

At Eastertime this year, it had been a half century since Miss Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the nation's first Congresswoman, voted no when a reluctant Woodrow Wilson asked for a resolution of war against the Central powers of Europe. She joined 55 of her male colleagues in so doing. But a little more than a quarter century later, on December 8, 1941, she was again a member of the House of Representatives from Montana, and this time hers was the only dissenting vote when Franklin Delano Roosevelt asked for a declaration of war against Japan. Unbelievable pressures to change her vote were brought against Jeannette Rankin in 1917. In 1941, Speaker Sam Rayburn brushed aside her objection to unanimous consideration of the resolution, and when her dissenting voice was heard, "a chorus of hisses and boos" greeted it, according to the Associated Press. We believe our readers will be interested to know that Miss Rankin, still vigorous at 86 years old, is busy with a new project which carries overtones of the same undeniable originality, courage and humanitarianism which animated her throughout her career: she is building a "cooperative homestead for unemployed homemakers" on her farm at Watkinsville, Georgia. With typical spunk, she makes it clear that this is not a dead end for homeless, helpless women, but rather a place where ladies whose families no longer need them can live on a cooperative and financially sensible basis. Although she has long since reached the point of objectivity about her own political career, Jeannette Rankin has never had cause to believe that she could ever in conscience vote her countrymen into war.

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From Montana

by JOHN C. BOARD

IN 1914, while Europe's Allied and Central powers were setting the stage for World War I, a different sort of campaign was being waged—with equal intensity—in Montana and the rest of the nation: the right of nearly half the country's citizenry to vote. This cause, popularly called woman's suffrage, was being discussed with desperate fervor on the one side, and everything from tongue-in-cheek tolerance to downright vituperation on the other. It was in the western states such as Montana—where the pioneer woman was still highly regarded—that the campaign achieved its first tangible success.

State chairman of Montana's suffrage activities was Miss Jeannette Rankin, a young woman who had been born near Missoula when Montana was yet a territory. Her personal magnetism, drive, and enthusiasm had attracted Katherine Devereaux Blake, "General" Rosalie Jones, "Colonel" Ida Craft, and the Irish laundry worker, Margaret Hinchey of New York City, to come to the state and give their aid to Montana's suffrage workers.¹

To illustrate the progress of the movement, let us look at a typical week in July, 1914. Margaret Hinchey, with humor, seriousness, and tact, had attracted and held audiences wherever she went and wherever she spoke. In Great Falls she and Miss Rankin were the first women to hold an open air meeting pleading suffrage. The two spoke from the rear of an automobile at the corner of Central Avenue and Third Street. The second night of their appearance "several hundred men . . . with a sprinkling of women . . . jammed from curb to curb" listened to them for two hours.²

From Great Falls, Miss Rankin left for Lewistown to meet every newspaper editor attending the State Press Association's meeting and to solicit his support.³ After her Lewistown work, Miss Rankin remained in Central Montana, campaigning for the ballot for women.

At left, the first official portrait of Hon. Jeannette Rankin after she had been sworn in as America's first woman member of Congress in April, 1917.

¹ *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, July 20, 1914. *Great Falls Leader*, July 22, 1914.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Great Falls Leader*, July 23, 1914.

NEWSPAPER HEADLINES on July 29, 1914, carried news of the opening hostilities in Europe, news which people had heard, feared, and didn't want to believe. Miss Rankin has recalled the day in these words:

I was in a small town in central Montana . . . when the word came that they had started war in Europe. It seemed to me at that time that the end of the world had come. I felt that I was the only person who hadn't been informed that a war was coming. Later I found that others were as shocked as I was. . . . But one of the first things we had talked about in woman suffrage [was] that it was women's job to get rid of war.⁴

It was now clear that a war was indeed raging in Europe, that it was rapidly engulfing a continent. But Europe had a warring history and, after all, the theater of conflict was thousands of miles away from Tallahassee, Indianapolis, Buffalo, Santa Fe, Portland, and Missoula, Montana. The probability that the United States would become directly involved had not yet captured the average mind in America; whether the possibility became a reality in the personal thinking and discussions of most people at the time is hard to determine. Most of them seemed to feel that the best thing to do was avoid direct involvement and tend to matters at home.

Certainly Europe's war, during that summer 53 years ago, did not slow down the crusading ladies of Montana. When male voters of Montana went to the polls on Tuesday, November 3, 1914, they voted in favor of the ballot for their women, although it was not until Saturday, November 7, that the state's newspapers began conceding the fact that the suffrage issue might have carried.⁵

"Around Miss Rankin centered all the work throughout the state," stated Mary

⁴ Interview with Jeannette Rankin, August 29 and 30, 1963. Hereafter cited as: J. R. Interview.

⁵ *The Great Falls Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1914.



MISS RANKIN, (above) about to be seated in Congress in April 50 years ago, spoke from the balcony of the National American Woman Suffrage Association's headquarters on Rhode Island Avenue in Washington, D. C. With her on the balcony is Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, national president of the group which had finally





MARGARET HINCHEY, the Irish laundry woman who was one of the most effective spokesmen for the suffrage movement, heads a parade (below) in New York City on Labor Day in 1914. It was Mrs. Hinchey who came to Montana earlier that year to join Miss Rankin in furthering the cause of woman's suffrage in Montana, indirectly assisting "The Lady From Montana," in becoming the country's first Congresswoman.



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E. O'Neil of Butte in her assessment on how suffrage was won in Montana.⁶ For Jeannette Rankin the victory had come less than four years after Montana's final effort had begun. With her native state added to the suffrage column, her efforts could now be concentrated in her work as a field secretary for the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She would continue in that position even though, at the same time, she was destined to discover a more effective way to serve the cause.

