



HCR 7: Abigail Scott Duniway

I would like to draw your attention to the name of Abigail Scott Duniway along the wall of names on the upper left front of this chamber. Hers is one of only four women's names who grace this chamber's walls, along with Sacajawea, Narcissa Whitman, and Eliza Spalding as early influential Oregonians.

Abigail Scott was born in Illinois in 1834. When she was seventeen years old, her life changed dramatically with the death of her mother and brother during the family's grueling trek to Oregon in an ox-drawn cart. Abigail's family settled in Lafayette, Oregon, where she began a career as a schoolteacher. Just one year later, she married Benjamin C. Duniway. Four children promptly followed, spaced less than two years apart.

By 1859, while Duniway filled her days caring for children and farm chores, she found time in the late evenings to pen her first novel, *Captain Gray's Company*. Her writing skills literally kept the family afloat when Benjamin suffered a crippling accident and lost the farm. Abigail was now the breadwinner and returned to teaching as well as running a hat shop in Albany, Oregon. A move to Portland in 1871 offered the family a new start.

The women's rights movement was small but active in Portland, and Duniway decided that a women's newspaper would offer income as well as a valuable outlet for her writing talents. She founded the *New Northwest* during her first year in Portland, after an inspiring visit from national suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony. Politics, fiction, fashion, and domestic advice filled the pages of the popular new publication which Duniway edited for the next sixteen years. She found time to lecture on temperance and women's rights as well, and was active in the Portland Women's Club.

Duniway's reputation grew throughout the entire region, with speaking engagements pouring in as far away as Idaho City, Boise, and Lewiston, Washington. National suffrage leaders called on her to serve as a vice president in the National Women's Suffrage Association in 1884. Lecture tours and publication of *New Northwest* kept Duniway in a constant whirlwind of activity.

Traveling some 12,000 miles (before the advent of automobiles no less) and giving more than 140 lectures, Duniway turned her full attention to the Idaho suffrage campaign. With local women taking charge, Duniway led campaign in Idaho to victory in 1896. She helped mastermind the campaign to victory in Washington State as well in 1910.

Duniway's efforts to win the right to vote in her home state of Oregon proved much more demanding. From 1884 to 1910, Oregon's male voters defeated suffrage five times at the polls. Ironically, Duniway's own brother, the influential publisher of the *Oregonian*, editorialized against every suffrage measure. Finally, in 1911, Duniway and her forces mustered the courage

to take the issue before the intransigent voters one last time. She led the Oregon Equal Suffrage Association to victory at the polls in 1912. On November 30, 1912, Duniway signed Oregon's suffrage proclamation and became the first woman in her state to register to vote.

Duniway's remarkable career as a journalist, lecturer, and suffrage organizer ended when she died in 1915. Her autobiography, *Pathbreaking*, remains a powerful memoir of her forty years of service to women's rights.

Abigail Scott Duniway is one of the four finalists under consideration to represent Oregon in the National Statuary Hall. To vote for Mrs. Duniway go to the Oregon Historical Society website and click on the Get Involved tab.