

Ancestral Newsletter #21

Give Women the Right to Vote!

I've been reading about the surprisingly long and difficult battle women had in the fight for suffrage and now I'm all worked up and angry at men. I'm raising a militant fist in honor of our foremothers who have struggled under the thumb of male oppression and have had the courage to stand up and fight for women's rights!

Whew! Give me a moment here---deep breath---it's been an emotional ride. Okay. I think I've calmed down a bit.

Barbara Weitzer, our featured relative, was born at an exciting time for women. She was 27 years old when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920 giving women the right to vote. It never occurred to me to ask Aunt Barb about her younger days much less what she thought about woman suffrage so I don't know how she felt but I'm sure she was aware of the suffragist movement. In the article *Parade, Picket and Prison* I talk about three violent incidents that took place during Barbara's time and each received national attention. Not all suffragist activities were met with violence but considering that it took 72 years from the conception of the idea to its fruition, woman suffrage certainly met with plenty of resistance.

"Suffragettes" are women who advocate voting rights for women. "Suffragists" go a step further, advocating for the extension of voting rights for women and others. Americans were suffragists.

The suffrage movement began prior to the Civil War when churches encouraged women to campaign against slavery. Along the way, the women began to demand fair treatment for themselves as well. After the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment granted former slaves the right to vote but did not extend that right to women. The suffragists had campaigned for the Negro vote and felt deserted when the men did not return the favor. The men were legitimately concerned that white Southern women, acting in their own best interest, would vote against African-American issues.

Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the suffragists did make some headway on a state to state basis. Wisconsin gave women the right to vote in the presidential and some local elections by 1919. I can't help but wonder if Aunt Barbara realized what a significant and historic moment it was as she filled out her ballot for the very first time.

I feel a sort of sisterly kinship with my Great Aunt Barb because neither of us ever got married. I stayed single by choice; she stayed single because her father would not allow her to date the man she loved. Barbara grew up in a time of ankle length skirts, Susan B. Anthony, and suffragist parades. I grew up in a time of mini-skirts, Gloria Steinem and bra burnings. Aunt Barb and I even worked in the same building on 70<sup>th</sup> and Greenfield in West Allis, although many years apart. For me, it was Dalin's Jewelry store and in her time it was Wolff's restaurant and bakery.

Before we get started, I just want to remind you that Lillian Anderson is still looking for recipes for her cookbook. She is also interested if anyone knows how to make a couple of dishes her Grandma Anna Weitzer Haas made. One was mashed potatoes covered with an egg sauce and shaped like a corn shuck. The other was German noodles. Please help her out by sending a recipe of something you and your family enjoy. I know she'll appreciate it. Her address is: 7396 River Road  
Arena, WI 53503

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Barbara M Weitzer

## Parade, Picket and Prison

The first Woman's Rights Convention took place in Seneca Falls, N.Y. in 1848. Born out of a growing discontentment of woman's subservient status, the convention focused on women's issues. With rare exceptions, women could not: own property, vote, sign contracts, hold public office, enter college or pursue a career. Once married, the husband owned all the wife's possessions including her clothing, jewelry, any money she might have or might eventually earn. In the case of divorce, he retained the legal custodial rights to their children regardless of the type of person he might be.

*"The legal theory is, marriage makes the husband and wife one person, and that person is the husband."*  
---1850 suffragist document *Address to the Women of Ohio*

Men held the power and they were loath to share it.

*"...the order of things established at the creation of mankind, and continued six thousand years, would be completely broken up."*  
---1948 newspaper, *Mechanics Advocate*



### Parade

Woodrow Wilson arrived in Washington for his inauguration in March of 1913. Only a small group of people came out to welcome him---everyone else had gone to a parade.



Over 5,000 suffragists marched down Pennsylvania Ave past an estimated 500,000 spectators; most were men, many were angry. They yelled insults and obscenities; some tripped the women; some grabbed, pinched or spit on them; some ripped their clothing and some tried to climb up on the wagons. Along the route, the menacing crowd pressed in closer, narrowing the path and slowing the parade down to a crawl.

