The year 2010 marks the centennial of one step in giving full voting rights to women in Washington State. In 1883 and 1887 the territorial legislature voted to give women the vote, making Washington only the third territory to do so, but both times the territorial supreme court ruled women’s suffrage unconstitutional. Women were therefore unable to participate in the process of writing the constitution in 1889, and the draft that resulted did not include votes for women.

On October 1, 1889, male voters were asked to settle several questions. Should the proposed constitution be adopted? Where should the state capital be located? Should liquor be prohibited in the new state? Should women be given the vote? The constitution won; Olympia led North Yakima and Ellensburg; prohibition lost; and so did votes for women.

The struggle for women’s suffrage went on. The new state constitution did give the new legislature the right to give women the vote in school elections, and in 1890 the men in the legislature took that step. In 1898 a second women’s suffrage amendment failed statewide, but in 1910 the third effort succeeded, allowing women to participate in all state elections. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution finally gave women the right to vote in presidential elections.

Votes in the Snoqualmie Valley generally followed state trends when it came to women’s political rights, but the individual communities did see the issues differently. Furthermore, election records show that women throughout the valley became actively involved in school elections. Curiously, once women gained full voting rights in 1920, their involvement in local politics began to decline, and by the late 1930’s few local women were seeking elected offices anywhere in the valley. In 1940, however, Snoqualmie Valley women once again began to seek elected offices.

Votes for Women

The men of the Snoqualmie Valley were opposed to votes for women at first. There were only three local precincts when the first statewide vote on women’s suffrage was taken in 1889, and Tolt, Fall City and Snoqualmie all voted no by wide margins. In Snoqualmie and Tolt more men voted on the suffrage and prohibition issues than on the state constitution itself, but the low point for suffrage was the Snoqualmie precinct where the vote was 25 in favor, 78 against.

In 1898, a women’s suffrage amendment failed again statewide, but votes for women won a slim victory in the Snoqualmie Valley. A majority of men in Preston and Fall City voted for suffrage, and the vote was close in Tolt, Snoqualmie and North Bend. The totals for the combined precincts were 72 in favor, 68 opposed.

By the 1910 election, a majority of male voters in Washington State had come around to the idea that women should have full voting rights in the state, and a majority of those in the Snoqualmie Valley agreed. Suffrage won by substantial margins in Tolt, Preston, Fall City, Snoqualmie and Cedar Falls, but the measure lost again in North Bend and in the Tanner precinct east of North Bend. The combined vote was 143 in favor, 94 against.
**Focus on schools**

The decision in 1890 to allow women to participate in school elections provided a political opportunity that Snoqualmie Valley women quickly seized. The official record of King County school officials begins late, in the year 1895, and in that year three women won elections. Edna Lovering was elected clerk of the Fall City school district, while Mary Klaus became one of the three school directors (board members) in Snoqualmie, and Sarah Davis became a director in Tolt. Others may have served between 1890 and 1895.

Throughout the 1890’s women regularly served as clerks and directors up and down the Valley. Edna Lovering and Florence Bonnell settled in as clerks in Fall City for over a decade, and Louisa Gardiner and Annie Joyner were clerks in North Bend throughout the late-1890’s. Mrs. E.M. Reed and Minnie Ludvigson served as directors in Preston.

Between 1900 and 1910 women became a very strong force in Snoqualmie Valley school politics. In 1900, Rosa Pumphrey was elected as a director in North Bend, and she was followed by Annie Liddle, just twenty-five years old, and Ida Payne. Minerva Herndon was elected in Fall City in 1906. Agnes Knack and Rachel Richardson became directors in Tolt, and Sarah Davis returned to the Tolt board in 1906.

In Snoqualmie women largely took over the school board in 1900. Caroline Redding and her neighbor Katie Chapman both began long terms of service as directors in Snoqualmie that year, and they were later joined by Margaretthe Reinig and Sibylla Storrs. Etta Winter, Polena Weller and Emma Rutherford also served during the decade. Snoqualmie’s school board was made up entirely of women during several years of the decade.

**Retreat**

After women’s suffrage won in 1910, local women almost immediately began to withdraw from public life. After Emma Rutherford finished her term in 1912, no woman served on the Snoqualmie Board for over twenty years. Mrs. M.V. Terhune and former clerk Annie Joyner Willard were the only North Bend women to serve between 1903 and 1932. Sarah Davis finished her final term in Tolt in 1909 and was not followed by another woman for over two decades. Fall City elected Lucile Taylor to one term starting in 1918, and Aura Coppers defeated a male incumbent in 1924, but lost three years later.

Women did continue to serve on the school boards in some of the valley’s very small school districts. Sophia Edwin served Preston continuously between 1908 and 1919, and she was followed by two other women. After the tiny Taylor school district was formed in 1905, women quickly dominated that board. Bessie Norman was one of the initial directors of the North Fork School District in 1910, and Julia Ellis served a term beginning in 1920. Etta Graybael served on the Cedar Falls school board starting in 1933, but the Edgewick school district didn’t elect any women in its short nine-year span.

Once women won the state vote they could participate in municipal politics, but this rarely happened. Actually, in 1906, before it was legal, one or possibly two men in Fall City cast single votes for “Mrs. T. King” for justice of the peace and “Mrs. Connelly” for constable, but women received only scattered votes for positions in city government, usually for clerk or treasurer.
First Snoqualmie, then North Bend

There was only one, late, exception, in Snoqualmie. In 1931, Carol Van Horne was elected city treasurer, decisively defeating Mable Iverson and Bob Woods, and she was reelected nearly unanimously in 1932. In 1934 she was challenged by Elmer Anderson and Lillian Post, but won with a plurality. In 1935 she was outpolled by Anderson, the winner, and Ruth Litz, and she did not seek public office again.

When Amy English was elected city clerk in Snoqualmie in 1940 a new generation of women emerged as political leaders, but again, only in Snoqualmie. Amy English and her husband Joe owned a pharmacy in Snoqualmie, and were well-known in the community. In 1940 she received all but one of the 144 votes cast for town clerk. She was joined in town government in 1941 by Christine Max, who served parts of several terms on the city council, and, in 1942, by Susannah Northern, who was elected city treasurer unopposed.

In 1947, Amy English received just four votes for mayor, probably write-ins, and she finished last, but in September 1950 she was appointed mayor of Snoqualmie. The Valley Record noted that “Mrs. English had been a councilman since June, 1948...” She was the first woman to hold an executive position in any valley government.

As Amy English retired, Mary Whitaker joined the Snoqualmie council, first as an appointee and then on a coin toss following a tie election, but when she stepped down in 1960, Snoqualmie was run entirely by men for the next twenty years, almost another generation.

North Bend, skeptical of women in politics from the beginning, took the next step, however, electing Frances North to the city council in the late 1960’s. The entire valley supported her as she won five terms in the state house of representative between 1972 and 1982. She told an interviewer in 1983 that she never felt that being a woman was an issue in any of her campaigns.

By the time Frances North retired, women were regularly elected to city councils in both valley cities. Jeanne Hansen became mayor of Snoqualmie in 1987, and Joan Simpson was elected mayor of North Bend in 1995. Today valley voters are represented by women on the school board, both city councils, the county council, the state senate, the U.S. senate and in the governor’s mansion. It has taken 127 years.