



# Episode One | TRANSCRIPT

**Florence Brooks Whitehouse** | 1869 - 1945  
**Robert Treat Whitehouse** | 1870 - 1924



**HOSTED BY:**

League of Women Voters of Maine  
*Featuring Anne Gass*



**MARKER LOCATION:**

42 Deering Street  
Portland, Maine

[lwvme.org/SuffrageTrail](http://lwvme.org/SuffrageTrail)

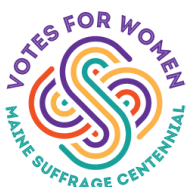
- 0:21      You're listening to the "Road to the 19th Amendment" podcast, and we're telling the story of Maine's suffragists, and bringing this history the recognition it deserves. This project is made possible by the Maine Suffrage Centennial Collaborative, chaired by Ellen Alderman, led by Anne Gass, and with support from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and other donors like you.
  
- 0:48      This episode covers Florence and Robert Whitehouse, the story told by Anne Gass, their great-granddaughter.
  
- 1:04      My name is Anne Gass, and I am a member of the steering committee of the Maine Suffrage Centennial Collaborative. I also serve as the Maine coordinator for the National Votes for Women Trail, which is the sponsor of this marker project nationally, and in Maine, the Maine Suffrage Centennial Collaborative kind of coordinated the decisions around which people and locations would get these markers. Florence Brooks and Robert Treat Whitehouse were my great-grandparents and the subject of my book, *Voting Down the Rose, Florence Brooks Whitehouse and Maine's Fight for Woman Suffrage*.
  
- 1:47      Florence and Robert were born in Augusta, Maine. Florence, in 1869 and Robert in 1870, and they married in 1894 after Florence had taken an extended, and unchaperoned, trip abroad. And they moved, to Portland, where they lived the rest of their lives, and became a kind of Portland power couple. Florence's father was a successful, businessman in Augusta. His name was Samuel Spencer Brooks. Robert's father was William Penn Whitehouse. He was an attorney, who served on the Maine Supreme Court from 1890 to the last two years of his service. He was Chief justice. So they were kind of Broke Enacted and affluent growing up and that they continued that pattern going forward in their lives.



**MAINE SUFFRAGE  
CENTENNIAL TRAIL**

THE ROAD TO THE 19TH AMENDMENT

- 2:35 Florence was a writer, and she published two successful novels with Little Brown and Company, both based on her travels in Egypt. Those books were called the God of Things, and the second one was called the Effendi.
- 2:37 They also...Florence and Robert also had 3 sons. As was true of other affluent women of her time, she had a number of interests outside the home. For example, she created a writing group, and was a vocalist in the Rossini Musical Club in Portland. Robert followed in his father's footsteps and became an attorney, starting out in private practice. He was elected County Attorney in 1900, and served in that office for 4 years, and then in 1905, he was appointed U.S. District Attorney for the District of Maine — kind of like a state's attorney. I think is sort of different terminology. But that's an effect when it was.
- 3:23 I think, it was their involvement in Portland's progressive movement in the early 1900s. There was quite a movement to make Portland a better place to live, and they were both active on a number of different committees. Robert, for example, was a member of the White Slavery Committee, which had to do with prostitution. It became clear to both of them that in order to change the laws that made life hard for women and families, women needed the vote. So they weren't early suffrage crusaders by any means; they were in their forties by the time they got active in suffrage, but by that time they had built a lot of skills, power and influence that allowed them to be effective suffrage leaders.
- 4:12 So when Florence first became active in suffrage around 1913, she joined the Maine Woman's Suffrage Association or MESA. MESA was affiliated with a national group called the National American Woman's Suffrage Association that had led the suffrage movement for many years. MESA and NASA had gotten a bit stodgy and set in their ways.
- 4:22 Their leaders were older, had been active for many many years, and they were embracing tactics that really weren't working for them that well anymore. They were focused almost entirely on winning suffrage state by state, and while they'd had some success, there were about a dozen or so states that had enfranchised women that way. It just was a slow way to go.
- 5:02 In 1913, these 2 young suffrage leaders in D.C., Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, launched the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage or CU to focus exclusively on persuading congress to amend the U.S.



## MAINE SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL TRAIL

THE ROAD TO THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Constitution to give women voting rights. Now they were much more willing to use controversial tactics, like picketing, and-and sort of playing politics, by which I mean harnessing women's votes from those states where women could vote to punish the political party in power for their failure to advance the Federal Suffrage Amendment.

5:40

It's-it's, important to understand that nowadays that doesn't sound like a big deal. But in 1913, it really was a big deal. It was seen as very unwomanly and unseemly for women to play power politics in that way. So Florence really made her colleagues at the Maine Women's Suffrage Association angry, when in 1915 she joined the Congressional Union and helped found Maine's branch of it and became its first president. And it got to the point where in 1917, she was forced out of the Maine Women's Suffrage Association and ended up doing all of her last years of suffrage organizing through the Congressional Union.