To Miss Rankin—and a major number of American women—suffrage was the primary battle. But to those in positions of power, it was only one of many issues in a changing world. The battle of importance in the mind of Secretary of State Robert Lansing was, quite naturally, the war in Europe. So impressed was he by its slaughter, general atrocities, and far-reaching effects, that he wrote on April 15, 1915: "Society . . . has cast aside its cloak of ease and is seeking in all earnestness to be useful. Men have grown serious-minded, and serious-mindedness leads to morality." According to the Secretary "Society is finding itself. Life is becoming real."⁷

The Good Government League of Missoula, Montana, was an example of women acting upon great moral issues which they felt most directly affected them. Missoula's League met on July 8, 1916. It was at this meeting that they formally suggested Miss Rankin as a candidate for Congress.⁸

Actually, Jeannette Rankin had already made the decision to run for Congress. Earlier in the month she had met at her home with some representative women from around the state. With their thinking and support and with the powerful backing of her brother, Wellington, the question was settled: she would be a candidate for the United States House of Representatives.

⁶ *The Suffragist*, November 14, 1914, p. 3.

⁷ Lansing, Robert, MSS Confidential Memoranda and Notes, April 15, 1915. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸ *The Daily Missoulian*, July 9, 1916.

WAR WAS not the primary issue which prompted Miss Rankin's candidacy for Congress. "I've said a good many times that I never ran for Congress; I ran for women's suffrage . . .," she has stated.⁹

On July 13, 1916, Miss Rankin spoke to an assembled audience in the Butte Grill and disclosed her political platform.¹⁰ In general terms, her stand was for "national equal suffrage, child welfare, greater publicity in congressional affairs, and prohibition." Her slogan: *Let the People Know*.¹¹

(It should be added, parenthetically, that Miss Rankin was not committed to Prohibition until after the primary election; indeed, she had deliberately avoided it as being irrelevant to suffrage.)

When the deadline for filing petitions for Congress closed, there were seven men, in addition to Miss Rankin, listed on the ballot seeking the Republican Party's endorsement. Two of the eight would be the party's candidates. The primary election was held on August 29, and Miss Rankin led her ticket with 22,549 votes. George W. Farr followed with 7,100 votes less. It is interesting to note that only one other candidate for public office in Montana polled a greater number than she: Samuel V. Stewart, incumbent Democratic Governor, garnered 28,185 votes—5,636 more votes than Miss Rankin.¹²

Speaking in the evening from a car parked on Main Street in front of Larabee Brothers' Bank in Deer Lodge on September 2, Jeannette Rankin began the final phase of her successful campaign.¹³ While she adhered to the platform she had outlined during the primary, the war in Europe did not escape her atten-

tion. She has since commented on President Wilson's campaign slogan, *He Kept Us Out Of War*: "It [the slogan] seemed . . . too pat. [It] didn't say anything . . . [about] what he was going to do about the future It just concerned what he had done in the past, and I was very skeptical about what his program really was."¹⁴

Regardless of Miss Rankin's thoughts about war, she has said about that campaign: "My speeches weren't so very different from the speeches I made in the suffrage campaign."¹⁵ Neither were the charges leveled at her different from much of the antisuffrage accusations used before: "A woman's place is in the home." Miss Rankin had no argument against such charges except that the way to protect the home was for women to have a voice in government. In 1911, she told the Montana legislature: "It is beautiful and right that a mother should nurse her child through typhoid fever, but it is also beautiful and right that she should have a voice in regulating the milk supply from which typhoid resulted."¹⁶

During the months of September, October, and the first part of November, 1916, Miss Rankin traveled by train, car, and, in some cases, horse-drawn carriage, to meet the voters. (In an interview with Wellington D. Rankin two years before his death, he said of his sister, "She was one of the best single-handed campaigners I ever saw.")

Miss Rankin's opponents may have had too much dignity when they campaigned against her in 1916—too much dignity to meet her on the same level on which she met the voters. For her, no place was out of bounds, whether it be a street corner opposite a saloon, standing and meeting men as they emerged from the shaft of a mine, or socializing with the voters in a dance hall on Saturday night. Since Montana was not divided into Congressional districts in 1916, she had the whole state to canvass.

⁹ J. R. Interview. Interview with Wellington D. Rankin, March 23, 1964. Hereafter cited as: W. D. R. Interview.

¹⁰ *The Anaconda Standard*, July 12 and 14, 1916.

¹¹ *Statement of Candidates For Nomination, Republican Party, Primary Election, August 29, 1916* (Secretary of State, 1916), p. 12, MSS Jeannette Rankin.

¹² Ellis L. Waldron, *Montana Politics Since 1864* (Missoula, Montana: Montana State University Press, 1958), p. 155.

¹³ *The Anaconda Standard*, September 3, 1916.

¹⁴ J. R. Interview.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *The Helena Daily Independent*, February 2, 1911.



THE LATE WELLINGTON D. RANKIN, a leading Montana lawyer and businessman for many years, posed with his sister, Jeannette, in front of the Rankin home in Missoula while she was campaigning in 1916 for a seat in the 65th Congress. Campaign manager and strongest supporter of his sister, Mr. Rankin tried in vain to dissuade her from casting a negative vote on the war resolution of 1917. This news photo was widely published in December, 1941, when Miss Rankin, again a member of Congress, cast the only vote against our entry into World War II.

In eastern Montana the ranches were miles apart, but none within a reasonable distance from her trail escaped a visit from her. Her direct approach paid off when the ballots were cast on November 7.

