

>> Janet Clemens: Imagine being the first woman elected to Congress, before the rest of your gender could even vote nationwide. What barriers would you face? What hurdles would you have to overcome? And what challenges would be left for the next generation to conquer?

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You're listening to Shaping History: Women in Capitol Art, produced by the Capitol Visitor's Center. Our mission is to inform, involve and inspire every visitor to the United States Capitol. I'm your host, Janet Clemens.

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Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to Congress in 1917 by the state of Montana, three years before the 19th Amendment was ratified. A statue of her by artist Terry Mimnaugh was added to the National Statuary Hall collection in 1985. Women have been challenging boundaries since the beginning of the nation's history. And there have been many firsts in terms of women at the Capitol. Some of the obstacles they face you might expect. Some, like finding a convenient restroom, you might not. I sat down with Farar Elliot, curator for the United States House of Representatives, to discuss the long history of women in Congress. Farar, welcome to the podcast.

>> Farar Elliot: Thanks so much. It's great to be here.

>> Janet Clemens: I'm excited to talk to you about women in Congress, because your office has been working on a project, which actually I think goes back to the Bicentennial about that.

>> Farar Elliot: Yes, it does actually. The very first edition of "Women in Congress" was back in the 1970s. And as you can imagine, biographies of all the women who've served in Congress, it's grown a little bit since then.

>> Janet Clemens: Kind of a massive project to assemble and put together. Right?

>> Farar Elliot: Yep.

>> Janet Clemens: And I've seen the latest iterations titled "A Century of Women in Congress." Right? The things that were focused in 2017?

>> Farar Elliot: Yes. Because, of course, 2017, for those of us who love congressional trivia, was the 100th anniversary of the first woman in Congress, Jeannette Rankin, being sworn in and serving in the House of Representatives.

>> Janet Clemens: So we're tying this podcast to the commemoration of the centennial of the 19th Amendment. Right? So that would be 1920. But here we have Jeannette Rankin actually getting sworn in in 1917 so.

>> Farar Elliot: Isn't that a little bit bonkers that she serves in Congress before women have the right to vote nationally? There are a few states, especially out in the west, that in the 19-teens give women the right to vote. And Jeanette Rankin represents a district in one of

those in Montana. But, yeah, she's almost the forerunner, the prelude to this big anniversary we've got right now.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah. I was doing some research on her, because we have a statue of her in the Statuary Hall collection, and the artist actually tracked down what she was wearing on that first day that she appeared in Congress. And I found actually on the House Blog you guys had written a post about there was a fake Jeannette Rankin that happened a couple weeks before?

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah. You know it's interesting, because it's the 20th Century. There's lots of newspaper coverage, so that we have a lot of documentation of what she was wearing the day she first entered Congress. But the same time, it wasn't as though there was television, and people were seeing lots of images of her. But she was seen as a novelty in some ways. And so, yes, people had some fun with it. So somebody's dressing up and pretending to be Jeannette Rankin. And, of course, it's also kind of interesting that all women look alike apparently. And also that in the course of all this coverage, there's so much emphasis on her clothing. And, in fact, one of the interesting things is that in the House of Representatives in the House Chamber, members do not wear hats.

>> Janet Clemens: Right.

>> Farar Elliot: It was something that was established in the middle of the 19th Century. But in 1917, a woman was not considered fully and appropriately dressed unless she had a hat on. So there was all this back and forth before she came to Congress, whether she should wear a hat or not. Is she a woman or is she a member of Congress? Because up until that point, you couldn't be both. And eventually they decided that she's not a woman, she's a member of Congress. And, therefore, she has to take her hat off. And when, in the early 2000s, the House commissioned a portrait of Jeannette Rankin, we had access to all that information about what she was wearing. And we were able to use all that. And she's depicted standing in the hallway, the corridor right outside the House Chamber about to turn and go in. And she's wearing a hat. Because we know she wore a hat and we know what it looked like. It was a big old hat. And when we unveiled the portrait, a number of people came up to us -- a number of members of Congress came up to us and said, "You know, she's going to have to take that hat off." And, yes, that's exactly what she would do. She would have to turn, take her hat off, and walk through the door.

