for us to believe that women have had a role in electing those government officials in the U.S. for only 90 years. In this month's column with the theme of transitions, we present information about one of the most important transitions that occurred for women – ever – in the U.S. – winning and exercising the right to vote!

When the colonists first came to what would become the United States of America, they brought their customs from their former countries with them and codified them into the laws of the new land. Under the old rules, women, especially married women, did not have the right to vote or to own property; just two of the many rights denied them. One of the first women to live up to the oft-repeated phrase “Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History” was **Lady Deborah Moody** (a widow) who in 1645 founded Gravesend, now a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. She became not only the first female landowner in the New World, because she was a property owner in New Netherland, she was also eligible to vote.

**Margaret Brent** emigrated to what would later become the state of Maryland in 1638 with one of her sisters and two of her brothers. She claimed a land grant, conducted business, and appeared in court. She was appointed the executor of Governor Leonard Calvert's estate when he was on his deathbed and her subsequent actions helped enable the settlement to survive. She appeared before the legislature in





1648 and requested two votes – one for herself as a landowner and another because of her role as Lord Baltimore's attorney. Her request to vote was denied.

Over one hundred years later, in 1776, **Abigail Adams**, wife of President John Adams and mother of President John Quincy Adams wrote to John: "I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could." John laughed at her saucy letter. It would be almost 150 years before women were granted the right to vote.

States enfranchised and disenfranchised women and other populations in various ways. For

example, under New Jersey's state constitution of 1776, inhabitants (without a sex or race distinction) who owned property could vote. This meant that unmarried women could vote if they owned property. Married women could not own property; all of their property was in their husband's name. In 1807, New Jersey changed its constitution, when the language was modified to only allow white males to vote.

Native Americans, who did not have legal standing in the U.S. Constitution of 1776, also made their own laws. In most tribes women played an equal role to men. Then, in 1827, The Cherokee Nation who had heretofore extended women full rights in the decision making process, adopted a constitution to please the U.S. government that reads "All free male Citizens (excepting negroes & descendants of white & Indian men by Negro women who may have been set free) who shall have attained to the age of 18 years shall be equally entitled to vote at all public elections". With this action, another door closes on women's suffrage!

The fight for women's suffrage began in earnest in 1848 at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The Convention leaders **Lucretia Mott** and **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** would have been discouraged but not deterred, if they had known that the fight would take 72 years before ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.

During those 72 years, there were rays of hope. Women were granted full suffrage in Wyoming "The Equality State" from the time it was a territory. In 1916, **Jeannette Rankin** was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, representing Montana, which had already granted women the right to vote. One of her enduring

quotes is "We're half the people; we should be half the Congress."



Although progress has seemed slow since 1920, women have been putting their mark on both politics and policy. **Edith Nourse Rogers** became the first congresswoman from New England in 1925. **Frances Perkins** became the first female cabinet member in

1933, when she was appointed secretary of labor. In 1940, **Margaret Chase Smith** was first elected as a representative from Maine. When she was elected to the Senate in 1948, she became the first woman elected to both houses of Congress. In 1949, **Georgia Neese Clark** became the first female treasurer of the U.S. In 1968, **Shirley Chisholm** became the first black woman elected to Congress.



Another landmark was reached in 1984, when **Geraldine Ferraro** was the vice presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket. **Madeleine Albright** became the first female secretary of state in 1997. With the election of 2006, **Nancy Pelosi** became the first female Speaker of the House. In 2008, for the first time, a state senate (New Hampshire) had a majority of women.



Yet, we still have not had a women nominated for president as a candidate from either major political party and, of course, no women presidents—yet.

As Jeannette Rankin said, women are half the population and equal representation would be half of the elected officials. Find qualified women and help them get the opportunity to represent us! Give money generously, to support those who are willing to run. Understand the issues; ask pertinent questions; support one another—VOTE! We are hopeful that soon we will see the U.S. elect a woman as President!



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