When Miss Rankin retired election night, she had been advised by *The Daily Missoulian* that she had lost. On Wednesday morning, however, her brother—who had studied and knew the voting history of Montana's counties—assured her that she had won. For the most part, newspapers of the eastern United States accepted Miss Rankin's victory more readily than did their Montana counterparts.

On Wednesday, the *Washington Post* carried the headline, WOMAN TO BE IN CONGRESS — MONTANA RE-

URNS SHOW. Buried in an election story in the Thursday morning edition of the *New York Times* was a paragraph that began, "Congress is to have its first woman member." Finally, on Friday, a secondary headline in *The Daily Missoulian* read, RANKIN'S ELECTION IS NOW SURE. At least two Montana newspapers never announced openly that Miss Rankin had won. The *Great Falls Tribune* on Friday came close in a secondary headline MISS RANKIN APPEARS SAFE. Under the headline, THE OFFICIAL COUNT WILL DECIDE SOME, the *Anaconda Standard's* one article which came closest to recognizing her victory began, "Miss Jeanette [sic] Rankin was advised today that she has been elected to Congress . . .". Indeed, she had been elected—by a plurality of 7,567 votes.



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Miss Rankin posed for this portrait by Matzene of Chicago in 1917, putting to rest some of the reports that she was much older or much younger, or even that she "packs a 44 six-shooter and trims her skirts with chaps fur." Actually, "The Lady From Montana" was a handsome young woman of thirty-six when she was elected to Congress, noted for her tasteful dress and dignified and restrained behavior. As news stories recently released from her home at Watkinsville, Ga. indicate, however, Miss Rankin has never wavered from her firm belief that war is a stupid and futile way in which to settle international disputes and that it is the particular job of women to put a stop to it.

CONGRESSWOMAN - E L E C T Rankin began receiving letters as soon as the announcement of her election officially came. As the first woman elected to Congress, her name would, it was believed, give a boost to certain products. A United Press release reported on November 20 that a toothpaste concern would pay her \$5,000 for a picture of her teeth, that an automobile concern would give her a new car if she would allow her ownership to be used for advertising purposes. The same news release stated that she had received offers of marriage as well as requests for her picture. Letters were not, however, the only things which found their way to the Rankin home in Missoula. Reporters, news photographers, and cameramen soon arrived and patrolled the area in which she lived. Finally, the pressure of their company became so great that Miss Rankin refused to leave her home until all news representatives had left.¹⁷

"To suddenly be thrown into such publicity," Miss Rankin has said, "was a great shock. It was very hard for me to comprehend—to realize that it made a difference what I did do and didn't do from then on."¹⁸

The fact that Miss Rankin was the first woman to be elected to Congress in itself helps to explain the great interest of the press in her and her activities. This interest is further understandable when it is realized that in 1916 only twelve of the forty-eight states permitted its women to vote.

For the most part, the press in the United States was concerned with her looks, the color of her eyes, her ability to cook, sew, and entertain. Writing in *The Evening Mail*, Zoe Beckley hysterically stated, ". . . I am glad, glad, glad even to pollyannaism that Jeannette is not 'freakish' or 'mannish' or 'stand offish' or 'shrewish' or of any type likely to antagonize the company of gentlemen whose realm has hitherto been uninvaded

¹⁷ *The New York Times*, November 17, 1916.

¹⁸ J. R. Interview.

by petticoats.”¹⁹ The Louisville *Courier-Journal* questioned, “Breathes there a man with heart so brave that he would want to become one of a deliberate body made up of 434 women and himself?” “A woman in Congress!” chortled the New York *Evening Post*, “That marks a political revolution indeed.”

Across the Atlantic in France, Monsieur Georges Montorgueil had his own thoughts. In an editorial in the *Argus de la Presse*, the United States was described as “a distressing utopia” as a result of its suffrage activity and Miss Rankin’s election.²⁰

If a reader had followed the contemporary newspaper and magazine articles on Miss Rankin from the time of her election until the time she was sworn into the House of Representatives, he would surely have been confused. Some things were certain, however: she had brown hair, not red; she had gray eyes, not green, black, blue, brown, or hazel; she was thirty-six, not thirty-seven, thirty-three, or a “slip-of-a-girl.” And certainly she did not fit one politician’s description: “A Montana suffragist—right out of the cattle country. Suppose she packs a 44 six-shooter and trims her skirts with chaps fur.”²¹

After the initial wave of publicity subsided, the first public statement from Congresswoman-elect Rankin was issued to the press on November 17, 1916. It read:

*I am deeply conscious of the responsibility resting upon me. I earnestly hope that I may be of some substantial service, however slight, to the men and women of Montana, my native state, and of the nation.*²²

Her first public speech was given on the same day. It consisted of fifty-eight words and was delivered before the student body of the University of Mon-

tana from which Miss Rankin had graduated in 1902. The brief speech reflected the same attitude as her public statement.

After it had been delivered, America’s first Congresswoman made no more public speeches until the spring of 1917. She did, however, grant a few interviews. Sometime in January, 1917, she employed the speaker’s bureau firm of Lee Keedick of New York City to arrange for her public appearances. Her contract with Mr. Keedick specified that she would receive \$500 for each speaking appearance. In the words of her brother, that was “a lot of money for a young girl from the country.”²³ A curious clause in her contract specified that it would end if the question of war was presented before Congress and if she voted against it.²⁴

The silence of Congresswoman-elect Rankin cannot be construed to mean that she was oblivious to the situation in Europe. There the war continued and the nation’s leaders pondered the United States’ probable degree of involvement. While Miss Rankin made preparations for her journey to the eastern seaboard to fulfill her speaking engagements and make living arrangements in Washington, D. C., the Kaiser’s armies continued to menace Europe. Their progress was assessed daily by the U.S. State Department.