>> Janet Clemens: So tell us about Jeanette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress in 1917.

>> Farar Elliot: She grows up in Montana. And she works very hard for suffrage. And, as we know, she's elected to Congress before women have the right to vote nationally. But she's very involved in the suffrage movement. And when she comes to Congress, a lot of what she's interested in is suffrage. And she chairs a suffrage committee. But other things that are really important to her include supporting minors in her district, and supporting the needs of women and children. The suffrage movement often comes out of a lot of the reform movements of the 19th Century. Things trying to make things better for very poor, vulnerable people, who include often women and children. And she is involved in something that's passed later as the Sheppard-Towner Act. Which, essentially, is one of the

first acts that provides social services to women and children. She also is a devout pacifist. And is one of a handful of members of the House who vote against entry into World War I. In fact, one of the reasons she's sworn in in April 1917, as opposed to a little later in the year, is because President Wilson calls a Special Session of Congress to consider acts of war and joining the World War that's happening in Europe. So she actually has to rush down to be sworn in, because this Special Session of Congress is called by Wilson to do this. So right from the get-go, she's tossed into the fray on issues that are very important to. Her brother is a big supporter of hers, and helped run some of her campaigns, Wellington Rankin. So, again, it's something where she has a lot of support, both from her family as well as from these very different movements she's been involved in, and that she continues to work on after she leaves Congress. She serves one term. And is gone for quite a while working on lots of different issues, particularly pacifism. And then is elected to Congress for a second term in 1940. Which means she's in Congress when World War II is declared. And is probably most famous today as both the first woman in Congress, and as a woman who voted against World War I and World War II. And becomes the only person who votes against entry into World War II. After she leaves Congress after that, she very much loses her next reelection bid, in part based on that vote against entry into World War II. After that, she's still very involved in lots and lots of political stuff. She testifies before Congress, things like that. And when the peace movement and the women's liberation movements of the late 1960s happened, she's involved in that, too. In fact, she's got such a long career that some women formed something called the Jeanette Rankin Brigade. And they think she's dead, because she started back in the 19-teens. And when she finds out that, you know, they've got this Jeanette Rankin Brigade, she's like, "Yeah!" And joins right in. She's involved in things through her entire life.

>> Janet Clemens: So I want to talk about women in Congress, in the sense of women in the building. Like before they're even in the position of being elected or being staff, women are showing up, right, to lobby. What is -- what is lobbying?

>> Farar Elliot: Lobbying is really the practice of talking to members of Congress about what's important to you. And, historically, it comes from the fact that people would stand in the lobby, just outside the main event of, say, a theater or a legislature, and talk about things outside. It's sort of like an informal space. And women begin to use that informal space in the Capitol right after the Civil War, really, when the devastation of the Civil War really throws women into the public sphere, whether they want to be or not. They're impoverished. They have dead husbands. They have injured husbands. They have dead fathers. They have dead sons. And you'll find women beginning to come to the Capitol to ask for specific personal assistance. There are things called private bills. And that would be sort of if you're asking for a pension for a particular person. And those things happened back then. So the only way that women could engage formally with the legislative process was through these things called petitions. And women would send petitions, often petitions not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the nation. Things like abolitionists would send petitions. Women would send petitions about Indian removal, things like that. And in the post-Civil War era, women would come specifically looking for pensions for people or a job, because they'd been thrown on their own resources. And it becomes this thing that's a real surprise to the establishment. And they're trying to figure out what do we do so that

