

# New book honors the women who made suffrage possible

By **Niki Kottmann**  
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Last month, Wyomingites celebrated an iconic milestone: the 150th anniversary of the law that made Wyoming the first state (at the time, a territory) to grant women suffrage.

On March 1, a book on the subject of women's suffrage in the West at large will be published, and Cheyenne was one of several places author Chris Enss visited to gain a better understanding of her subject.

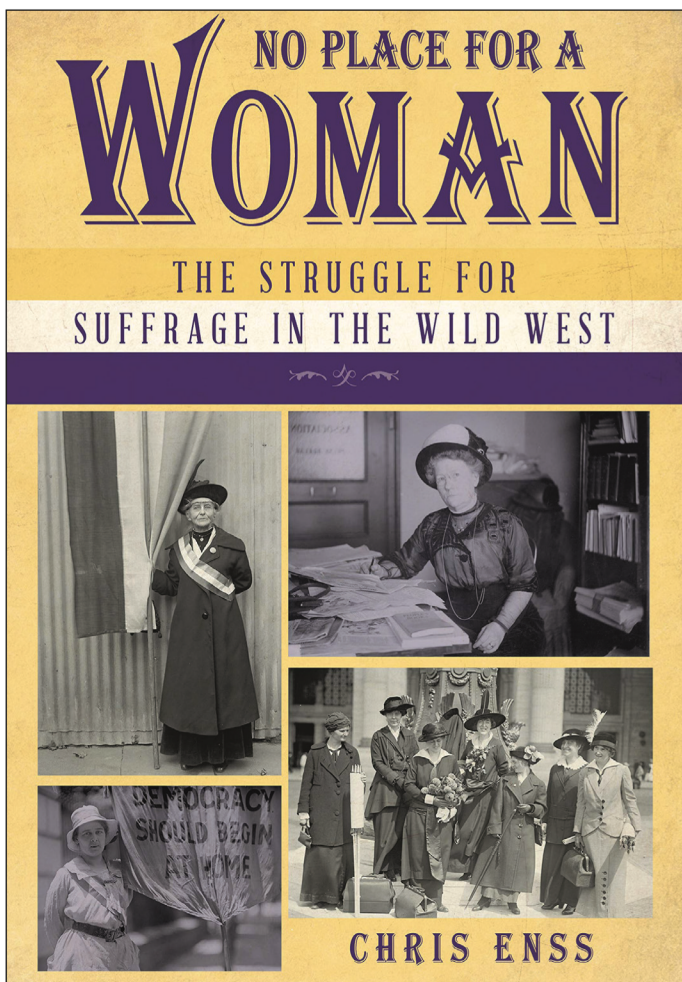
"Wyoming, as you know, is such an amazing place," Enss said by phone from her home in Grass Valley, California. "Wyoming embraces its history and holds on to it. So being able to go to those places and be able to hang out in Wyoming in various places—you get a sense of what that history was to a degree. ... It's so rich you have to wipe it away like cobwebs."

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, and March is Women's History Month, so Enss decided it was the perfect time to publish "No Place for a Woman: The Struggle for Suffrage in the Wild West." The title is the latest of more than 40 books she's penned about the Old West, but the first to dive into an aspect of history that she's long been fascinated by.

About three years ago, Enss decided to work on this book with editor Erin H. Turner of TwoDot publishing. The pair had worked well together in the past, and they share a passion for women's history—and how the West factors in.

"I was struck by the idea that (women's suffrage) was granted first in the West, then the nation," Enss said. "The whole movement began in the East in Seneca Falls, and the bill wasn't going to be passed anything east of the Hudson, but it was all because of what was done west of the Mississippi River."

Enss lives in the heart of California gold country, Ne-



"No Place for a Woman: The Struggle for Suffrage in the Wild West" by Chris Enss comes out March 1, but it's now available for preorder in hardback on Amazon for \$26.95. Courtesy photos

vada County, which is also where Aaron Sargent and his wife, women's suffragist Ellen Clark Sargent, drafted what later became the 19th Amendment. One of the most engaging parts of her research, Enss said, took place in the archives of her own county history department, where she read several years worth of letters between the couple and Susan B. Anthony (who they met on a train to Wyoming after inviting her to sit and share food with them).

The amazing pieces of history she was able to find after unraveling the incredible, yet difficult-to-decipher handwriting of these letters is an example of why leaning on primary source material is key for Enss. As a history writer, she said she doesn't like her work to be a series of facts regurgitated from another

modern source. Instead, she likes to dig right into the heart of the matter, and there's no better way to do that than to read personal letters.

Enss is also a licensed private investigator, so in-depth research that often includes intimate material has always been attractive to her.

For this book, Enss said she spent a great deal of time in the first four states that granted women the right to vote before the nationwide amendment was passed in 1920: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho. On these trips, much of what she'd learned from research on her previous books was further validated.

"I've written so much about soiled doves, the prostitutes of the Old West, that it didn't surprise me, but soiled doves were the first to get the right to vote in small towns



Chris Enss is a New York Times bestselling author.

because they owned property, and they had to purchase a license to run their business," Enss said. "It's not a very attractive way to look at the suffrage movement, but it's why I believe women were able to advance more in the West than the East."

Enss said the reason the movement was successful out West first is largely because women had more opportunities in the West. There were jobs, more lenient divorce laws and an overall sense of freedom from the established societal roles of women back East, leading women to play more pivotal roles in their new communities as they maintained a "zeal for reform."

That empowerment that comes with learning how these Western women pushed the women's suffrage movement forward is why Enss wrote her book.

"I think just to be able to let young women know how much women were able to achieve by having the grit and courage to cross the rugged plains to start new societies in this rugged frontier," she said of her goal with this book. "A lot of time people feel like we're safe where we're at, we're just in our cocoon and changes don't take place there, but they happen by taking broad steps like these women did."

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