On January 28, 1917, Secretary of State Robert Lansing wrote in his journal of the inevitability of our entry into the war against Germany. He wrote of President Wilson’s reluctance to act upon the advice of those who urged immediate involvement. The Secretary recognized that the American people were not completely convinced of the German menace. In his evaluation, the President would have to have a united people behind him before war could be declared. In Lansing’s words: “. . . we can no more avoid entering this war against Germany than we can avoid the

¹⁹ *The Evening Mail*, March 1, 1917.

²⁰ *Argus de la Presse*, November 11, 1916.

²¹ *The San Francisco Chronicle*, undated clipping, MSS Jeanette Rankin.

²² *The Daily Missoulian*, November 18, 1916.

²³ W. D. R. Interview.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

progress of time. It is as certain as fate. . . . War cannot come too soon to suit me since I know that it must come at last."²⁵

It is not known whether, when Miss Rankin left Missoula, she was aware of Secretary Lansing's thoughts. It is highly probable, of course, that she was thinking with qualified reservations about the same subject. At any rate, she arrived in New York City on February 24, 1917. While there she was a guest in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Lees Laidlaw at 6 East Sixty-Sixth Street. Her friendship with the Laidlaws had begun in her early days in suffrage work and had grown through the years. To Miss Rankin, the Laidlaws had given much moral support and help. Mrs. Laidlaw was vice-chairman of the New York State Suffrage Association and she and her husband had made substantial financial contributions to the cause. Mr. Laidlaw had made a \$100 contribution to Miss Rankin's primary campaign the year before.²⁶

In New York City, Miss Rankin held her first news conference. It was the evening of February 25, and questions from the reporters lasted for an hour. The Congresswoman-elect was cautious and allowed herself to be committed only to supporting the federal amendment to the Constitution for woman suffrage and for supporting a Federal Children's Bureau. On one point, *The Washington Post* reported, "She has not decided definitely about universal military training; . . . [She] would not state whether she was a pacifist. . . ."²⁷

Speaking on "Democracy and Government," Miss Rankin made her first official public address in Carnegie Hall on Friday, March 2, 1917. It was a general speech as reported, relating to woman suffrage, child welfare, and industrial questions as they affected the State of Montana.

²⁵ Lansing, Robert, *Op. Cit.*, January 28, 1917.

²⁶ *The Anaconda Standard*, October 31, 1916. W. D. R. Interview.

²⁷ *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1917.

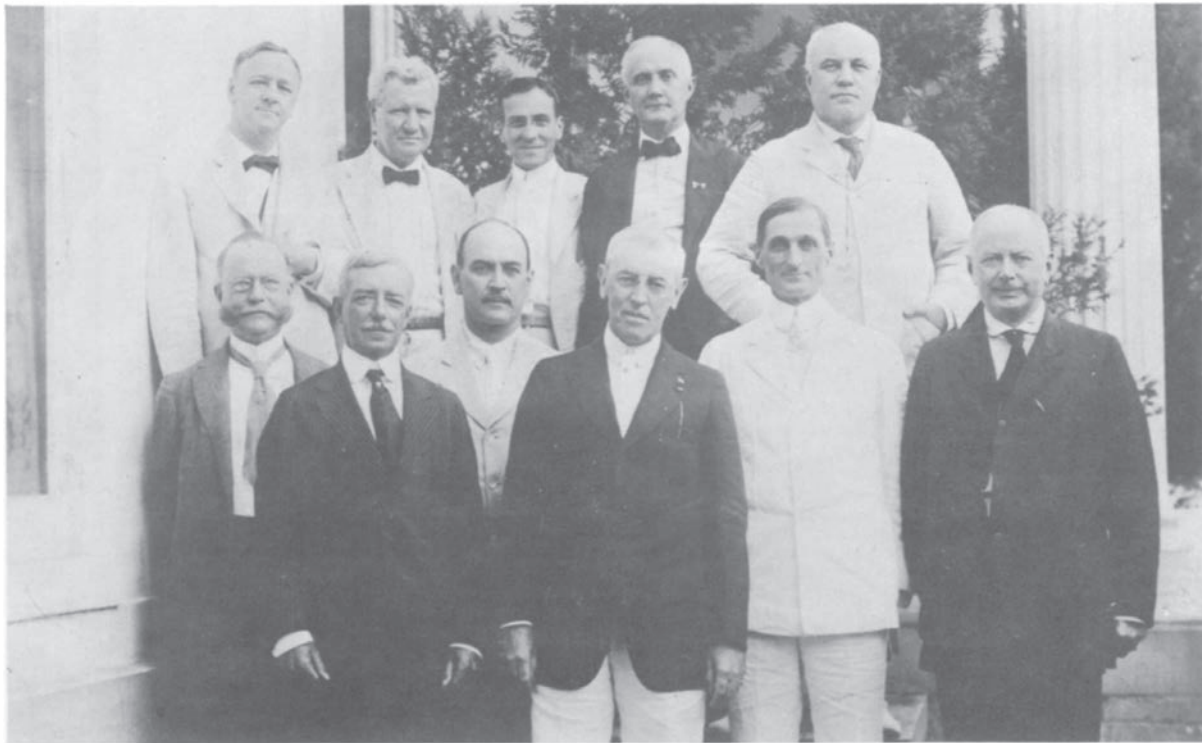
The evening included the reading of a letter from former President Theodore Roosevelt which expressed his regret at not being able to attend.²⁸ This did not disappoint Miss Rankin as much as it might have, because she and her brother had an invitation to dine at the Roosevelt home at Oyster Bay. Their evening with Theodore Roosevelt lasted for some four hours. The former President, as usual, talked about many subjects. Two of the main topics were President Wilson and war. To Roosevelt, President Wilson was "that fellow in the White House [who] . . . if he had a lick of sense or an ounce of courage . . . could have stopped [the war in Europe]." Although Roosevelt spoke much about war, "he didn't urge [Miss Rankin] to vote for it." One can only guess at Miss Rankin's reaction—according to her brother, "She didn't say much."²⁹

