

A Day in the Life – March 27, 2009

Description

In honor of Women's History Month...More on Anna Howard Shaw

Anna Howard Shaw was born on February 14, 1847 in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England. Soon after her second birthday, her family left for America. They settled first in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where young Anna read and re-read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and became passionate about issues of slavery.

When the Shaws moved again in 1859, they found themselves in a much different environment: the wild forests of Michigan. Anna and her family lived in a tiny log cabin surrounded by 360 acres of wilderness. Her father and her two oldest brothers returned to Lawrence to work, leaving Anna, four siblings, and her mother to fend for themselves. Finally, at the age of 15, Anna was able to get work as a schoolteacher, earning two dollars a week. It was at this point that she first dreamed of becoming a minister. When her older sister got married, she invited Anna to live with her in the town of Big Rapids. Here Anna attended high school and met an influential mentor, Miss Lucy Foote. Through Miss Foote's guidance, she was invited to give her first sermon in the village of Ashton.

The Shaw family vehemently disapproved of her ambition to become a preacher, and they offered to pay her way through the University of Michigan if she abandoned the idea. Anna preached on 36 more occasions that year, however, and then decided to attend Albion College without their financial assistance. She was nearly broke when she arrived at Albion, and then-President George Jocelyn was impressed by her and allowed her to live with his family during her first year at school. Anna gave a series of temperance lectures in an effort to defray the costs of her education, and Miss Foote took up a collection totaling \$92.00 from her friends in Big Rapids to help support her education.

In 1876, Anna began to study for the ministry at Boston University. She was the only woman in her class, and she still had to get by on limited funds. After her graduation, she was pastor of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in East Dennis, Massachusetts for seven years. In 1882, she decided she wanted to attend medical school as well, and in 1885 she became a physician as well as a minister, preaching at two churches and treating the urban poor three days a week.

Soon, Anna decided to give up her ministry posts altogether, choosing to travel the country lecturing on temperance, and later traveling with Susan B. Anthony for the cause of women's suffrage. Anna continued to cross the country and campaign for women's rights for the next 18 years. She was elected president of the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1904. She held this position until 1915, when she looked forward to retirement at her home in Moylan, Pennsylvania.

In 1917, however, war came to the country and the Council of National Defense appointed Dr. Shaw as Chairman of the Women's Committee.

It was at this time that the First National Community Song Day was held in Washington, D.C.—on Sunday, December 9, 1917, to be exact. It was held under the direction of the Community Music Department of the National Council of Women. The purpose of the day was to, very simply, sing. The program for the event states:

Why we Sing

We, as American Citizens, have an imperative duty imposed upon us at this hour. We must inculcate American Principles and arouse all citizens of the United States to a realization of the Power of Music in *Mental* and *Moral* Preparedness. Let us make this a great power in our country and bring together in *one vast army* the forces working in America for our great democracy. All the men, women and children of our land cannot enter the trenches—but those who are *left at home can* join The Army for Encouraging Patriotism and Energized Spiritual Thought Through Community Music.

With *your* co-operation, the endorsement of our National Administration, our Chambers of Commerce, our Schools, our Clergy and Press, there will be developed a happier people, a greater America—True Democracy.

On this day several important American individuals met to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Old Folks at Home” “A Perfect Day,” “America My Country,” “The Spirit of Victory,” “Come Thou Almighty King,” “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” “Over There,” “There’s a Long, Long Trail,” “Pack up your Troubles in your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile,” “Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand,” “O Come All Ye Faithful,” and “America,” which was conducted by Anna Howard Shaw. You can see her holding the baton she used to conduct in her left hand, in one of the photos below (Dr. Shaw is the third woman sitting to the right of the man standing on stage).

Anna served as Chairman of the Women’s Committee for the Council of National Defense until 1919, when she again expected to retire, but was asked to travel through the country with former President Taft and Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell in order to generate support for the newly formed League of Nations. This proved to be too much for Anna’s health, however, and she checked herself into an Illinois hospital.

Shaw died at her home in Pennsylvania on July 2, 1919. A year after her death, the government finally accepted her life’s message and ratified the 19th Amendment, giving women the vote.

The following images are from MSS-0004 Collection on Anna Howard Shaw:



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