these respectable women can be in a public space that is designed for and intended for a more rough-and-tumble environment and people than they think women should be. So they'll set up things like separate retiring rooms for women, or reception rooms for women. Because you probably shouldn't be talking to a man you don't know in public. But if you set aside a special room, you can stay there in seclusion, and send your calling card in to the member of Congress. And hope that they will come out and talk to you in that reception room. So women are in there. And they start to be -- over the 1870s, say, and the 1880s, they start to be so much more present in the Capitol that it comes to the notice of, say, reporters. Who tend to start portraying them as dangerous, seductive people who might get their talons into these poor innocent members of Congress. And seduce them into sometimes, in some cases, you know, just a pension. But other times, they may be involved in some of the largest business operations going on in the U.S. Like railroads and mining, things like that. So it becomes this sort of tentative entry into the public sphere. And because they are personally there, it also becomes this experience for women in which they are exercising some level of soft power. But, also, are exposed to a lot of criticism. And the idea of petitions is often considered a more ladylike approach. Because it's just paper and you're not putting your actual physical body in there. But beginning in the 1870s and the 1880s, occasionally women do testify before congressional committees.

>> Janet Clemens: Right. So who do we think is the first?

>> Farar Elliot: The first woman to testify before a House committee is Victoria Woodhull, the suffragist. And she testifies before the Judiciary Committee in January of 1871. And it's electric. It gets covered in all the newspapers. There's illustrations of her as this very fashionable woman. And women learn to use this new widespread print journalism and illustrated newspapers very savvily. Both Victoria Woodhull does and later Sarah Winnemucca does as well, when she becomes the first Native American woman to testify before a House committee. So Victoria Woodhull is already notorious, infamous. She's a stockbroker on Wall Street with her sister, Tennie. And she's a spiritualist. And she gets written up in kind of the racy newspapers, because she's, you know, meeting men as a stockbroker. I mean, nothing says sin like that apparently. And when she comes to Congress, she's here operating kind of as a free agent for women's suffrage. But she comes at exactly the same time that the women's suffrage movement is having a giant convention here in D.C. So although they hadn't been working together, the larger suffrage movement is very savvy. And immediately realizes this is something we need to be a part of. So they get with Victoria Woodhull. Even though she's not quite as proper as this long tradition of petitioning and writing and speaking is, they grab a hold of her. They come out in force to support her at the committee hearing. And she gets up and they say that she lays aside her little Alpine hat. And I really want to know what an Alpine hat looks like, because I bet it's cool. And speaks they say at first shakily, but with increasing confidence. And makes a constitutional argument that the fact of the 14th Amendment means that women should have the right to vote. And the 14th Amendment has only been in force for five or six years. So she's really reading the Constitution, and coming up with some novel ways to do this. And using this very smart exposure through the newspapers. In fact, it's so popular that if you look at one print that shows her testifying, it's a crowded room, she's young, she's beautiful. She's ready for primetime, fashionably dressed, Alpine hat. And there's sort of

other anonymous women around the table, also fashionably dressed. And in the background, they even have like some reporter sketch artist sketching the whole thing, too. So there's this real sense that this is an event.

>> Janet Clemens: So I kind of want to talk about this sort of evolution of women in the building. Because we know that the House of Representatives has been open to the public since day one. Right? The gallery, essentially, the idea that people could sit and watch Congress has been around from 1789?

>> Farar Elliot: Certainly in the House.

>> Janet Clemens: Yes.

>> Farar Elliot: They said it took a little longer.

>> Janet Clemens: Right. They were met behind closed doors for five full years. And then they copied the House and went ahead and let people in there. So the idea that people could come and they could watch silently from the gallery has been around with Congress almost from the very beginning. Right? And then we've got this idea about these folks who are kind of waiting in the lobby to speak to members as they come off the floor. And that's one way to sort of insert your voice into the conversation. And then we're talking about Winnemucca and Woodhull. And they're finding a voice in the conversation a different way by testifying before an actual committee. And then we move on to Jeannette Rankin, who gets to actually stand on the floor, make a speech. Right?

>> Farar Elliot: [inaudible] on.

>> Janet Clemens: So what happens post-Rankin? Where does it go?