Before Congresswoman-elect Rankin arrived in Washington, D. C. on March 31, she had spoken in Rhode Island and Connecticut as well as making other than her Carnegie Hall appearance in New York. Her official duties as a member of Congress began at noon on March 4, 1917. The Constitution prescribed that, "the Congress shall assemble at least once in every year, and such meeting shall be on the first Monday in December . . .". The duties and responsibilities of Congressmen made it necessary for them to be in Washington to attend to business. Congresswoman-elect Rankin's secretaries had preceded her to Washington to set up her office and to tend to perfunctory duties. Her arrival in the nation's capital was hastened as the result of a meeting of the President's Cabinet on March 20.

This fateful meeting was, to Secretary Lansing, "the most momentous and . . . the most historic of any of those which have been held since . . . [he had assumed office]." The reason: "the question of war with Germany and the abandonment of the policy of neutrality which has

²⁸ *The New York Times*, March 3, 1917.

²⁹ W. D. R. Interview.



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PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON, the lover of peace who reluctantly delivered his message of war in 1917, posed in that year with his cabinet. They are identified as follows: Front row, left to right, William C. Redfield, Secretary of Commerce; Robert Lansing, Secretary of State; David F. Houston, Secretary of Agriculture; President Wilson; William G. McAdoo, Secretary of Treasury; Albert S. Burleson, Postmaster General. Back row, left to right, Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy; William B. Wilson, Secretary of Labor; Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War; Thomas W. Gregory, Attorney General, and Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior.

been pursued for two years and a half." It was at this meeting that the ten members of the President's Cabinet unanimously urged him to call Congress into session and place before it the question of war with Germany. It was the opinion of Secretary Lansing and Postmaster General Burleson that Congress should be summoned into extraordinary session on April 2, 1917.³⁰

On the morning of the day that Congress convened into extraordinary session, the suffrage leaders of the United States officially recognized the significance of Miss Rankin's political attainment. There at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington at 9:00 A.M. to honor their Member of Congress were Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association; Miss Alice Paul, president of the National Woman's Party; Miss Julia Lathrop, representing the Children's

Bureau; and other notable ladies such as Mrs. Maude Wood Park, Katherine Anthony, Elizabeth Watson, Miss Anne Martin, Mrs. James Lees Laidlaw, and others. It was an audience unified in support of Miss Rankin's achievement. It was also a divided body, since scattered throughout the audience were women with and without the "white paper armlets of the pacifists." In more ways than one, Jeannette Rankin was the center of attention.

After breakfast, the Congresswoman made a short speech from the balcony of the headquarters of the National American Woman Suffrage Association on Rhode Island Avenue. From there a motorcade delivered her to the nation's capitol building. The pictures of the day show her with a serious expression on her face. One can only guess at the thoughts in her mind. It was a memorable moment for her and for the women of the country, complicated by the

³⁰ Lansing, Robert, *Op. Cit.*, March 20, 1917.

thought of the impending business before the Congress.³¹

At 12:00 noon in the House of Representatives, Mr. South Tremble, clerk of the last House, assembled its members. Escorted by Congressman John M. Evans of Montana, Miss Rankin entered the chamber of the House and was applauded as people began to recognize her. When her name was called on the roll by states, the members of the House rose, applauded and cheered, and it was necessary for Miss Rankin to rise and bow twice.

In her book, *Washington Wife, Journal of Ellen Maury Slayden from 1897-1919*, Mrs. Slayden gave her impressions of the occasion:

The chief interest of the morning—even exceeding that in the election of a Speaker, as Clark was a for-gone conclusion—was the new Congresswoman. Not more than a year ago men would say when arguing against woman suffrage, “Next thing you’ll be wanting women in Congress,” as if that was the *reductio ad absurdum*. And here she was coming in, escorted by an elderly colleague, looking like a mature bride rather than a strong-minded female, and the men were clapping and cheering in the friendliest way. She wore a well-made dark-blue silk and chiffon suit, with open neck, and wide crepe collar and cuffs; her skirt was a modest walking length, and she walked well and unself-consciously. Her hair is a commonplace brown and arranged in a rather too spreading pompadour shadowing her face. She carried a bouquet of yellow and purple flowers, given her at the suffrage breakfast.

She didn’t look right or left until she reached her seat, far back on the Republican side, but before she could sit down she was surrounded by men shaking hands with her. I rejoiced to see that she met each



MISS RANKIN was given the use of two offices, the outer one of which is pictured above. The former Congresswoman recently said she was fortunate this extra room happened to be empty at the time she served in the 65th Congress. Second from the right here is Miss Rankin’s sister, Harriet, who now lives on Long Island. Married to the late Oscar Sedman of Virginia City, she was for many years dean of women

one with a big mouthed, frank smile and shook hands cordially and unaffectedly. It would have been sickening if she had smirked or giggled or been coquettish; worse still if she had been masculine and hail-fellow-ish. She was just a sensible young woman going about her business.³²

The first business before the House was its organization. Thus, after all the necessary officers had been elected and Champ Clark of Missouri had been named its Speaker, the House prepared for its first item of business—an address that evening by the President of the United States.

