

Stella Goslin Cowan

Census Enumerator and Suffragist

The U.S. Census Bureau has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to employing women. Ever since 1880, when it started using professional enumerators rather than U.S. marshals, the Census Office has employed women in that role. With the advent of the Hollerith tabulating machine in 1890, women moved into the role of keypunchers. By 1909, 10 years before the 19th amendment granted national women's suffrage, over 50 percent of the Census Bureau's 624 permanent employees were women. As women proved themselves as capable as the men, and with the increasing number of women in the workforce, it became harder for the Census Bureau to justify assigning all supervisory positions to men. By 1920, the Census Bureau would once again push forward appointing the first five female supervisors, as well as the first three female expert chiefs of divisions. Many of these pioneering women who worked on the census in these early years also broke through in other fields, such as law, medicine, education, activism, journalism, and the arts.



MRS. JOHN F. COWAN,
Who Will Lead in the "Open Parliament" at the Federation Meeting in
Ogden.

The Salt Lake Tribune (Salt Lake City, UT)
September 17, 1911

Historic census records are maintained and released by
the National Archives and Records Administration,
not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly
available records like the one shown here.

Stella's self-enumerated 1880 Census

Following her early education, Stella enrolled in the Oregon [Missouri] Normal School (also known as the Northwest Missouri Normal School), from which she graduated in 1877. In 1878, Stella accepted a job as assistant principal at nearby Falls City, Nebraska, and continued to be active in the Oregon Teacher's Institute. In addition to teaching, Stella participated in her local Women's Union and the Holt County Woman Suffrage Association.

In May 1880, Stella's education and knowledge of the community, and strength of will earned her, and seven other women in her census district, an appointment as enumerator for the decennial count. Enumerators began counting the population on June 1st, and Stella enumerated 862 people in the town of Oregon, for which she would have received the standard enumerator pay of 2 cents per name. In addition to the population schedule for the 1880 Census, enumerators also completed schedules for Mortality, Agriculture, Social Statistics, and Manufacturing.

* * American liberty is a farce while
half the American citizens are yet in bond-
age.—Stella M. Goslin.—Oregon.

The National Citizen and Ballot Box (Syracuse, NY) July 1880

There are six lady enumerators and one lady clerk in the Supervisor's office.

In some counties the appointees are nearly all Republicans, while in others they are nearly all Democrats, owing to the fact that but very few of the opposite party were applicants.

Atchison County.

Dist.	Name.	Dist.	Name.
1	N B Merritt	9	C N Van Pelt
2	T J Wright	10	Geo T Moore
3	I G Bushy	11	Mrs E A Bachelor
4	Jas M Young	12	W A Van Gundy
5	Jas A Newell	13	Robert Steele
6	M A B Darnell	14	Robert E Graves
7	B F Rummerfeld	15	S S Hughes
8	John C Schuler	16	F A Schiereolk

Holt County.

Dist.	Name.	Dist.	Name.
17	B F Potter	25	Chas E Barnes
18	Rev Wm S Mahan	26	Alex Van Buskirk
19	C A Doughty	27	D W Thuma
20	Geo A Bryant	28	Judge W H Poynter
21	Gus S Seideman	29	Miss Stella M Goslin
22	L P Graham	30	Wm Kaucher
23	D S Alkire	31	S W Morrison
24	Capt S A Glenn		

St. Joseph Weekly Gazette (St. Joseph, MO) May 20, 1880

On July 10, 1883, Stella married John F. Cowan, an 1881 Princeton graduate, who had growing business concerns in Butte, Montana. A week after their marriage, the new couple arrived in Butte, where John developed his reputation as a businessman, civil servant, and politician. The couple also experienced the rougher side of the frontier mining business—in 1885, John tried to avoid testifying as a witness in a murder trial. In the 1890s, the growing family moved to Salt Lake City, Utah.

After her three daughters and one son started school, Stella returned to the activism that she had displayed in Missouri. Over her next several decades in Salt Lake City, Stella devoted most of her time to the Ladies Literary Club. Originally

founded for women to discuss literature, like most Ladies Literary Clubs across the country, women soon found themselves discussing a variety of topics and issues affecting their community. During Stella's long tenure, she participated in talks ranging from pensions, old age care, municipal property ownership and utility fees to current events, World War I, and of course, women's suffrage. Stella served in several leadership positions in the Literary Club: as a member of the finance and program committees, as a corresponding secretary, as vice-president in 1918, and starting in 1919, as president.

As part of her membership with the Ladies Literary Club, Stella also enjoyed membership in Utah's Federation of Women's Clubs, a group of approximately 75 women's clubs that worked together to exercise greater power. Although the Utah state constitution had enshrined the rights of women to vote in its state, most did not have the same privilege. For this reason, Stella became more active in national organizations. In 1916, Stella and fellow clubwomen hosted the Congressional Union for Suffrage, a national women's political group which, in 1914, had successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress for the first women's suffrage



Stella, left, and fellow members of the Federation of Women's Clubs
The Salt Lake Tribune (Salt Lake City, UT) October 16, 1919

amendment in several decades. She also served as a longtime delegate to the annual Utah Federation of Women's Clubs conventions. In both 1919 and 1921, she attended the national conventions as a delegate for Utah. In addition to her work with the women's clubs, Stella also supported the Red Cross and helped found the Sarah Daft House, a nonprofit senior living community in Salt Lake City.

Stella's legacy and hard work also laid the foundation for several people in her life, whether they knew Stella intimately or only in passing. All three of Stella's daughters attended prestigious colleges: Vassar, Bryn-Mawr, and Columbia University. Following Stella's pioneering work as a census taker in 1880, at least four out of the next five enumerators for her district were women (the returns for the 1890 Census were destroyed by fire in 1921 and the enumerators' names are lost). In the 1930s, Stella moved to California to live with her daughter Frances' family, where she



The Salt Lake Herald Republican (Salt Lake City, UT) February 19, 1910

passed away in Los Angeles on March 10, 1945. The Census Bureau is proud of Stella's work in education, her fight for universal women's suffrage, and her contributions to the community.