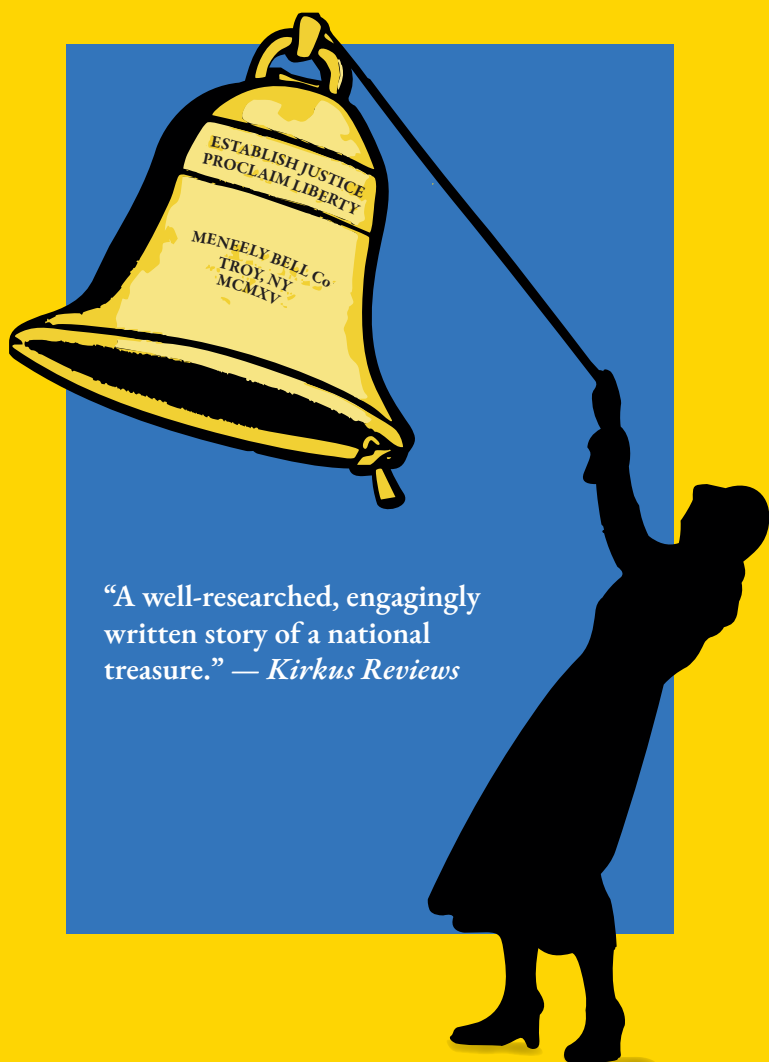


# The Justice Bell

Tracing the Journey  
of a Forgotten Symbol



Amanda Owen

# THE JUSTICE BELL

# The Woman's Liberty Bell

Silent Until November 2nd

1776  
LIBERTY



1915  
EQUALITY

**"LIBERTY THROUGHOUT THE LAND TO ALL THE INHABITANTS THEREOF"**

Was the Message of

## THE LIBERTY BELL OF 1776

It proclaimed the birth of a new nation "DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT JUST GOVERNMENTS DERIVE THEIR POWER FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED" AND THAT "TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION IS TYRANNY."

Today, fifty million of these inhabitants are women, but only four million of them have received the full benefits of the Liberty which the old bell proclaimed. These four million women live in the equal suffrage states of the West and Middle West. The people of these states think as did Abraham Lincoln who said:

**"I GO FOR ALL SHARING THE PRIVILEGES OF GOVERNMENT WHO ASSIST IN BEARING ITS BURDENS, BY NO MEANS EXCLUDING WOMEN"**

Even as the original Liberty Bell rang first for Pennsylvania in 1776 so should the new Liberty Bell proclaim a new message of Liberty first in Pennsylvania this year. The new bell is the Woman's Liberty Bell, which is to ring for the first time on the day that the Women of Pennsylvania are granted the right to vote. Every fair-minded man in Pennsylvania will help to make this day November second next

Because every fairminded man believes in Justice and  
Because Justice is an empty word so long as half the population  
of a Commonwealth have no say in the making of its laws.

The Liberty Bell of 1776 rang to "proclaim Liberty" to create our nation. The Woman's Liberty Bell will ring to "establish justice"—to complete our nation.

**Help break the chains that hold the bronze clapper silent.  
Vote "Yes" on the Suffrage Amendment on Election Day.**

**Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association**  
Campaign Headquarters:—201 Arcade Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania



Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association flyer promoting the women's suffrage amendment on Election Day, November 2, 1915.

# THE JUSTICE BELL



TRACING THE JOURNEY OF  
A FORGOTTEN SYMBOL

Amanda Owen



JUSTICE BELL  
FOUNDATION

Justice Bell Foundation

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*This book is dedicated to those who fight  
for equality and stand up to injustice.  
May their determination be a lesson  
in the power of never giving up.*

History isn't what happened. It's who tells the story.  
—Sally Roesch Wagner

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## Preface

In 1915, a one-ton bronze bell traveled across Pennsylvania, its clapper chained and muted to symbolize the silencing of women's voices. Shepherded by a determined band of suffragists, the Justice Bell became a rallying cry for equality and a call for men to vote for a referendum that would grant the women of the state the right to vote. This impressive symbol drew thousands of people to hear speeches at roadside gatherings and in small towns, and it attracted even larger crowds in big cities, where they could see the bell and participate in suffrage parades. Yet today, the story of the bell and of the tenacious women who championed it remains largely forgotten.

