



Episode 1, Women's Suffrage Painting, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington D.C.

Gwendolyn Wright: It's a right we may take for granted today, but the struggle for women to win the vote was long and tough. For more than 50 years suffragists had lobbied the country state by state. By the dawn of the 20th century, they had succeeded in only four. In the winter of 1913, a small group of young women drew up an ambitious plan to jumpstart their cause. The goal: to win an amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote. Now Laura Greiner of League City, Texas, has a remarkable piece of artwork that may have been crucial to that struggle.

Laura: I was attracted to this painting because it's such a beautiful powerful image.

Gwendolyn: I'm Gwendolyn Wright. Laura's asked me to have a look at her picture. Well, this is really beautiful. And the colors are so vivid.

Laura: I found it in a garage sale. The house next to my mother in Galveston, Texas. I think it was about 20 years ago.

Gwendolyn: On first glance it looks like a poster from the early 20th century, announcing a woman's suffrage demonstration on March 3rd, 1913. I can't tell if it's original or a print. The costumes are a romantic evocation of medieval times. Though perhaps an odd choice of imagery for a protest march. Do you know anything about this artist Dale?

Laura: I don't. I don't know anything about that artist.

Gwendolyn: So tell me, Laura, what exactly would you like for me to find out about the painting?

Laura: Is this an original painting. And, any information you can find out about the artist.

Gwendolyn: I'm also curious why this image was chosen. I'm excited about this. May I take it with me?

Laura: Sure.

Gwendolyn: Thanks very much. I've been interested in women's history my whole career. I've never seen this image before, but it's quite provocative. This woman on the horse is very striking. I'm trumpeting the idea of votes for women. Carrying this procession behind her of women marching along toward the Capitol. This is not a timid group requesting something. As I pore through the history of the early suffrage movement, I make a discovery. The date on our poster does match the date of a major protest march for women's rights held in



Washington D.C. on March 3rd, 1913. And it seems our poster may have played a significant role. This image was used as the cover for the program of the 1913 march on Washington. It makes the choice of artwork even more intriguing. A medieval image for a 20th century march? The manuscripts department at the Library of Congress has some of the papers of the march's organizers. Archivist Janice Ruth offers to give me a hand.

Gwendolyn: You have a copy of the program?

Janice: Yeah, we do. Actually, we have two.

Gwendolyn: Oh! It's exactly that image. Janice can't tell if we have the original artwork. You haven't come across any reference to the original artwork for this cover?

Janice: No. I've never heard of there being an original in existence.

Gwendolyn: She says understanding more about the march organizers is a good first step toward figuring out why this design was chosen. So tell me how this procession came to be.

Janice: It's actually the brainchild of Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, who became acquainted with one another in Britain where they were active in the British suffrage campaign.

Gwendolyn: Paul and Burns were Americans, the closest of friends and political allies.

Janice: They actually met in a police station. They were both arrested for some of their suffrage demonstrations there.

Gwendolyn: Janice tells me how Paul and Burns had been influenced by the hunger strikes and civil disobedience of British militants. They returned to the U.S. determined to take women's suffrage from a regional to a national issue.

Janice: Paul and Burns wanted to instil in the American campaign a renewed vigor. They wanted to adopt some of the sort of confrontational tactics that had been used effectively in Britain. And they come up with this grand idea to stage in Washington D.C. the first national women's suffrage procession.

Gwendolyn: For maximum effect, they would hold it on the eve of Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

Janice: This is going to be the most conspicuous and important demonstration that has ever been attempted by suffragists in the country. They know that basically there's going to be lots and lots of people in town for



Wilson's inaugural the following day. They also know there's going to be lots of media in town. Alice Paul was incredibly savvy in terms of public relations.

Gwendolyn: A major priority was to create a defining image for the march. But Paul and Burns didn't have much time. Just nine weeks to pull off the most ambitious suffrage demonstration ever attempted in the United States. Janice doesn't know why Paul and Burns settled on this particular image, but the art did have a galvanizing effect on the marchers.