The police did little to protect the women. One officer even chastised the women saying, "There would be nothing like this if you women would all stay at home."



Note: ^ Parade with horses straight up from arrow.

Crowd closes in on suffrage parade.

The National Guard and the Federal Cavalry troops pushed back the crowd. A group of sympathetic college students linked arms to hold back the crowd and to clear a path for marchers that had been cut off from the main procession. Even the boy scouts tried to help but the two hour parade dragged on until late in the day.

Newspapers reported the ill treatment of the women and the nation was outraged. The U.S. Senate appointed a special committee to investigate the lack of police protection which resulted in the dismissal of the police chief. The parade made woman's suffrage a national topic of discussion and won more support for the cause.

### Picket

Five years later beginning on January 10, 1917, the suffragists staged a peaceful demonstration of dawn to dusk picketing at the White House. They held banners bearing messages such as "Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?"



The President managed to keep the nation from entering the war in Europe until April of 1917 when he asked Congress to declare war on Germany. In one of his speeches President Wilson said:

*“The world must be made safe for democracy. We shall fight for the things which we have always held nearest to our hearts---for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments.”*

The suffragists used the President's own words on their banners, believing that American women should certainly have a voice in their own government as well. They continued picketing as “silent sentinels” not shouting demands but getting their message across quietly on the banners they held. But, in time of war, many people felt the women were unpatriotic. Harassment became sport as men ripped banners off the poles, some even making wagers to see who could tear down the most. Ridicule, spitting, name-calling and kicking the women was all game.

*“...then more and more crowds; more and more insults; ...sometimes the crowd would edge nearer and nearer until there was but a foot of smothering, terror-fraught space between them and the pickets.”*  
---Suffragist Inez Haynes Irwin

Finally the police stepped in----and arrested the women. Some men who tried to protect the women from the mob were also arrested.

### Prison

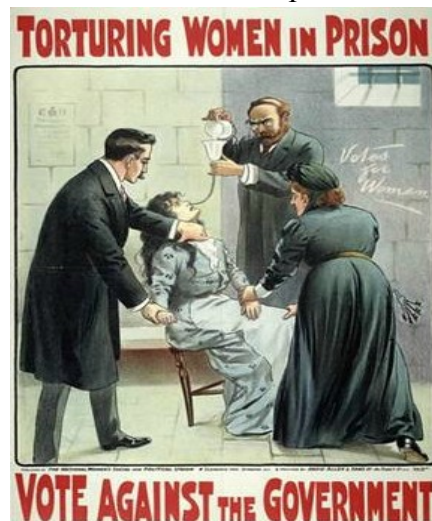
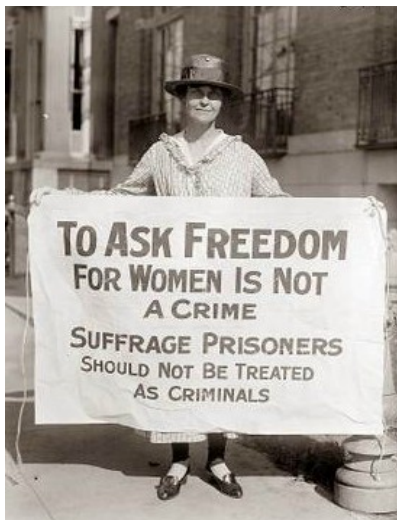
Charged with “...causing a crowd to gather and thus obstructing traffic” the first of the suffragists were convicted and ordered to pay a fine or spend 3 days in jail. Over the following months more women were arrested and incarcerated; some received sentences of six or seven months. Almost all of the women chose jail rather than pay the fine but life in prison was miserable. The place was filthy; sometimes a bucket served as a toilet; rats ran around freely and some meals were worm infested. There was also prison guard brutality. Lucy Burns spent a night with her arms raised and handcuffed to her jail cell bars because she tried to take a roll call of her fellow suffragist inmates.