ON HIS WAY to Capitol Hill, President Wilson had been applauded by the crowds which lined the streets and when he entered the House chamber at 8:37 P.M., he received a prolonged salute. His speech, House Document

³¹ *The Evening Star*, April 2, 1917. *The Suffragist*, April 7, 1917.

³² Ellen Maury Slayden, *Washington Wife, Journal of Ellen Maury Slayden from 1897-1919* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1962), pp. 298-299.



JEANNETTE RANKIN MSS

at the University of Montana. After Sedman's death, she married Grant McGregor, well known mining engineer. At the extreme right is Florence Leech Murray of Dupuyer, Mont., and second from left, with glasses, is a Miss Puffer of Massachusetts. Mrs. Norman Wine-stine of Helena, the former Belle Fligelman, was also a secretary to the first Congresswoman and has materially assisted in research for this article.

Number One of the Sixty-fifth Congress, has been referred to as the "War Message." The reference is apt because, in it, he called upon Congress "to declare the recent course of the Imperial [German] Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States. . . . It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war," the President said, "But the right is more precious than peace . . ."³³

The President left the House of Representatives at 9:11 P.M. He journeyed back to the White House where he sat for a while, according to his secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, "silent and pale in the Cabinet Room." Thinking of the reaction of the crowd on his way to give his message, he finally broke his silence by saying, "Think what it was they were applauding. My message today was a message of death for our young men.

³³ U. S., *Congressional Record*, 65th. Congress, First Session, 1917, LV, Part 1, pp. 118-120.

How strange it seems to applaud that."³⁴

If President Wilson thought it strange to be applauded for his call to war, Congresswoman Rankin thought the whole question unthinkable. At one time in the Montana suffrage campaign, she had declared that if war were ever to come, she felt that "they ought to take the old men and leave the young men to propagate the race."³⁵ For years Miss Rankin had considered war an obsolete and stupid way for men and countries to settle disputes. The august presence of the President did not alter her view.

Actual debate on the war resolution began in the Senate on Wednesday when it convened at 10:00 A.M. When the Senate adjourned at 11:15 P.M., it had voted to pass the fateful resolution—with only six members voting against it. It was the opinion of one of the lonely six dissenters, Senator Norris of Nebraska, that, "upon passage of this resolution, we will have joined Europe in the great catastrophe and taken America into entanglements that will not end with this war, but will live and bring their evil influences upon many generations yet unborn."³⁶

By the time the House began its debate on Thursday, the tension in Washington had continued to grow in proportion to the crowds which had gathered, not only to observe the proceedings of Congress, but to exert influence upon the members of Congress. "The propaganda was something terrific," freshman Congressman Fiorello H. LaGuardia has written. "Groups of every kind were pouring into Washington. The corridors of the House Office Building and of the Capitol were jammed. . . . The House was very restive. The situation was tense."³⁷

The Lady from Montana could not escape the crowds. As the first woman in Congress she had attracted the atten-

³⁴ Joseph P. Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson As I Know Him* (Garden City, New York: The Country Life Press, 1921), p. 256.

³⁵ J. R. Interview.

³⁶ U. S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 214.

³⁷ Fiorello H. LaGuardia, *The Making of An Insurgent* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1948), p. 138.



CHAMP CLARK OF MISSOURI
Speaker of the House



CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT
National Suffrage Leader

tion of her country. The way she voted would surely have its effect upon the success of the suffrage movement, and her desire to do what she could for suffrage could not be discounted. She had worked too long and too hard in Montana and in too many other states. Whichever way she voted would be used as an example by the enemies of suffrage. Suffrage was, however, only one of the momentous issues she had to consider.

Aside from the national consequences of her vote, Congresswoman Rankin had her own future to consider. That she was a woman made her political future a precarious one. If she voted against war, her chances of being re-elected, if she chose to run again, would be even less favorable. If she voted against war, her contract with Lee Kee-dick ended—a serious blow to her finances since she was not financially independent. Finally, her position on this great issue would surely affect her relations with her friends throughout the country. The women who had worked for her so faithfully could not escape being judged by their association with her. Carrie Chapman Catt, perhaps, summed up Miss Rankin's position best when she caustically wrote, two days after the war vote, "Whatever she has done or will do is wrong to somebody, and every time she answers a roll call she loses us a *million votes*."³⁸

No one, of course, was more aware of the consequences of her vote than Jeanette Rankin herself. The theme of the arguments she heard were the same, but they came from various points of view. "It was this constant repetition," she has said, "speech after speech, person after person, of the idea that if you didn't vote yes, you would be unpatriotic."³⁹

Of all those most concerned, Miss Rankin's closest friend and advisor, her brother, Wellington, was most aware of the considerations and their ramifications. "I knew that she couldn't be

³⁸ Peck, Mary Gray, MSS, C. C. Catt Letter to M. G. Peck, April 8, 1917, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁹ J. R. Interview.

elected again," he has said, "if she did vote against war [and] I didn't want to see her destroy herself [and all of the things for which she had worked]." With this in mind, Mr. Rankin did everything he could to persuade his sister to vote for the war resolution. Forty-seven years later he expressed regret at the pressure he had brought upon his sister. But, at the time, his intense desire to save her was uppermost in his mind. At any rate, his pressure was leveled to hit his sister, in a manner of speaking, "where it hurt the most." From New York he had Mrs. Laidlaw come and talk with her; he had her closest friends write and telegraph her; and, knowing his sister's high regard for him, he used his own personal presence to apply the highest degree of pressure.

