

Collin, Lois M. "Utah considers placing female statue in nation's Capitol amid national conversation on monuments and values," *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 24, 2018

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah is famous for giving women the vote decades before other states, but fewer people know Utah also elected the first female to a state senate, clear back in 1896.

Now there's a push on Utah's Capitol Hill to send that same woman — Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, who was also a physician — to Washington to represent the state in The National Statuary Hall Collection in the U.S. Capitol.

The campaign comes as the nation grapples with what statues and monuments mean and what story they tell about a community or country. Recent decisions to remove or relocate statues featuring prominent Confederate Civil War figures have ignited protests and counter-protests about whether statues commemorate history or speak to what is valued in the public square today.

Fans of Cannon believe it's time to emphasize the valuable role that women have played throughout American history. Utah women were leaders in the women's movement, and "Mattie" Cannon was one of the state's most precocious and accomplished players.

"What we see every day reflects our values as a culture," adds Neylan McBaine, CEO of Better Days 2020, which is coordinating Utah celebrations of suffrage's 100th anniversary. "We're part of a valuable movement that is identifying gaps between what we see in our public iconography and what we value and hold dear."

The Utah Legislature this session is considering SCR1, a resolution to enshrine Cannon — wife, mother, physician, politician and activist — who helped establish Utah's public health system. Wednesday, a Senate committee passed the bill, which the full Senate will now consider. If successful, the statue placement in the national collection would occur in time for the centennial of the 19th Amendment, which gave America's women the right to vote. If it passes, Cannon would become just the 10th woman honored as a remarkable American in a monumental collection that includes two statues from every state. Her statue would replace one of Philo T. Farnsworth, credited for crucial inventions that enabled creation of the early television. Utah's other statue is of Brigham Young, second president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who led Mormon pioneers to settle the state. It was placed in the collection in 1950s and is not likely to be rotated out of the collection, given his stature in state history.

Proponents believe the Cannon statue will likely win legislative approval, but there are Farnsworth fans who'd like to see Utah decide to keep him, including some students and faculty of the elementary school that proposed his statue in the late 1980s.

Female statuary tends to be symbolic, like Lady Liberty or the feminine creation atop the U.S. Capitol that is based not on a person, but on an ideal. Such feminine statues are common in public venues, but those representing actual women are rare.

"There is a whole statue movement out there about having more equality in that public sphere — of statues who are named and not just representative," says Jen Christensen, political outreach

coordinator for Better Days 2020. "We feel it's important to have actual women of achievement — and there are many."

"If we truly value women, their contributions to public and private life and to our modern culture, then we should have powerful visual confirmations of that value in our public images," McBaine says.

"Conversely, the images and symbols we see daily become our values. According to the well-known adage, we can't be what we can't see. When we promote public images of women, we promote an expectation that women can be those things themselves. We don't hesitate to reach great heights because we see those who have forged the paths already."

Statues are "about memorializing those who seem to be important by those who have the power (and) the means to erect them," says Kathryn MacKay, who teaches history and gender studies at Weber State University.

Memorials indicate what matters to those who can erect them, but "statues are not history," says Barbara Jones Brown, historical director of Better Days 2020. "They send a message about history."

And statue placement is often not permanent — as views change, as new heroes emerge, as time passes or other ideas become prominent, they are moved, much like exhibits in museums are rotated, she notes.

The statuary hall in the nation's Capitol was designed on that notion: Each state was given space for two statues, which can be rotated out every 11 years, if desired. The rules are simple: A statue must be of someone who is dead and must remain 10 years before it can be replaced. California recently replaced one of its statues with Ronald Reagan. In 2016, Ohio installed Thomas Edison, a year after Arizona placed a statue of Barry Goldwater. Other states have also rotated statues.

Brown finds it "shameful" that fewer than 10 percent of the Americans honored there are women.

"Statues are monuments. They are visual reminders of our past, of our history," she says, adding it doesn't bother her that statues linked to slavery and racism — erected decades after the Civil War — are coming down back East.

Cannon symbolizes something entirely different, Brown notes: "Women's leadership in public service."

"I think Martha Cannon is the story," agrees Sen. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, SCR1 sponsor. "She was ahead of her time by probably 100 years and has a story that needs to be told. Nothing against Philo Farnsworth, who's had almost three decades to shine. I just think it's Martha's turn."

"We keep hearing 2018 described as the Year of the Woman, of trying to get women more involved and to run for office. I think it puts an exclamation point on those efforts. And it tells a great story that even many Utahns don't know, that Utah was historically a leader in advancing women. I love that," he adds.

Student involvement

Bruce Barnson was principal of Ridgecrest Elementary School in 1987 and spearheaded the effort by three successive fourth-grade classes to get the Utah Legislature to approve Farnsworth as the choice for Utah's second statue. Most states already had two, but after the Beehive State put a statue of Brigham Young in the hall, it didn't settle on a second option for decades.

