

# “I Am Here as a United States Citizen to Vote”: Acts of Protest and Resistance by Women in New Jersey



**New Jersey boasted many women’s rights activists who engaged in forms of resistance. Alice Paul is perhaps the most well-known, but here are other courageous examples.**



Lucy Stone  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

**Lucy Stone (1818-1893)**, a leading abolitionist and women’s rights activist, was born in Massachusetts in 1818. She moved to Orange, New Jersey, with her husband, Henry Blackwell, in 1857. In 1858, she chose that her household goods be seized rather than pay property taxes to a government in which she had no voice. In a letter to the tax collector she explained,

*“Enclosed I return my tax bill, without paying it. My reason for doing so is, that women suffer taxation, and yet have no representation, which is not only unjust to one-half of the adult population, but is contrary to our theory of government.... The only course now left us is to refuse to pay the tax.”*

**The women of Vineland, New Jersey** staged a mass protest when they were rebuffed while attempting to vote in a federal election in November 1868.

As was the custom of the day, male inspectors sat at a table with a ballot box as voters stepped up to drop in their ballots. Several women set up a table opposite the men with

a ballot box they had fashioned out of a blueberry box, one of Vineland’s staple crops. Scores of women tried to cast a vote in the official ballot box. When the inspectors refused to let them do so, they immediately went to the other table and dropped their ballots in the women’s box. Many then went to the homes of neighbors to babysit for their children so that those mothers could also go to the polls and protest. About 172 women, including several African American women, attempted to vote.

The women of Vineland carried out this protest in at least four more elections, with more than 150 women attempting to vote each time.



Vineland Women’s Ballot Box, c. 1868  
Credit: Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)**, one of the architects of the organized 19th century women’s suffrage movement, spent more than half a century fighting for women’s right to vote, own property in their own names, attend college, enter professions traditionally closed



Elizabeth Cady Stanton  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; transfer from the National Museum of American History; gift of the National American Woman Suffrage Association through Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch, 1924

to women, and control their children and their bodies. She and Susan B. Anthony worked to achieve many victories for women, but neither lived to see women’s suffrage become law.



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Originally from upstate New York, Stanton spent the latter part of her life in Tenafly, New Jersey. In 1880, on her 65th birthday, she was sitting at her desk in Tenafly when, she said later, “a wagon and horses all decked out with flags and evergreens” pulled up to her house. The driver was looking for male voters to take to the polls. Stanton decided to go.

At the polling place, an inspector informed Stanton that voting was a male privilege. She retorted, “I am here as a United States citizen to vote for United States officers. It is not the duty of a town inspector to decide on my liberties.”

But he would not allow her to drop her ballot into the ballot box. So, as she recounted, “I laid my ballot in his hand, saying that I had the same right to vote that any man present had, and on him must rest the responsibility of denying me my rights of citizenship.” Proudly, she wrote to her children that night, “The whole town is agape with my act.”

**Susan Pecker Fowler (1823-1911)**, a resident of Vineland, did pay her taxes but lodged a public protest every year. On December 16, 1907, she wrote in the Vineland Evening News,



Susan Pecker Fowler  
Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society

*“As a tax paying citizen of the United States I am entitled to a voice in Governmental affairs.... Having paid this unlawful Tax under written Protest for forty years, I am entitled to receive from the ‘Treasury of Uncle Sam,’ the full amount of both principal and interest.”*

But Fowler did more than write letters. After reading about the bloomer outfit—a calf-length tunic over a pair of full Turkish pants—that many women’s rights activists wore to protest the tight corsets and dangerously long dresses that were the fashion of the day, she created a suit that, she said, enabled her to feel like “a bird uncaged.” The coat buttoned down the front and flared slightly from the waist to the calf. Beneath she wore tapered trousers and a white shirt. She said that these looser clothes gave her the flexibility for her hard physical labor as a blueberry farmer in Vineland.



“Forty-Five Years of a Woman’s Life Devoted to Wearing Hideous Clothes”  
New York Journal and Advertiser, April 10, 1899

Fowler’s decision to wear more comfortable clothing reflected one concern of the women’s rights movement — dress reform. While women’s rights leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Amelia Bloomer (for whom “bloomers” were named) advocated political and economic rights for women, they also promoted dress reform and health measures such as fresh air and exercise. Tight corsets limited women’s freedom of movement and damaged their internal organs. Full, floor-length skirts were heavy, attracted dirt and made climbing stairs precarious.

Bloomers attracted public ridicule from people who believed that women should not wear pants, and many wore them only in private. Nonetheless, bloomers and other forms of alternative dress were important to the women’s rights movement because they were designed to give women more freedom and comfort.