Many of the women went on hunger strikes. As they became weaker, doctors and their assistance would force feed them.

*“I was held down by five people at legs, arms and head. (Dr.) Gannon pushed tube up left nostril...It hurt nose and throat very much...Food dumped directly into stomach feels like a ball of lead.”*  
---Suffragist Lucy Burns, 1917

*“Of course a stomach that has been unaccustomed to food for a week cannot take so much liquid cold, all in half a minute...it began to come up out of the corners of my mouth and down my neck until my hair was stiff with it. When he pulled the tube out, it was followed by a large part of the food...he walked away, leaving me in that messy condition.”*  
---Suffragist Elizabeth McShane, 1917.

News of the brutality reached the public and not long after President Wilson pardoned the women.



## Barbara Weitzer

Barbara Weitzer was born on January 6, 1893 in Stockarn, Oberfultz, Germany. She was the last one of the Anton and Barbara Brantl Weitzer family to be born in Germany. The Weitzer family immigrated to America the year Barbara was born, according to the census of 1900.



Barbara Weitzer



The Weitzer Family

The family settled on a farm south of Plain, WI. Besides school and chores, much of Barbara's early life would have revolved around family events, holidays and celebrations. Barbara was 10 years old in 1903, when her mother passed away, in the town of East Bristol. The following year, (1904) Barbara's sister Marie became a Nun with the new name of Sister Damian. Two other sisters, Catherine and Theresa also became Nuns.

In 1905, Barbara's sister Anna married Philip Haas. In 1909, her oldest brother George married Christina Bauer and Barbara stood up as Maid of Honor. The next year (1910) her brother John married Cecelia Brechtl and the couple moved to West Allis.

In 1918, a tornado struck the area around Plain. A few months later, Barbara's younger brother Alois joined the army. He sent her a letter from LeMans, France along with a souvenir pink silk handkerchief. The flags of France and the U.S. are embroidered on the front. The envelope is addressed to Barbara in Plain, WI on Route #2, Box 28 so we know she still lived in Plain at age 25.



Alois married Laura Reider in 1926 and Barbara was a bridesmaid in their wedding.

Below: Barbara W., Priest, Herman R., Frieda R., Albert R., Laura, Berniece Brickl, Al Weitzer, Priest





Barbara standing in back on left. Gusty directly below. Wolff's restaurant, bakery and cigar store

Barbara's brothers John, Alois and Tony began the Weitzer Brother's Plumbing and Hardware store in West Allis. And brother Andrew moved to the Milwaukee area and worked as a carpenter. At some point, Barbara and her father Anton Sr. also left Plain and moved to West Allis. Anton moved in with Alois and Laura and Barbara stayed with John and his wife Cecelia for awhile.

Barbara eventually found a job at Wolff's bakery and restaurant where she met her good friend and co-worker Gusty Helminiak.

Mom told me that Aunt Barbara had once been deeply in love, but the man married another woman. The man turned out to be an alcoholic so Mom said to Aunt Barb, "Aren't you glad now that you didn't marry him?" And Aunt Barb said, " Maybe he wouldn't drink so much if I had." Perhaps the love of her life got away, but she did find a life long friend in Gusty. In 1952, they traveled out West with their friend Koviak.

Barbara and Koviak in Colorado

Barbara touching snow in July of 1952



Barbara and Gusty shared a small apartment above a tavern on Greenfield Ave. I worked at Dalin's Jewelry, which was only about six blocks away, so I'd stop in once in awhile to say "Hello." I always marveled at them because they were both elderly but quite independent. They walked everywhere: stores, restaurants, church---maybe all that walking kept Aunt Barb healthy. She lived to be 93. She died on October 9, 1986 and was buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery.

Below: Theresa Krenz & son Joe with Barb Laura W., Barb (80<sup>th</sup> birthday), Gusty and Frieda Klaus

