

# Mable Judd, Grant County Suffragist



Almost one hundred years ago a young woman from Grant County enlisted in a great crusade. This crusade was perhaps the longest in American History - the fight for Woman's right to vote. Mabel Judd was an intelligent young teacher, having worked in the State of Oregon and in Richland Center, Wisconsin. Mabel grew up in Lancaster, the daughter of Henry and Helen Judd. In 1908 she graduated from the Milwaukee Normal College. From her work in Richland Center, she met and became friends with Ada James, the well known Wisconsin Suffragist. Ada's father, Wisconsin State Senator David G. James was persuaded in 1911 to introduce in the legislature a bill for a referendum on woman's suffrage. That vote was to be held in November of 1912. Miss James founded the Political Equality League of Wisconsin (PEL), breaking with the established Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association (WWSA) headed by the more cautious Rev. Olympia Brown. Both organizations, however

moved in to high gear win the Suffrage Referendum. Ada James called her talented friend Mabel Judd back from Oregon to serve as a state organizer. In the following months Mable traveled the state in "Auto Tours" giving lectures in small towns, often from the cars. She also founded PEL chapters in many towns and cities. The usual practice was to enter a town in a car draped with signs such as "Votes for Women!", drive about for awhile to get attention, and then stop, a woman playing a coronet, while another spoke to the resultant crowd.

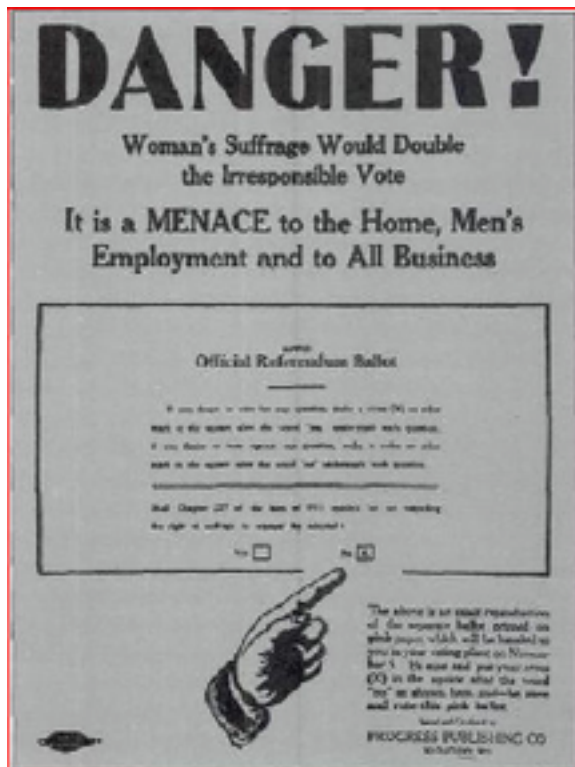


An Eau Claire Newspaper describes Judd thus:

***"Miss Judd was plainly prettily dressed and spoke with earnestness and eloquence. She is a particularly handsome young woman, and knows her subject. She said she was not a militant suffragist, and that there was no occasion for such in Wisconsin as the attitude of the men, she said they were "politely non-committal". She claimed the movement was growing rapidly in Southern Wisconsin, that notable men and women were freely giving their services."***

Despite her disingenuous denial of militancy, she did work with great diligence for the right of women to vote. It was hard to convince women who had taken no part in politics to push their spouses and male children to vote for their enfranchisement. It was hard to speak to men at factory gates, farm and labor conventions, churches, and school meetings. Most Men of that time felt that women were not sufficiently

rational, educated, or astute to be entrusted with the vote. Women were to be protected from the affairs of the world (by their men of course). Many men also felt that women would vote in prohibition. The State Retail Liquor Dealers' Protective Association formed a subsidiary called "Progress" and started publishing material opposing woman suffrage. In fact, many women had learned how to campaign working in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and many did support prohibition.



Mabel was not to see the fight through in Wisconsin, however. On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1912 the Milwaukee Journal carried an article titled "Suffragist Will Wed" It reported:

*"Cupid has again shown that he is no foe of the suffragists. Miss Mable Judd, one of the prominent woman suffrage workers of Wisconsin is to be married to Bruce R Kester, Vale, Ore. The ceremony will be performed at the home of Mrs. Helen Judd, mother of the bride, Lancaster, Wis., July 11, at 8:30*

*p. m. After a wedding trip to the east they will be at home in Vale. Miss Judd does not intend to give over campaigning, though she will combine it with the study of law, with the intention of entering partnership with Mr. Kester, who is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania."*

Mabel did move to Vale, Oregon with her spouse. She did not give up working for the cause. She immediately affiliated herself with the Equal Suffrage League of Oregon, and became president of the Malheur County League, once again speaking and organizing for the cause in that state. Fifty two percent of Oregon male voters approved woman suffrage in November 1912.



Mabel did receive her law degree. She had several children, one of whom, Randall B. Kester was the 69<sup>th</sup> Associate Justice of the Oregon Supreme court, serving from 1957 to 1958. He is now 94 years of age and lives in Portland, Oregon.

Mabel was not done with the Badger State, however. In 1932 Bruce died and in 1933 we find Mabel Judd Kester teaching school in Bloomington, Wisconsin and running for Grant County Superintendent of Schools.

## Bloomington Teacher To Seek Grant Office

Bloomington, Wis., Jan. 11—Special: Mrs. Mabel (Judd) Kester, of this city, has announced her candidacy for superintendent of schools of Grant county at the spring election. She is a normal school graduate and holds an unlimited state certificate. She is also a member of the bar of the state of Oregon, where she recently passed several years. She was a teacher for several years in Grant and Richland counties.

F. E. Ralph, of Lancaster, the present superintendent, will also be a candidate for re-election.

### Campaign Warms Up.

Mrs. Mabel Judd Kester is meeting with much encouragement in her campaign for county superintendent of schools. She is making trips to many precincts and giving talks.

At Hazelton Friday evening she spoke before a large crowd at the Community club meeting, and was very well received.

Last week Mrs. Kester was scheduled to address the P. T. A. at Patch Grove, but was unable to do so, although a later date may be arranged.

At Mt. Ida, February 18, there was

a large enthusiastic crowd. After the talk two nomination papers were filled before the crowd dispersed.

At Blue River the number of signatures of her nomination papers reached 60. Influential persons have circulated papers for her in the various precincts.—Bloomington Record.

She applied her Oratorical skills once again and ran a spirited campaign, but 1933 was a year of economic catastrophe, and she lost to the incumbent, F. E. Ralph, garnering 4169 votes to his 5186. Voters that day also voted to repeal prohibition.

I have been unable to find much information on her later years, and I hope her son will be able to provide this information, along with a few good photos. She died in 1964 and is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery, Ontario, Oregon with her husband.

The referendum was not to succeed in Wisconsin in 1912. Despite all the hours of work and all the miles traveled, it was defeated by 90,000 votes. From the ashes of defeat, however came the seeds of victory. Women were motivated and men were thinking progressively. On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1919 Senator James, Ada James' father, raced to Washington D. C. making Wisconsin the first state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the vote. Final ratification occurred on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1920, and the rest, as they say, is history.