



Jeannette Rankin (1880-1973)

Suffragist, feminist, pacifist, political reformer, battler for children's rights, and economic justice for the poor. First woman elected to the U.S. congress. Her election took place before women had the right to vote. Hear about her childhood in Missoula and the other influences that shaped her life and made her an advocate for social justice.

- **1880-Birth.** Jeannette was born on June 11, 1880 on a ranch in the Grant Creek area of Missoula MT. Parents were John Rankin, a rancher and lumber merchant and Olive Pickering, a former schoolteacher. Family was of Scottish descent.
- **1902.** Graduated from Montana State University located in Missoula MT with a bachelor degree in science. She was a schoolteacher, seamstress, and studied furniture design. When her father died in 1902, he left money to Jeanette which was paid out to her over her lifetime.
- **1904.** Inspired by slum conditions on a trip to Boston, she took up the field of social work. She became a resident in a San Francisco Settlement House for four months then entered school in New York to gain her degree in Social Work. Upon completion, she returned to the west to become a social worker in a children's home in Spokane WA. This lasted only a few weeks.
- **1910.** Became involved in the woman suffrage movement while studying at the University of Washington. Visiting Montana, Rankin became the first woman to speak before the Montana legislature, where she surprised the spectators and legislators alike with her speaking ability. She organized and spoke for the Equal Franchise Society.
- **1912.** Field secretary of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She was among the thousands of suffragists at the 1913 suffrage march in Washington DC before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.
- **1914.** Returned to Montana to organize the successful Montana suffrage campaign.
- **1916.** First woman elected to Congress. She was a Republican. (This was three years before women were guaranteed the Constitutional right to vote.) She won the election even though the papers first mistakenly reported she had lost. She was the one of the first women in the World to be elected to a parliamentary body. She lost her bid for US Senate in 1918. She made history by voting against World War I. She violated protocol by speaking during the roll call before casting her vote. Her stand led to the Republican party pulling all support, leaving her as Independent.
- Political reforms she worked on during her terms: civil liberties, suffrage, birth control, equal pay, and child welfare, right to vote for women. At one point, her peace activist roles led her to be accused of being a 'Communist'. 1917 - She opened congressional debate on the Susan B Anthony Amendment, which passed the House and Senate to become the 19th Amendment. Other campaigns: 1922 Women's Independent Citizenship; 1921 Maternity and Infancy Protection Act; 1924 Child Labor Amendment.
- **1940.** Elected for Congress. She was the ONLY vote against World War II. Again, she violated protocol by speaking during the roll call before casting her vote, announcing "As a woman I can't go to war, and I refuse to send anyone else". She was then denounced by the press and her colleagues and barely escaped an angry mob. She believed that Franklin D Roosevelt had deliberately provoked the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
- **1968.** Led 5000 women in a protest in Washington DC demanding the US withdraw from Vietnam. She headed the group and it was called the Jeannette Rankin Brigade.
- She lived in self-imposed poverty, spending the last half of her life traveling the world for peace and equality for women.
- **1973-Death.** Jeannette died on May 18, 1973 in her sleep in Carmen CA. Her ashes were reportedly spread at sea.