6:27

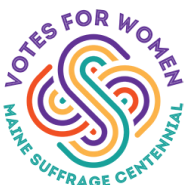
The Congressional Union also became the National Woman's Party. What it boils down to is her willingness to pick at President Wilson and to support those who are arrested for doing so earned her the enmity of her former colleagues at MESA, and they were incredibly nasty and hostile. But yeah, it's important to know that her activism and supporting the Federal Amendment directly led to Maine becoming the 19th state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment.

6:54

So Robert formed the Men's Equal Suffrage League in 1914 and led it until suffrage was won in 1920. The Men's Equal Suffrage League was a men's only statewide organization and was created, because by this time in the suffrage movement, virtually all of the organizations were women-only, but men would create these kind of separate groups to support suffrage activities. Its board included other politically active and prominent men who threw their weight behind suffrage.

7:27

These are men who would later become Maine governors, or Maine, you know, U.S. representatives or senators. I mean, they were just up and coming political actors. So it wasn't-it was important and influential to have them behind the suffrage movement in Maine. Robert also served as an unofficial legal advisor to Florence and her suffrage work, and she consulted him quite a bit. And finally, he was active in the Republican party and could meet often with Governor Carl Milliken, who was also a big suffrage supporter, and Millikan ultimately was the one who called the Maine Legislature back in the session to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment in November of 1919. So in all those ways, Robert was a key leader in the Maine suffrage movement.



## MAINE SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL TRAIL

THE ROAD TO THE 19TH AMENDMENT

8:17

Their markers are located at 42 Deering Street, which is the site of their first home in Portland and where they were living when they first became active in suffrage. They did suffrage work there and had suffrage meetings there as well. They later moved to 108 Vaughn Street in Portland's West End to a larger house, and that house became the Maine headquarters for the National Women's Party. And they posted — it was a bigger house, so they could host suffrage organizers when they came to Portland. And, for example, Alice Paul would stay with them when she came to town, but 42 Deering Street is where they got started.



## **MAINE SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL TRAIL**

THE ROAD TO THE 19TH AMENDMENT

# Bio.

**Florence Brooks Whitehouse** | 1869 - 1945

**Robert Treat Whitehouse** | 1870 - 1924

Florence and Robert were born in Augusta, Maine, and moved to Portland following their marriage in 1894. Their first home in Portland was at 42 Deering Street, and this is where their marker can be found.

In 1913, after bearing three sons, writing several plays, and publishing two novels, Florence became involved in woman suffrage. She joined the Maine Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA) and quickly assumed leadership positions. Among other things, she chaired MWSA's Legislative Committee from 1915-1916.

Robert was an attorney, who founded the Men's Equal Suffrage League in 1914 to support Florence and the campaign for woman suffrage. He chaired the League from its start to when the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, and provided considerable legal advice and financial assistance to the suffrage campaign.

In 1915 Florence agreed to lead the newly formed Maine branch of the Congressional Union (CU), later known as the National Woman's Party (NWP). This was controversial with her MWSA colleagues, especially once Florence joined in public demonstrations against then-President Woodrow Wilson for his refusal to support equal suffrage. In 1917, when the Maine legislature passed a statewide suffrage bill and sent it out to voters for a referendum vote, Florence's more conservative suffrage colleagues refused to let her have any public role in promoting it, citing her radical views. In response, Florence's friends secretly formed the Equal Suffrage Referendum League of Maine- to work only for the referendum- and elected her Chair. She happily accepted the position.

When Maine's suffrage referendum was resoundingly defeated, Florence left MWSA and worked only for the NWP. This earned her much local notoriety because of the "militant" tactics employed by NWP organizers, such as picketing the Whitehouse.

In June 1919 the US Congress passed the 19th Amendment and sent it to the states to ratify. In November, Maine's Governor Millikin called the legislature into special session to act on it. A few days before the session, the Maine Federation of Labor (MFL) unexpectedly issued a public call for the legislature to defeat the suffrage amendment. Florence called for aid from the NWP and Alice Paul traveled to Maine to help. The Senate passed it easily, but at the 11th hour it was Florence and Alice Paul in a room at the state capitol, twisting arms and threatening the MFL leaders to make them retract their call, which they finally did. When the House voted the next day it passed by only four votes. Maine became the 19th state to ratify the 19th Amendment in November 1919.

Florence's skills as a writer, public speaker, lobbyist, and organizer were unequalled in Maine's suffrage movement, and she was a key figure in the last six years of the struggle. She worked closely with national suffrage leaders, especially during pivotal periods when the nation looked to Maine for breakthroughs in the battle. The support she received from her husband, Robert, was invaluable in winning the long battle for woman suffrage.

[lwvme.org/SuffrageTrail](http://lwvme.org/SuffrageTrail)



**MAINE SUFFRAGE  
CENTENNIAL TRAIL**

THE ROAD TO THE 19TH AMENDMENT