The schoolkids and their adult mentors narrowed a list to three important names in Utah history — Farnsworth, University of Utah chemist Henry B. Eyring and J. Willard Marriott, founder of the hotel and hospitality chain that bears his name — then did a survey of 400 Utah residents. Farnsworth was a clear choice, Barnson remembers. And the kids fought hard to send him to Washington, lobbying, enlisting parents and other supporters. They helped raise money for the statue, which used no taxpayer money. That's a promise Weiler makes for a Cannon statue, too, if the resolution passes.

When Utah artist James R. Avati's sculpture of Farnsworth was unveiled in Washington, D.C., many of the students were there, along with Barnson and his wife Treva.

They'd fought for their hero and knew his story well: Born in Beaver, Utah, but largely raised in Rigby, Idaho, Farnsworth at age 21 invented a video camera tube that proved essential to creating the first TV. He'd started working on it when he was 14. A serial entrepreneur, he later invented a nuclear fusion device and contributed to development of the electron microscope, baby incubator, night vision infrared and other technological wonders. He held 300 patents when he died.

Cannon's historical contribution was also colorful, and she was extraordinarily accomplished. By age 25, she'd earned two medical degrees, one in chemistry and one in oratory. Brown says Cannon believed that would help her crusade for a robust public health system, and it did. Back in Utah, she became Deseret Hospital's resident doctor.

Cannon also ardently supported the polygamy she practiced as Angus Cannon's fourth wife, even leaving the country temporarily to avoid having to testify against him or her patients.

As a lawmaker, she helped established Utah's Department of Health and its building now bears her name.

Running as a Democrat, she defeated her Republican husband to win her place in history as the first woman in a state Senate. She beat other high-profile candidates, too, including Emmeline Wells, prominent in Mormon politics and later in the women's suffrage movement.

Cannon's first bills laid groundwork for what would later become the state School for the Deaf and Blind. She wanted everyone to flourish.

"Why do statues matter? Why did people freak out in Charlottesville, Virginia, when they tore down a statue?" asks Weiler. "They are part of our history and remind of us of who we are and where we came from. I think people would like to get to know Martha — this great woman who really was a trailblazer."

Her fan base also includes students she inspired.

"I am kind of a history nerd, and it's been a bit disheartening studying history as a woman. When I was 10, I told anyone who would listen that I would be president of the U.S. Then I found out women couldn't vote until 1920," says Natalie Tonks, 17, a Lone Peak senior who's recruiting support for a Cannon statue. Women were late getting accepted to colleges, too, says Tonks, who adds she's grateful gender won't hold her back.

"If Martha could do all that, what can I do with all the opportunities available to me?" she asks. "My favorite thing is that she was so many different things: Mother, doctor, legislator. She wasn't confined to one thing. She was able to be so many things at once."

While the Barnsons hate the idea that Farnsworth may lose his place in the giant statue collection, they do like the notion that another generation of students is learning about government and working to influence its decisions, just as their group of students did years ago.

Securing the vote

Christensen and Brown love to look at political cartoons from the suffrage era. Women in territorial Utah were the first to vote, starting in 1870, before Congress rescinded that right in 1887. Some traveled back East to talk about voting — and how it felt to lose that right. Utah's Constitutional Convention delegates included women's rights and the Utah male electorate ratified it in 1896.

One cartoon shows Lady Liberty marching. Another shows a "fantastic figure placed on top of the U.S. and all the women in the East in chains," Christensen says. "There were great speeches, great advocates and a beautiful quote about Utah being 'the shining star' as it extended that suffrage right."

Weiler hopes to shine that star again by giving Cannon her place of honor among notable American women. If the vote passes — possibly on Feb. 12, which is the date in 1870 when Utah passed its suffrage bill — Better Days 2020 and others will start raising money for the statue and an artist will be commissioned.

They hope to install it in the national collection in August of 2020, exactly 100 years after U.S. women secured the right to vote.

McBaine expects a Cannon statue to inspire both girls and boys to see what can be accomplished. And in a few years, if someone else replaces it, she thinks that could be inspiring, too.

"Who we place in the public sphere should be a sort of vital, flexible, organic process depending on who and what we value at that time in our culture — and who has already been valued and who still has an opportunity to be valued in the future," she says.

Her best case scenario? Lots of heroes, all worthy of public display.



Wiegand, Jacob. "Statue of Martha Hughes Cannon, outside of Utah state capitol building," *Deseret News*, January 24, 2018



Wiegand, Jacob. "Statue of Philo T. Farnsworth, inside of Utah state capitol building," *Deseret News*, January 24, 2018.