Janice: This is a suffrage organizer in Pennsylvania actually writing to Paul and asking "Do you have extra copies? We'd love to have them as a remembrance of that wonderful day".

Gwendolyn: And one lady said that tears were in the eyes of both her and her husband. I'm trying to find some information about Dale. Do you know about this artist?

Janice: No. Not specifically the artist.

Gwendolyn: It seems as if this art did play a starring role in that famous march. And if Laura has the original, it's an important piece of history. Down the hall are the Library of Congress conservators, Diane van der Reyden and Nels Olsen.

Diane: Oh, how lovely.

Gwendolyn: They can tell straight away it's paint. So, if they can pinpoint when and how the piece was made, we can tell almost certainly if it is the artist's original.

Diane: We could tell you if the materials are characteristic of what would have been used at the time. We can tell you if the materials have aged.

Gwendolyn: First step, they examine the paper under ultraviolet light.

Diane: One thing we want to look at is whether there are any general brighteners in this. That's something that you'd find in much more modern papers.

Gwendolyn: It's unlikely this was done on modern paper. And the paint looks old too.

Diane: And you can see on the screen there...this paint has cracked. And that's very characteristic of what a thick paint would do over time.



Gwendolyn: And there's more. Under the paint Diane finds what she believes is some kind of pencil drawing.

Diane: It's very exciting to be able to see the reflection that is coming off of the graphite.

Gwendolyn: These could be the fingerprints of the artist's original sketch. But Diane needs to take a closer look.

Diane: What we'd like to see is if there's graphite in other parts of this piece. And for that we would need to do some image analysis.

Gwendolyn: Diane and Nels take a few high resolution pictures to analyze further. Meanwhile, I'm taking Laura's picture to the Schleisinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard University. They have a large collection of suffrage materials. Professor Nancy Cott has offered to help figure out why this art was chosen.

Gwendolyn: I can't wait to show you this.

Nancy: Oh, my.

Gwendolyn: Look, it's in great condition.

Nancy: It's stunning! I've seen the program that this was presumably the mockup for and it's much smaller. I'm really surprised to see it at such a large scale.

Gwendolyn: I was hoping we can just get a sense of how imagery was used. Nancy says the art clearly shows how the influence of the London militants had rubbed off on Alice Paul. The picture illustrates a strategic choice this 28-year-old made in the winter of 1913.

Nancy: The Alice Paul faction specifically said women shouldn't beg for the vote. They should demand the vote. They should be more aggressive in their approach to claiming this right. And this kind of marshal effect that the woman on the horse with her horn as a herald is along those lines.

Gwendolyn: Then there's the color scheme, purple and gold. By combining colors, Alice Paul and our mystery artist demonstrated shrewd political judgment.

Nancy: Colors really had symbolic significance. Gold or yellow was traditional in the woman's suffrage movement since the 1860s. But Paul and Burns were very indebted to the militants in England and purple was the militants color in England, so they melded that with the gold.



Gwendolyn: It would seem as if Alice Paul and Dale are choosing these colors in a very politically savvy way. They want to build a broad coalition of supporters.

Gwendolyn: Whoever Dale was, the artist did a masterful job. The marchers come across as dignified and upstanding. Nancy tells me that would pay off too.

Nancy: As soon as the women started moving down the avenue in Washington D.C. they were attacked both verbally and physically by men.

Gwendolyn: Reporters captured the chaos in the streets of the Capitol.

Nancy: "Parade struggles to victory despite disgraceful scenes". "Women were insulted, kicked and struck by ruffians, and many of the policemen on the spot made no effort to stop these outrages".

Gwendolyn: The suffragists gained public sympathy.

Nancy: It was regarded as an embarrassment for the Capitol, but a success for the suffrage movement.

