

The Fundamental Principle of a Republic

By Anna Howard Shaw

Delivered June 21, 1915, Ogdenburg, New York

Mrs. Shaw was very passionate about women's suffrage and truly believed it was high time women had the right to vote. She compared the United States to Australia who had already given their women the right to vote.

Although I agree with her in many of her beliefs and reasons for wanting the right to vote for women, I am surprised it was ever passed with women like her talking to men about it. If I had been a man at that time, this speech would have only reinforced my belief that men should be the only ones to vote. She had very valid points to make but this speech was long, wordy, pedantic, and very difficult to understand in many places. For example, in one paragraph, she used the words consistent, inconsistent, continuance, and consecutive. She said that "men were inconsistent with their consistency" and it was so difficult to follow, that men probably tuned her out early in her speech. She had good things to say, too, but for the most part, her whole speech was very derogatory toward men and why they hadn't given the right to women sooner. It is no surprise that it took another five years to get this legislation passed.

She traced the history of the discussion back to the beginning of time, blaming different people and parties along the way for not allowing women to have their say. She talked about the verbiage in laws stating that at different times the people had been called, "white" or "taxpayers" or "church members" depending on what people they

wanted to have the right to have their say in the voting booth. I think she must have refuted every aspect of why men did not want women to vote in every way possible.

Even though her points were valid, her arguments strong and her view was right, I sincerely believe that she may have set the right to vote back a few years by going on and on about things that really did not make a difference in why or why not allow the women of the United States the right to voice their opinion on a ballot. She even went as far as to talk about the details of the ballot, how it should be printed, how it should be laid out and even showing ways to make the ballot easy for an illiterate person to understand.

All in all, as I read the speech, my mind kept wandering to the poor souls who had to listen to this very long speech that must have been so hard to endure. Thank goodness someone else came along and helped. I believe I read that Susan B. Anthony may have been with her when she delivered this speech. I just wonder what her reaction was, was she proud or did she want to crawl under the nearest rock?