>> Farar Elliot: Well, you know, it's interesting. It's slow. And certainly the widow's mandate, the notion that women will succeed their husbands for just a little bit, is very prominent in the early years. But one thing you start to see, there are not a lot of women serving in Congress. But it's an interesting thing to track. So women start serving a little bit in the '20s, a little more in the '30s during the Depression. And women get involved in politics. And women start arriving with more political experience. So after World War II ends, there are a number of women in Congress. But you start to see a tailing off of new women coming into Congress. So there are women who have established themselves. But you see this emphasis in the nation at large on one-income families, women being at home. And there's a real assumption that that is the appropriate place for women, that women should be doing unpaid labor. They might be involved with the League of Women Voter, but they're not going to run for City Council, that kind of thing. So in 1953, there are 15 women in Congress. So it's not a lot. And almost a decade later at the beginning of the '60s, there are 20 women in Congress. But then during the 1960s, only 11 new women come into Congress. So you really see this sort of shrinking of new women coming into Congress.

>> Janet Clemens: But there is increased diversity at that point.

>> Farar Elliot: Absolutely.

>> Janet Clemens: Right? In 1964, we get Patsy Mink, who was the first Asian-American woman elected to Congress. Right? In 1968, Shirley Chisholm is there, the first African-American woman elected to Congress. So it's not a lot of women, but it is a little bit more diverse.

>> Farar Elliot: Absolutely. That's exactly the change that you see in the '60s is greater diversity. One of the things that's interesting that happens is -- I was looking this up just the other day. So it takes a while to get power in Congress. You have to be here a while. You can't be here for, you know, the widow's mandate part. You have to really be here and accrue power and seniority. So in 1953 to '55, Edith Nourse Rogers chairs the Veterans Affairs Committee. She's been in Congress for decades. She comes in in the 1920s. And then after she leaves Congress, there isn't another woman chairing a committee until the 1970s.

>> Janet Clemens: Ah, yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: So it takes 20 years before another woman to get that much power, before Leonor Sullivan chairs Merchant Marines and Fisheries. And you [inaudible] this sort of decline in new generations of women coming in in numbers, and sticking around from the 1920s to the 1940s. Those are the starting years for three women who serve more than 20 years. So women who serve a really long time. And then the next time you get somebody who serves more than 20 years as a woman, that person doesn't start until the 1980s. So you have this really long time where you have women who just really aren't doing that for that long. The average age in the late-'40s for women getting married is 20. So you just have a really small pool, as there's this assumption that what you're going to do is start a family. Or even if you do participate, it's like you're doing it with one hand tied behind your back. There's this really great example actually. The first congresswoman from Minnesota, her name is Coya Knutson. Coya Knutson is awesome. She's really effective as an early legislator. She's elected in 1954. So she's elected kind of just at the time when you would expect a new generation of women to be coming forth. But it's the 1950s. And women are supposed to be wearing frilly aprons, and sticking around at home. And she serves only a couple of terms. And one of the reasons for that is that her opponents conspire with her husband, Andy Knutson. Who manages to take down his own wife's career. And he takes out ads in the papers that say, "Coya, come home. You are neglecting your family." So it's this very, very direct, one-to-one correspondence between a woman going to Washington and being a member of Congress, and this backlash in this very specific instance. In which they're really clear, "Oh, it's because you should be at home cooking and cleaning, and taking care of your son." So you see that happen a lot in there. And so while you don't necessarily see the numbers go down as dramatically as I'm making it sound, there are so many women whose careers explode on the launchpad.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah. And you can see there that they're using the press almost as a weapon. I mean, in that case as a weapon. But that the press is focused intensely on the personal lives of these women in Congress. And also focused on their appearance, as we saw with Jeannette Rankin. That there's this -- the reporters are used to reporting on society ladies. So they're accustomed to reporting every detail of her dress and her hat and her manners. Right? And then when women are elected to Congress, the reporters are like, "Well, I guess we'll describe her outfit."