"Many of my loved friends told me," Miss Rankin has recalled, "that I would ruin the suffrage movement if I voted against war." But, she also said at the time, "I can't vote for war as I see things now. If I get an insight into the fact that I should vote for it, I'll vote for it and I'll not cast my vote until the last minute."⁴⁰

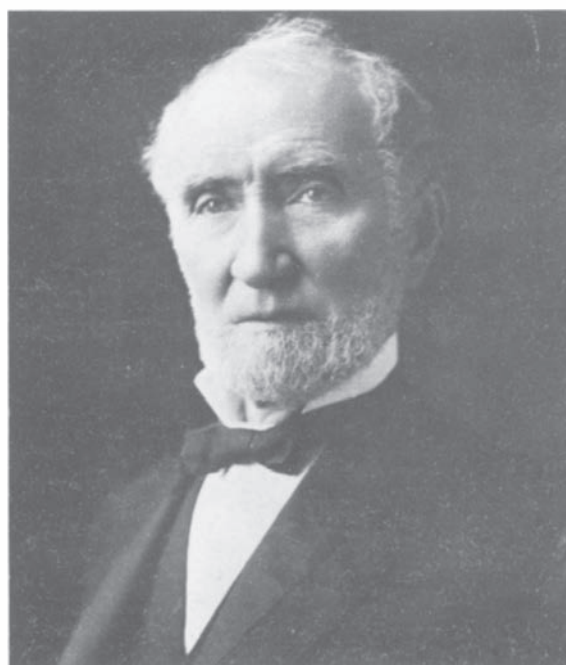
The speeches delivered in the House both for and against the declaration were, for the most part, filled with deep emotion. It was a traumatic experience for Democratic Majority Leader Claude Kitchen, who declared, ". . . it takes neither moral or physical courage to declare a war for others to fight."⁴¹

Congresswoman Rankin did not make a speech on the issue, and this was to become one of the things which she later regretted. During the debate she did not know how the majority of the men who talked to her were going to vote. Yet, she knew that she could not, herself, face the idea that she could, with her vote, be responsible for sending "young men to be killed for no other reason than to save [her seat] in Congress."⁴²

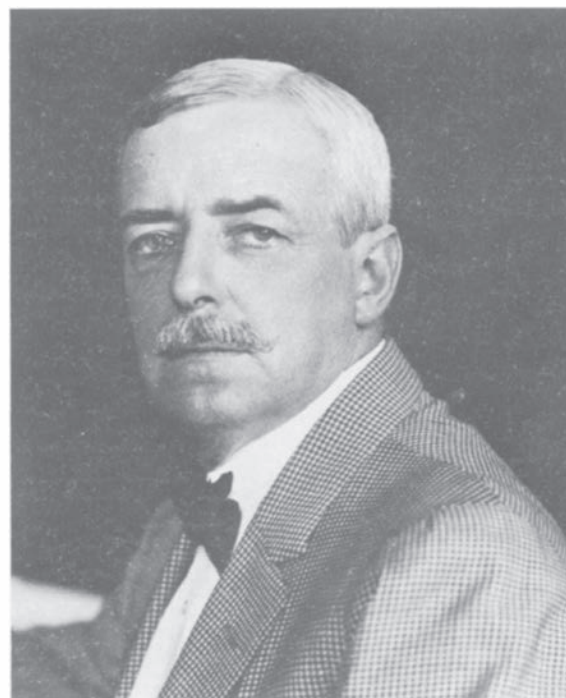
⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ U. S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 332.

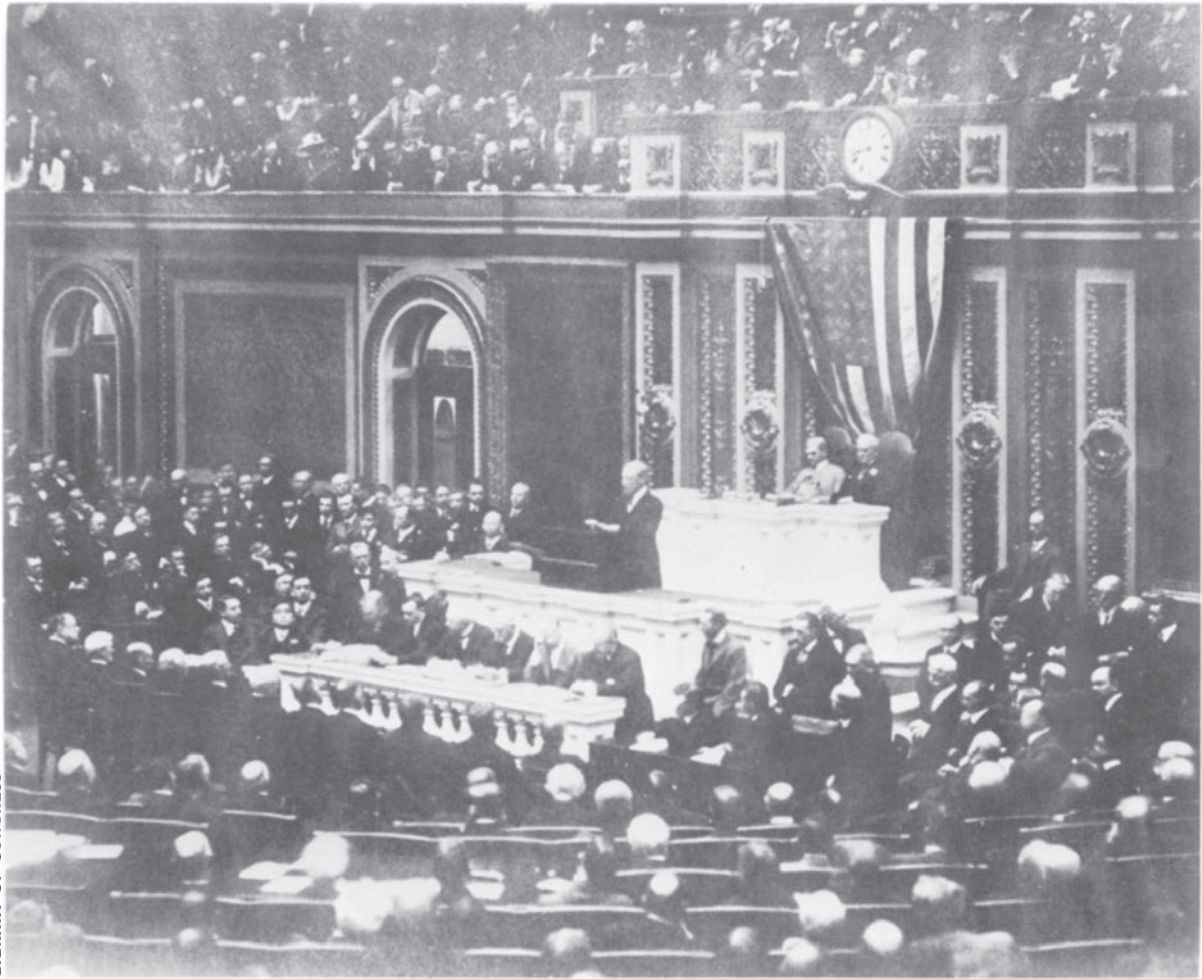
⁴² J. R. Interview.



