



JESSICA LORD COX HENDERSON

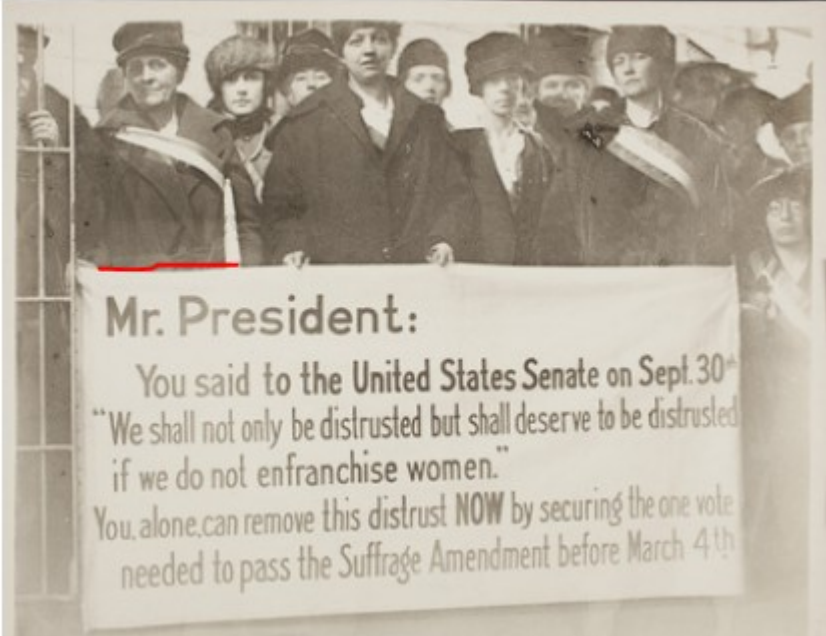
1867-1952

Crazy! Communist! Could this be the description of 5'8" Wayland woman with a high forehead, oval face with a round chin and aquiline nose, straight mouth, and medium complexion with brown hair and eyes? A woman who belongs to the Women's Club, chairs a committee to build a playground, leads a book discussion group, belongs to Animal Rescue League, cares about her neighbors by writing them notes and sending flowers, and supporting the Red Cross? A mother of six, living comfortably but proclaiming the simple life, reaching for a high moral stand and pursuing an understanding of the world's current events through lectures given in Wayland? This is a woman who fought to save the Wayland Post Office, involved herself with the Waltham Hospital Aid society, saw the importance of having an everyday garden, fundraised for electricity for the grade school and for science laboratory for the high school. She was a leader in the Searchlight Club and belonged to the Daughters of Portland.

So why was this vegetarian who refused to wear real fur accused of being a "willful violator of the law both in thought and deed"? Why was an FBI file kept on this woman? A file which contained the secret comments such as she influences disloyalty, is mentally unbalanced, supporter of the Irish Rebellion, pro-German and anti-war individual who reads Scott Nearing, was maintained. Despite saving the post office, Postmaster, M.W. Haynes claimed, "although prominently known around Wayland, she was always getting into arguments or disputes over various matters." Constable J. Charles Vincent alleged her a fool, crazy and erratic in her actions.

Granted she did not attend church, although she did support many of the church's activities. This determined female stepped to the beat of her own drum. She respected the German methods of science and education. She brought a brother home to Wayland from a New Jersey mental institution to reside with her. She removed U.S. Army recruitment posters from all over town rather than have the young men die in war.

Jessica Lord Cox Henderson started making friends with the famous and the infamous early in her personal career. By 1898, she was sitting on stage with Lucy Stone, her husband, Henry B. Blackwell or their daughter Alice Lucy Stone. Jessica presided over a meeting of those interested in Women's Suffrage given by William Lloyd Garrison's son in 1899. Breaking away from older leaders, Jessica joined forces with Alice Paul and became the state secretary and District Chairman of the new Women's National Party which believed in a more aggressive approach to getting their demands. This involved picketing, parading through the streets and getting jailed. Jessica included her 14-year-old daughter to protest President Wilson in Boston for which they both were arrested.



Note the heart shaped lock on this pin the women received for being jailed in Boston

Jessica did not stop at this point but traveled to Washington DC picket at the White House.



Visible and commanding in the Boston "Great Suffrage Parade" of 12,000 to 15,000 women who marched for over two hours, Jessica proudly held the gold banner of the suffrage goal.



Learning to hear her own voice, convinced Jessica to have the confidence to fight for her personal beliefs. Jessica was prominent in the American League against War and Fascism, presiding over the conference of the New England Committee of the United States Congress Against War and later the International Congress against War and Fascism. She would be forced to testify about the organization in court. She opposed a law that would curb jobs for married women. Jessica proposed a bill stating that "man cannot marry until he can show he is capable of supporting a wife." She was against "unwarranted interference with the lives of women." She was against pasteurization of milk due to the increased cost to the farmers. Jessica joined the Ladies Committee at the Massachusetts College of Osteopathy. She became the treasurer of the National Committee to Striking Miners and sought to protect them from hired armed guards. She was frequently in Washington DC where she testified before Congressional Hearings and on one occasion visited President Coolidge. She wrote several letters to newspapers, magazine articles and pamphlets in support of her causes.

In 1934 she suggested to married couples that they incorporate each other's names to solve the "discrimination of the sexes as it applies to titles." By 1937, Jessica joined the board of Harriett Tubman House to "assist colored girls." Prior to that, she had been involved in the movement to improve the status of the African Americans. Jessica became Chairman of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. She and one of her daughters became passionate in helping Sacco and Vanzetti. She went to Italy twice and enabled Vanzetti's sister to come to America. Vanzetti's letter of thanks to Jessica L.C. Henderson was published in the newspaper. Jessica also set up a fund for the Sacco family. She also protected Edith Berkman, a young woman who was a communist, from being deported to Russia by hiring a doctor to examine her. He declared Edith too ill to be moved. Jessica continued to try to protect other political prisoners.

Just as strong in her other beliefs, she lectured and wrote in opposition to vaccination, pointing out the dangers of vaccination. She was prominent in the anti-vivisection movement. Jessica was the secretary of the Citizens Committee opposing Compulsory Vaccination which engaged in a state-wide campaign against compulsory vaccination. She was also Secretary-Treasurer of the Medical Liberty League. Jessica called attention to the Nation-wide opposition to Social hygiene legislation proposed by the League of Women Voters. She had the ears of the mighty and well-known and she continued to lecture for years on these subjects.

Jessica lived over a half century in Wayland. Born in Maine, she also died here. Her home at 116 Plain Road was known as "Ye Old Place" showing her comfort and love for her home in Wayland. One long-time friend was reported in the FBI report describing Jessica's "enthusiasm may have caused her to overstep the bounds of loyalty, but any disloyal remarks are unpremeditated and not really intended as seditious." However, the FBI concluded that Jessica Lord Cox Henderson should "cease making statements, or she should be placed where she cannot do so." There is no evidence that this ever happened.



Contributed by Katherine Gardner-Westcott and Wayland High School History Project

To learn more about Jessica Lord Cox Henderson from Wayland High School History Project

<https://whshistoryprojectwwi.weebly.com/ch-1-family-life-1800s-1952.html>

click on [Jessica Henderson, activist](#)