

Music for the Campaign Trail

Written by Liz Almlie, Pierre, 2020.
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Historical Background

Like many political campaigns at the time, suffragists in South Dakota used songs to pep up their events and help people remember their message. When a state constitutional amendment to allow women to vote was put on the ballot for the election in November 1890, music was part of the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association's campaign strategy to support the amendment.

One of the state leaders was **John H. DeVoe**, who had been a musician in the Army during the Civil War. John and his wife Emma came to Huron in 1881. **Emma Smith DeVoe** often sang John's song "A Soldier's Tribute to Woman" when she traveled around the state to give speeches and organize local suffrage clubs. John wrote "A Soldier's Tribute" about all the work he saw women do for the Union Army in the war. He dedicated it to the Women's Relief Corps, an auxiliary to the Civil War veterans' association. For the 1890 campaign, the S.D.E.S.A. published a song book with many of John's suffrage songs and others. Some songs in the book were written for common tunes like "Battle Hymn of the Republic" or "America."

There was also **Irene Adams** of Webster who wrote a song called "Woman and the Ballot." A quartet of singers from Iroquois campaigned with Emma DeVoe in 1890, and numerous local choirs performed at major suffrage speeches and conventions. Later, **Rose Bower** of Rapid City used her musical abilities by whistling and playing the cornet in her suffrage work in 1907-1914. Bower and her cornet were also invited to tour with national speakers in New York and New Jersey during their campaigns in 1915.

A Soldier's Tribute to Woman.

To the Woman's Relief Corps of the United States this song is respectfully dedicated by J. H. DeVoe, Company "G," 9th N. Y. Art'y, 2d Brig., 3d Div., 6th A. C.

1.

In the long, long years ago, when I wore the loyal blue,
When the patriotic women, with their hearts so good and true,
Came to help us in our struggle, as no other ones could do,
Then I swore to help my sisters, for they nursed and brought me thro'.

CHORUS.

Yes, they nursed and brought me thro', when the fever laid me low,
In my dreams I now can see them, while they're flitting to and fro,
Then I swore to help the women, for their hearts were loyal too,
And my vote shall go to free them, for they nursed and brought me thro'.

2.

On the field of Petersburg, 'midst the screaming shot and shell,
Where the soul of man was tested, where the bravest soldiers fell,
There I saw the women kneeling, with their hearts so good and true,
By the bleeding, wounded soldiers, and they nursed and brought them thro'.—CHO.

3.

On the dome in Washington, there the goddess proudly reigns,
She's the emblem of our freedom, while our women are in chains;
And her light from Bedloe's tower gleams in mock'ry o'er the sea,
While our mothers, wives, and daughter's humbly beg for liberty.—CHO.

4.

Let us stand in solid phalanx, every man who wore the blue,
For our mothers, wives, and sweethearts, who to us were tried and true;
For no better friends, with truer hearts, on earth we'll ever find:
We will not forget the kindness of the girls we left behind.—CHO.

Your Turn!

1. Read "A Soldier's Tribute" above. Research any words or phrases you don't understand. What imagery did DeVoe use? Why does the song's narrator think women should be able to vote?
2. Write a song (from the following options) to a familiar tune or come up with a tune of your own, then perform the song for your family and/or friends. You can choose to write:
 - A suffrage song that Emma DeVoe could have used in 1890;
 - A song to commemorate the history of suffrage, or;
 - A song for a contemporary campaign to encourage people to vote.

Rapid City Daily Journal (SD), October 26, 1914.



Rose Bower