"UNCLE JOE" CANNON
Congressional Leader



ROBERT LANSING
Secretary of State



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PRESIDENT WILSON delivering his fateful war message to a joint session of Congress on the evening of Monday, April 2, 1917. The chamber was packed with spectators as well as members of the diplomatic corps, members of the Supreme Court and the President's cabinet. The President began speaking at 8:40 P.M., stating the inevitability of war with Germany, and receiving applause at almost every juncture, including the moment when he said: "There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission."

At least one national suffrage leader shared Miss Rankin's thinking. Some time during Thursday evening, Miss Alice Paul, president of the National Woman's Party and a Quaker, accompanied by a woman from Montana, had Miss Rankin called off the floor of the House to tell her that she did not favor the United States' entry into the war in Europe.⁴³

Late Thursday evening Miss Belle Fligelman, now Mrs. Norman Winestine of Helena, and Miss Florence Leech, the Congresswoman's secretaries, left their office and headed for the House. Miss Fligelman was struck by the fact that,

"around the flood-lighted dome white doves were circling. They held no olive branch in their beaks, but it seemed to the peace-lovers like a final plea."⁴⁴ Shortly before midnight, a Representative from New York made a plea for the vote to be put off until Saturday in order that the final decision not be made on Good Friday. His plea was ignored.

While the first roll call was in progress, Miss Rankin took her place in the House. "It was a different roll call from any I [had] ever seen from the gallery," she has said. "Every vote was watched

⁴³ Interview with Alice Paul, July, 1967.

⁴⁴ Winestine, Belle Fligelman, MSS, Helena, Montana.

with intensity. When they called my name, there was a hush and I didn't say a word." During the days when Miss Rankin had lobbied for woman suffrage, she had seen Congressmen pass over the first roll call and vote on the second one. She had decided to vote on the second ballot. "They could see me there and then there was a mumble . . . because they didn't know what had happened—what was going to be."⁴⁵

"Uncle Joe" Cannon, when he entered the Chamber of the House, learned of Miss Rankin's presence and her failure to vote on the resolution. He thought she did not know the importance of her vote and that she might be unaware of her second chance. Concerned, "Uncle Joe" went to her and said, "Little woman, you cannot afford not to vote. You represent the womanhood of the country in the American Congress. I shall not advise you how to vote, but you should vote one way or another—as your conscience dictates."⁴⁶

According to her remembrances, on the second roll call, "The eyes of the galleries were on [me]. For a moment, [when her name was called the second time], there was a breathless silence. Without any intention of doing so, I rose and said: 'I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war!'"

Immediately, bedlam broke; there was applause, and in the confusion of it all, only those nearest her heard her say, "I vote NO." She goes on to say, "The clerk came down and it was settled, but it was an awful commotion."⁴⁷ Minutes later, Congress exercised its constitutional prerogative, and the United States entered World War I.

What had been predicted during the days and hours before the final vote happened. The legislation in which Miss Rankin was interested was given little consideration, because in times of war Congress is unable to give much attention to domestic legislation. The suffrage movement, except for the activities

⁴⁵ J. R. Interview.

⁴⁶ W. D. R. Interview.

⁴⁷ J. R. Interview.

of the National Woman's Party, suffered. And, Miss Rankin, who did not run for re-election to the House but for the Senate in 1918, went down to defeat. In 1941 she returned to the House and, ironically, re-enacted her stand of 1917. This time, however, instead of being one of fifty-six, she stood alone.

"The Lady From Montana" deserves distinction, not only because she was the first woman to sit in Congress, but because the years have not diminished the reality of her courage. In her own mind today she feels that being the first "had only temporary significance." Indeed, the 50 years which have passed since that dark Good Friday morning in 1917 have permitted this remarkable woman to evaluate herself historically and with perspective. Jeannette Rankin stated her position well in 1963 when she said to the author:

I have always felt that there was more significance in the fact that the first woman who was ever asked what she thought about war said NO and I believe that the first vote I had was the most significant vote and a most significant act on the part of women, because women are going to have to stop war and I felt at the time that the first woman should take the first stand—that the first time the first woman had a chance to say no against war she should say it. That was what held me up with all the pressure being brought to get me to vote for war. Never did I for once think that war could solve any problems or that we should go in, but the pressure might have pushed me in if I hadn't realized that the first woman had to take the first stand.

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