>> Farar Elliot: It's true. And I think that you can really see some parallels between that [inaudible] women as something that is looked upon, both in statuary in the Capitol and the actual women serving in Congress. There are lots of instances in which women have to work with that to try and get some kind of press for issues that are important to them, or press for themselves as they're running for Congress. You know, so they'll have to do sort of photo ops of powdering their noses, or ironing their clothes, that kind of thing, in order to get some attention so that they can talk about issues that are important to them. And you can also see how people don't really know where to have them. As you were saying, reporters are used to reporting on society pages. So if you're a respectable woman, that's what happens. If you're not a respectable woman, there's a whole different category of how you're going to get reported on. But if you're respectable, this is what happens. We talk about how you had lunch. There are articles about Ruth Bryan Owen, a member of Congress, about how she invented a handbag.

>> Janet Clemens: I wanted to talk about that, yeah. So, you know, at that point, there are clutch purses. Those are popular. What year are we talking about circa?

>> Farar Elliot: It was like the 1920's, 1930's.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah, so handbags, clutches, maybe a little strap that you wear around your elbow. But you can't really put the whole thing on your shoulder.

>> Farar Elliot: Right. Like we're all used to shoulder bags. Right? Women like carry enormous thing's, enormous bags --

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: Of stuff. And Ruth Bryan Owen probably didn't actually invent the notion of a shoulder bag. I'm sure that you could look at like messenger bags --

>> Janet Clemens: Military use.

>> Farar Elliot: Exactly.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: The Pony Express, for all I know.

>> Janet Clemens: Haversacks. I mean, the --

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah.

>> Janet Clemens: Ammunition they're carrying --

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah.

>> Janet Clemens: In the revolution and earlier.

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah, I mean, it's a shoulder bag. A shoulder. It's like the wheel. It's been around a while.

>> Janet Clemens: But the press are crediting her with.

>> Farar Elliot: Exactly. Because there's this notion of like how do we talk about a woman who is very fashionable, and known for her style? And how does she talk about herself? How can she do this job that requires both things? And so, yeah, she talks about essentially there are these like breathless descriptions of "it's a bag with a strap, it's amazing, and it's got her monogram on it.

>> Janet Clemens: She's like, "As a member, I need to use both my hands sometimes."

>> Farar Elliot: And people are like, "Wow, it's a miracle." And it is true that we do have some photos of other women who are like juggling a lot of bags, because the bags that you have don't have that much in them anyway.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: So you have like -- there's one woman who's got like three clutches she's hanging on to. And there's a later photo of Ruth Bryan Owen when she becomes an ambassador. And she's got like full-on briefcase. Like done with this stuff, I'm going briefcase.

>> Janet Clemens: Another interesting thing that happened in 1958 is that's when Edith Green starts pressing for the women to have a more private space. Right? So I've got your blog about becoming the women's reading room. So she starts a push. Edith Green of Oregon begins to press, it says, for a more appropriate room of their own.

>> Farar Elliot: So in the 1920s, when there are all of three women in Congress, the House assigns a room for the women. And they don't actually call it this. But it's a bathroom. And it's not on the same floor as the House Chamber. It's a floor below. It's way off in the corner. And I think it's a room, and then there's like a bathroom within it. The men in Congress have had a bathroom right off the floor of the House since the 1850s. And it's really great. And it's really nearby. And it's important to be nearby, because this is a time before electronic voting, you don't know what's -- necessarily know what's happening on the floor unless you're there, or unless you're close enough that you can pop your head in. So the room that the women have is on a different floor. It's far away. If it's busy, as the number of women grows beyond three up to, say, a dozen, then maybe you're going to go to the public bathroom. I don't even know where the public bathroom for women is at that point. But I'm sure it's even less accessible. And there are probably lines. But by the time Edith Green comes in, there are enough women in Congress, probably more than a dozen, that a one-holer of a bathroom isn't going to work.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: So she's --

>> Janet Clemens: She served a long time.

>> Farar Elliot: But in 1962, 17 of them are sharing a single bathroom.

>> Janet Clemens: [inaudible], yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: And, of course, everybody's leaving at the same time. I mean, its Congress. They're all doing the same stuff. So they're all stuck on the floor at the same time voting. And then everybody scoots out. So Congress women, starting with Edith Green in particular, start agitating for something more appropriate. Something that will suit their needs. And it takes a while. But, ultimately, in the early 1960s, they secure a room that originally was the Speaker of the House's office, when the House met in the Old Chamber. And at the time that they secured it, it had been the Clerk of the House's office. So they get this room. Ultimately, it becomes the Lindy Boggs Congressional Women's Reading Room. Named for Lindy Boggs, a long-serving and wonderfully beloved member of Congress. And it consists of a room that has both sort of a parlor, as well as more necessary facilities. And that really becomes a place that women, members specifically, can go. It's not near the Chamber. But it's on the same floor, the same level as the rest of what's really going on legislatively. And that happens in the '60s. And in the early '70s, electronic voting comes in. And it becomes infinitely more convenient, because there are bells and buzzers and lights that go off to tell you when you need to leave, and go back to the floor and vote.

>> Janet Clemens: Right. So there's a room in the Capitol that we now refer to as National Statuary Hall. And it houses the majority of those Statuary Hall collection, which we focus a lot on in this podcast. But that's not what this room has always been.

>> Farar Elliot: That's so true. And in addition to be calling Statuary Hall, it's also called the Old Hall of the House. Because it was the House Chamber for many decades before the House built what we call the New House wing, and with the New House Chamber, which dates back to 1857. But if you were to watch television, turn on C-SPAN and look at the House in session, you see a bunch of seats in a semi-circle. And there's what we call the rostrum. They're all sort of facing that. It's like the stage. But it's several layers of stage so that you're up high, if you're, say, the Speaker of the House presiding. And if you think about that same sort of semi-circular layout, if you go into Statuary Hall, you can see that it was exactly the same. It's a half circle. There was a place that would be the center of the circle, if you finished making it into a whole circle, that's where the speaker's rostrum was. And the floor, rather than being flat the way it is now, would have been a stepped floor, like a theater, with desks for each member, a desk and a chair. And the desk and chair was their only office. There were no other rooms. No buildings. No nothing. All you got was this desk. And, frankly, they were not that big. And as the House got more crowded, as the nation grew and added more population, so more seats were added, they would actually sometimes cut the desks down so they could fit more in. So they were even tinier. We have one in the House collection. And it is -- I can't even imagine. If you put that right next to somebody else, I'm left-handed, and if you're right-handed and we were sitting next to each other, we would just be like fighting all the time, knocking over each other's stuff.

>> Janet Clemens: They were elbow to elbow?

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah -- [inaudible] They really were until '57.

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah.

>> Farar Elliot: So it was very crowded. And the galleries were very popular to go to. In fact, at one point, they added another gallery. The galleries were on the sort of curved semi-

circular part. But at one point, they added another gallery along that sort of flat side of the half circle, so that they'd fit even more people. And we have lots of letters and newspaper articles about the number of people who were crowding into the galleries. And if you had some association with Congress, say, you were the wife of a member of Congress, you could sometimes sit not up in the galleries, but on these sofas that dotted the edge of the semi-circle. So there were lots of people all over the place. It was very busy. Lots going on. Early on, one member, John Randolph, would bring his hunting dogs in. I mean, it was called the Bear Garden for a reason. It was definitely considered a thing where you'd go and watch, and just see a lot going on there. It was a very contentious place. And now we go into Statuary Hall, and it's very stately. There are columns, as there were then. There are wonderful windows, as there were then. But at the time, it was a much busier, messier place, just like democracy is. But now when you go in, it's beautiful. There are so many statues there. And part of the reason there are is because once the House went into its new 1857 chamber, what is now Statuary Hall really didn't have a purpose. It was big. And you had to walk through it to get to the New Chamber. But it didn't really have much that it knew it wanted to be. And people would start selling stuff there. There were vendors all over the Capitol. And a lot of them set up in what is now Statuary Hall selling apples or souvenirs, floor plans, scorecards, things like that, gingerbread. Somebody had a whole pie stand that had like a million different kinds of --

>> Janet Clemens: Yeah --

>> Farar Elliot: Of pie.

>> Janet Clemens: A lady who sold pies. When I had heard about this initially, I always pictured the vendors as male. But really it was a mix.

>> Farar Elliot: Yeah, it really was. And a lot of them were women. In the same way that women are coming after the Civil War to try and get pensions or jobs, when they're being really entrepreneurial. And there's one old woman who, you know, just sells apples. And another who sells just souvenirs. And she gets photos printed up with famous members of Congress, and has them sign them. And then she sells them. There was somebody. this was a guy actually, in the Rotunda who was selling coffins during the Civil War. Which I think is a little tacky. But apparently --

>> Janet Clemens: Or a bed.

>> Farar Elliot: Yes. So they were starting to think maybe there's a better use for this. People are storing ladders in here. People are leaving their sandwiches behind the columns. People are selling apples. And so they start to add art there, because sometimes people give the Congress art, random stuff seems to show up. Occasionally people will come and they'll want to display their art with an eye towards getting Congress to buy it. So it's like they put it there on approval. Because they can't photograph it and send it to them. So a lot of it's just hanging there or standing there, because a member of Congress has said, "Sure, I'll sponsor putting that thing in the corner." And so it starts to become a little bit more formalized. They put up two-by-fours around some of the art, so that people can't go like sit on it or climb on it, or something. So it starts to become a little bit more like an art gallery. And in the 1860s, the House and Senate decide, "You know, let's make this a formal deal,

instead of just this random stuff people are putting up here." So they create the National Statuary Hall collection to be housed in what they are now going to call National Statuary Hall. And that's the beginning of the National Statuary Hall collection. And it has become this wonderful resource for the nation and for visitors here, who come and see it. And now it is not just in National Statuary Hall, it's all over the building. And I've heard members of Congress say that one of the experiences they have as new members is seeing all of these people who represent this long history of civic engagement. On whatever level. Whether you're a revolutionary war soldier, the first woman in Congress, or the inventor of television. These people who are sort of adding to our national story as they pass by them headed to the House Chamber or the Senate Chamber. They sort of imbibe this. And I feel all of us when we visit the Capitol do that very same thing.

>> Janet Clemens: So, Farar, if you had to sum up a "Century of Women in Congress," what would we say.

>> Farar Elliot: You know, we've talked a lot about women being involved in the political process, informally from the very beginning in the galleries with petitions, talking to members, testifying before Congress. But I really think that now, as we've completed a century of women in Congress, and as we are celebrating the centennial of women earning the right to vote, it's a really wonderful and interesting time to contemplate how important that vote was for Jeanette Rankin, and for all the other suffragists who worked beginning in the 1840s for that. And what a long arch that was, from 1848 at Seneca Falls to the passage of the amendment, and then its ratification. And I think that one of the most wonderful things about visiting the Capitol is that, when we walk in here, we really have the opportunity to see how long American history is. And how it is always an unfinished story. And we are always adding to the sum total of people who count in America, and who participate here at the center of legislative democracy.

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>> Janet Clemens: The momentum of female contributions to the Capitol, both politically and artistically, continues today. As the 20th Century progressed, more statues of women and by women arrived at the Capitol. In our next episode, we'll discuss some of the many women who've been included in a Capitol collection, either as artists or subjects of illustrious renown.

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Thank you for listening to Shaping History: Women in Capitol Art. For more information, or to book a tour, please go to visitthecapitol.gov. The interviews included in this podcast represent the personal reflections and opinions of the interviewees, and should not be considered as the official views or opinions of the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, the Architect of the Capitol, or members of Congress.

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