

## *Marietta Poor, First Woman Elected in West Newbury*

Marietta Poor(e), the first woman elected to office in West Newbury—and the first female Town officer of any kind—was born here on Poore’s Lane on November 18, 1830 to Alma Hall Poor and Captain Ebenezer Poor. The Captain, who died in 1837, had a prosperous farm (where his family lives to this day) and was described in probate papers as a “gentleman.”

Poor graduated from the Bradford Academy for Young Ladies in 1847. Located in what is now Haverhill, Bradford Academy was [the first college in Massachusetts to admit women](#). According to census records, she was a woman of some means, with real estate valued at \$500 in 1850.

For much of her life, Poor lived with her brother Moses’ family at the Poore’s Lane homestead, and worked as a teacher locally. Throughout the 1870s, she lived and taught in Georgetown. A mainstay in the First Parish Church who enjoyed a wide circle of friends, she never married. [She was described as “a woman who was unusually esteemed, with sterling qualities of heart and mind.”](#)

[In 1879, the Massachusetts legislature first granted women throughout the Commonwealth the right to vote for, and participate in, municipal school committees.](#) Most of the students’ teachers and mothers were female at the time. Boston had elected three women to its school board in 1874. Suffrage was a growing concern in the state and the nation.

West Newbury took up—and then dodged—the question in 1881, when noted women’s rights activist [Lucy Stone](#) and others petitioned for an article at Town Meeting to “see whether the Town will, by vote or otherwise, ask the Legislature to extend to women who are citizens the right to hold Town Offices, and to vote in Town affairs on the same terms as male citizens.” Like other municipalities confronting this proposal, West Newbury demurred. [After some debate largely concerning their opinions of their wives, the Town’s voters tabled the article.](#)

Nonetheless, in March 1883 Poor made history when she was elected to a three-year term on West Newbury’s School Committee. The [Newburyport Herald](#) listed her name among those elected without acknowledging her pioneering accomplishment.

Instead, it reported that the near-unanimous vote for the selectmen reflected “a decided approval of their efforts to break up the liquor traffic in the town.” Starting in 1884, Poor also assumed the paid job of caring for certain of the schoolhouses. She served in both roles through 1893, when Minerva Pingree Rogers was elected to the School Committee.

[In 1894 opportunities for women to hold Town offices expanded.](#) In March, Town Meeting passed an article sponsored by the School Committee to establish a public library. This was set in motion in May, when various libraries donated their books and the Ladies’ Library Society also offered its building. Of the nine Library Trustees, two—Anna L. Noyes Chase and Annie L. Rogers—were women. The Trustees “were unanimously elected, only one ballot having been cast.” The women’s franchise in Town was *not* broadened at this time to include election of the Library Trustees.

Suffrage in Massachusetts rose to the forefront in 1915, when a referendum was proposed to amend the constitution to give women the vote. [The Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, founded in 1882 by women in the Commonwealth, led the “Antis.”](#) In West Newbury, [Hazel Hammond Albertson](#) was a principal local sponsor of the [Massachusetts Political Equality Union](#) favoring universal suffrage. October 1915 provided [“the most exciting time in \[West Newbury\] for years on the matter of registration.](#) Thirty-eight names were added to the voting list, 22 of the number being ladies who will vote for school committee only. The total number of women registered now is 50.”

Massachusetts, home to the first National Woman’s Rights Convention in 1850, was not ready for change. “Suffrage Swamped,” headlined the November 3, 1915 [Newburyport Daily News](#): the statewide vote was 224,878 against, 120,000 for. It was not until 1920, with adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that women across the country—including in West Newbury—gained full voting rights.

This came too late for Marietta Poor, who died at her home on Garden Street on December 19, 1916. She is buried with her family at the Rural Cemetery.

*Marietta Poor, First Woman Elected in West Newbury*

*Marietta Poor*



*Poore's Lane Homestead: House, Barn, Stable, School*



*Photos above courtesy of Marietta Poor's great-great-grandniece and resident owner of the Poore's Lane homestead, [Bethany Groff Dorau](#)*

**THE SOCIALISTS KNOW THEIR FRIENDS**

These little pictures are from the women's advertisement of "THE NEW YORK CALL," the socialist organ. "But above why the socialist are working so hard in the 'cause' of 'votes for women'."

**Opinions of Eminent Men Against Woman Suffrage**

The Hon. ELIHU ROOT, United States Senator:  
I am opposed to granting suffrage to women because I believe it would be a boon to women and an injury to the state.

The Rev. LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D., Editor of the Outlook:  
If men attempt woman's franchise, he will prove himself not an inferior woman. He woman himself man's franchise, she will prove herself not an inferior man.

**JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS:**  
Woman is weak, indeed, but her empire is the domestic kingdom. The greatest political triumph she would achieve in public life would be to obtain the same respect with the secret of her own mind as the man has with his.

**Bishop JOHN H. VINCENT, Founder of the Charismatic:**  
When about thirty years of age I accepted for a time the doctrine of woman suffrage and publicly declared in "TRIALS OF VIRTUE AND CHARITY" OBSERVATION HAVE CONVINCED ME THAT THE PROPOSITION IS UNWISSE AND, IN SUCCESSFUL, MUST PROVE DAMNABLE TO SOCIETY.

**PLEASE KEEP THIS BOOK FOR REFERENCE**

1915

**The Case Against Woman Suffrage**

**The Most Important Question on the Ballot at the State Election, November 2, 1915.**

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Shall the following proposed amendment to the constitution, enabling women to vote, be approved and ratified?

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Article of Amendment**  
Article three of the articles of amendment to the constitution of the Commonwealth is hereby amended by striking out in the first line thereof the word "male".

"It is by the promulgation of sound morals in the community, and more especially by the training and instruction of the young that woman performs her part toward the preservation of a free government."—Daniel Webster.

*Source: Historic Ipswich*



**Number 2 School**

*Source: West Newbury Website*

*Articles Presented at West Newbury Town Meeting March 7, 1881*

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ART. 11. To see what disposition the Town will make of the money received of the County from the "dog tax."

ART. 12. To act on the list of jurors as revised by the Selectmen.

ART. 13. To see if the Town will appropriate a sum of money to dig a well and establish a watering place in the square in front of the Post Office. By request of Geo. A. Nason and others.

ART. 14. To see if the Town will re-district the highways of the Town. By request of Henry T. Bailey and others.

ART. 15. To see whether the Town will, by its vote or otherwise, ask the Legislature to extend to women who are citizens the right to hold Town Offices, and to vote in Town affairs on the same terms as male citizens. By request of Lucy Stone and others.

ART. 16. To see if the Town will vote to make any alteration in present internal arrangement of the Town Hall, also to see if they will instruct the selectmen to use one of the ante-rooms for an office. By request of C. P. Rollins and others.

ART. 17. To see if they will renew their arrangement with the City of Newburyport in relation to the Public Library: and if voted, to see if they will accept from Hon. Charles S. Bradley a sum of money towards defraying the expenses of the same.