Gwendolyn: The protestors wound up on the moral high ground. That positive image would eventually help win them a constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote.

Gwendolyn: Do you have any idea who Dale was?

Nancy: No, No. There are a lot of women who did this sort of drawing.

Gwendolyn: I've still got no leads on who Dale might be. Time to hit the books. Three artists whose last name is Dale, all of whom were practicing around 1913. One is named Ellen Dale. She lived in Salem. In 1913, long distance communication was slow and unreliable. From the organizers base in D.C., it might have been difficult to use an artist all the way in Massachusetts. And then there's Marguerite Dale, but she was practicing in Australia. There's no way. Then there's Benjamin Moran Dale, who was born in 1889 in Philadelphia. That's a lot closer to Washington D.C. But in 1913, he was only 24. This is fascinating. Here from the Washington Post is Benjamin Dale's wedding announcement. Benjamin Moran Dale of Washington DC has gotten married. So he's living in Washington. That makes him look a lot more promising. Here's his obituary. Benjamin Moran Dale worked for a number of magazines. I might be able to find samples of his work in periodicals. It turns out that Ben Dale did several illustrations for the Ladies Home Journal. Let's see what they look like. This 1929...But this signature, it's just not the same as the one we have on our watercolor. It has Ben Dale, a full name and the letters aren't interconnected. That's no help. Let me go back to earlier in his career. Here it is!



Early Benjamin Dale illustrations from the 1914 Philadelphia Ledger with exactly the same signature as our piece. So now we know that Benjamin Moran Dale, a young illustrator in Washington D.C., is the artist we've been looking for. So a young man, Ben Dale, was responsible for this major women's suffrage image. Time to find out from Nels and Diane at the Library of Congress if we have his original.

Diane: So...

Gwendolyn: Do you have a verdict for me?

Diane: Yes, I think we do.

Gwendolyn: I think Laura will want to see what Nels and Diane show me next. I was able to figure out the artist was not a woman. It was a young man named Benjamin Moran Dale. Twenty-four years old at the time. A supporter of women's suffrage.

Laura: All right!

Gwendolyn: I brought these other pictures that show you other examples of his work. I tell Laura how by winning public support for the marchers, Dale's art had ultimately helped women win the vote.

Laura: You're kidding.

Gwendolyn: All that remained was to figure out if Laura owns the original artwork. Diane and Nels at the Library of Congress had a verdict.

Diane: We've done quite a lot of image analysis on it.

Nels: We've looked at the IR part of the spectrum.

Gwendolyn: By isolating the infrared light, it becomes clear that the graphite markings we'd seen earlier are almost certainly the artist's original sketch.

Diane: We think it could be an illustrator's drawing from the early 1900s, 1913 period.

Laura: Oh, my God! I am so excited. [Chuckles]. That is just wonderful news.



Gwendolyn: Now Laura, I want you to imagine that you're standing here, Pennsylvania Avenue, March 3rd, 1913, a view of the Capitol. There are 8000 women marching in the street. 20,000 people in grandstands and all of them have programs that have the cover of which you have the original artwork.

Laura: Oh, my God!

Gwendolyn: That program represents a major shift in the effort to win women's suffrage saying it was not simply a local or state matter. That all American women should have the right to vote.

Laura: God. That's amazing.

Gwendolyn: And your image was a powerful part of that.

Laura: That's amazing. God! I didn't know this was going to be such a powerful image. I feel proud. Very proud to own it. I'm astonished that I kept it in my garage for so long and never did anything with it. And I'm just amazed that this is real. Thank you so much. [Laughs and hugs Gwendolyn]

Gwendolyn: It was...Well, I really enjoyed doing this. Now we'll go take over the Capitol, okay. [Both laughing]

Laura: Onward.

Gwendolyn: Right! Paul and Burns would spend months in prison for their activism. In 1917, Alice Paul even participated in a much publicized hunger strike. Finally, in 1920, the two women prevailed. The 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote.