**The Women Who Won Elections Before Suffrage**

**It's been almost a century since the 19th Amendment guaranteed American women the right to vote, an occasion now marked by Women's Equality Day on August 26th. But long before suffrage was extended in the Constitution, women were running for office -- and winning. In fact, at least 3,586 women campaigned for elected positions in the half-century before 1920, according to Her Hat Was in the Ring, a database created by scholars Wendy Chmielewski, Jill Norgren and Kristen Gwinn-Becker. Among them: Marietta Patrick and Lydia Hall, who in 1855 were elected to the Ashfield, Massachusetts, school board, and Susanna Salter, who became mayor of Argonia, Kansas, in 1887.**

**Those efforts were possible because state and federal qualifications for voting and holding office differed. Most of the states and territories that pioneered women's suffrage -- such as Montana and Utah -- were newer to the Union, eager to attract families and relatively open to new ideas. There, women could often get a foot in the door on school or sanitation boards, which were seen as extensions of women's domestic work.**

**Although it would take decades for women nationwide to get the right to vote -- and decades more for it to be guaranteed for women of color -- those early candidates and voters played a key role. "Political parties began to recognize women as an important part of the electorate," says Sally McMillen, author of Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement, "and realize that they needed them." *(Olivia B. Waxman, in Time magazine, September 4, 2017)***

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