My fascination with the Justice Bell began in 2015, when I came across a brief online reference to it while researching the women's suffrage movement. I was astonished to learn that the bell had once been a national symbol for voting rights. Between 1915 and 1920, more than a million people had seen it, and updates on its journey appeared in newspapers across the country. The Justice Bell was an exact replica of the Liberty Bell except for two details: it wasn't cracked and, in addition to the words on the Liberty Bell, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof," it bore an inscription from the Preamble to the United States Constitution: *Establish Justice*. It rang for the first time after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, during a celebration attended by ten thousand people on September 25, 1920, in Philadelphia's Independence Square.

What happened to the bell after 1920? I could not find anyone who had ever heard of it—including librarians, teachers, and women's rights leaders. When I asked, "Have you ever heard of the Justice Bell?" the answer was always the same: "What bell?"

My search eventually led me to the Washington Memorial Chapel, a small privately owned church in the middle of Pennsylvania's Valley Forge National

Historical Park, where I found the Justice Bell in the rotunda of the chapel's bell tower. When I asked a woman working there if she had any literature about the Justice Bell, she looked puzzled and replied, "What bell?" She knew nothing about it. The lack of awareness, even among those working beside the bell, sparked a years-long journey through archives and newspapers to uncover the story of the once-famous Justice Bell and the clever women who used it as a symbol of the fight for voting rights.

I began by tracking down descendants of suffragists who had traveled with the Justice Bell, and I located the chapel's retired rector, who, in the early 1990s, had rescued the bell from the woods where it had been abandoned. I enlisted archivists and volunteers at historical societies and museums across Pennsylvania to help me sift through microfilm and undigitized newspapers in an effort to map the bell's path during its historic tour.

Through my research into the lives of these suffragists, I found that many accounts defied traditional depictions of women from this era as primarily devoted to home and family life. They were feisty and resourceful. They came from diverse backgrounds and contributed to the movement in myriad ways. College students and other young people sought to build a more just society. Affluent women financed the movement while actively organizing and campaigning. Black women saw the vote as a vital tool in the fight against racial inequality, and working women championed labor reforms, including better working conditions and restrictions on child labor. In the pages that follow, you will meet many of these remarkable women.

This book represents the first in-depth documentation of the Justice Bell's creation, historic tour, years of obscurity, and rediscovery. It does not provide a comprehensive history of the women's suffrage movement but, rather, details one story among many that took place during this pivotal period of activism.

I wrote *The Justice Bell* to ensure that this chapter in American history becomes part of the historical record. But the journey of the bell and the women who used it to bring attention to their campaign for the vote is not just a story about the past. Its message remains relevant, offering lessons in tactics and the importance of persistence. Grassroots campaigns require deep dedication. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and knowing who they are and what they did matters.

*The Justice Bell* is presented in four parts. Part One provides an overview of American women's voting rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on Pennsylvania, where earlier efforts paved the way for

the bell's journey. Part Two follows the bell's 1915 tour, featuring highlights from its travels, biographies of the suffragists who campaigned alongside it, and newspaper articles that capture the spirit of the campaign. Lightly edited for clarity, these articles serve as both a record of the journey and a resource for further research. Part Three traces the bell's role from the 1915 campaign to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Part Four examines the bell's fall into obscurity and the efforts to secure its place in the historical record. The afterword reports on ongoing initiatives to preserve the memory of the Justice Bell, ensuring its legacy endures. These efforts underscore the critical importance of safeguarding women's stories and their role in shaping history.

More than a century after the women's suffrage movement, the themes represented by the Justice Bell still resonate in today's ongoing pursuit of equality. By sharing its story, I hope to inspire readers to explore the contributions women have made to our nation's history and recognize the roles they continue to play, ensuring their voices become part of the ever-evolving story of America.

## Introduction

Reverend Richard Lyon Stinson arrived as a new rector at the Washington Memorial Chapel in January 1992. This was an ideal assignment for an Episcopalian minister who was also a history buff. The chapel, built in 1903 to honor George Washington, sits on private land within Valley Forge National Historical Park in Pennsylvania, occupying the location where Washington's Continental Army encamped during the brutal winter of 1777–78.

As Rev. Stinson surveyed the grounds and the adjacent woods, he came upon an enormous bronze bell surrounded by chicken wire and with a small roof over it. The bell was in obvious disrepair, and he wondered what it was doing there. It looked like the famous Liberty Bell, but upon closer examination, he saw it was engraved with the words "Establish Justice." So, not a Liberty Bell replica. What was it? He asked the staff at the chapel and learned that the bell was an artifact from the women's suffrage movement and was called the Justice Bell. But why was it here? He wanted to know more.

He rummaged in the basement and found information about the chapel's founding rector, Reverend W. Herbert Burk, and discovered he had collected numerous historical objects with a goal of creating a center of American culture that would include several museums. He surmised that Rev. Burk must have persuaded the suffragists to give the bell to the chapel.

Rev. Stinson's mother had been a member of the League of Women Voters, an organization he knew to be the continuation of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Wanting to reunite the bell with its organization, he called the League's Pennsylvania office, located at that time in Philadelphia, and spoke to Sara "Sallie" Corbishley.

"I have your bell!" he said.

"What bell?" she asked.

Until Rev. Stinson's call, League members had been unaware of the bell's

existence. Corbishley had a vague memory of seeing stacks of old glass-plate negatives that had images of a bell, ten years prior to this phone call. They had been stashed in paper grocery bags at the League's state headquarters. After the call from Rev. Stinson, she wondered if the bell found in the woods was the one in the photographs.

Indeed, it was. And with that phone call, history was retrieved from paper bags filled with photographs that chronicled one of the most dramatic chapters of the women's suffrage movement.