

Maria Louise Baldwin

1856-1922



An innovative educator, Maria Louise Baldwin advocated woman's suffrage, beginning with participation in school committee elections.



Maria Louise Baldwin. MOORLAND-SPRINGARN COLLECTION

“A very cultivated woman” who could speak on “almost any subject except herself.” –Boston Globe description of Maria Louise Baldwin, August 1897

Educational Pioneer

Born in Cambridge, Maria Louise Baldwin faced prejudice as an aspiring teacher. A school committee member advised her to go south “where she was more needed.” After teaching in Maryland she returned to teach at the Agassiz School. In a forty year career she became principal, the only black women in that role in New England. She was appointed master when the school's facilities and programs were upgraded. An innovator, she improved mathematics education, established parent-teacher groups, and introduced the position of school nurse.

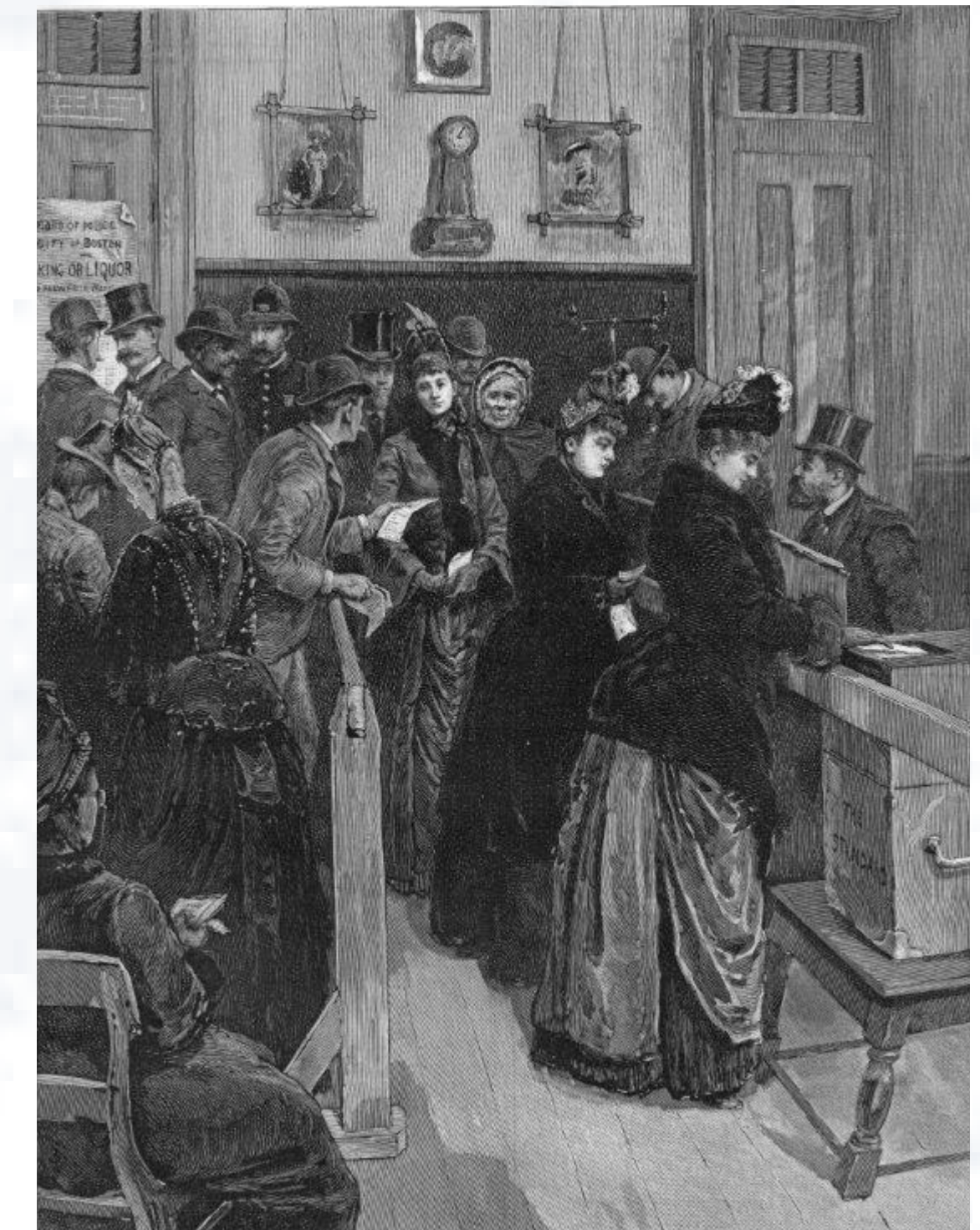


Image of women voting for school committee in Boston, Harper's Weekly December 15, 1888. ALAMY

A First Step

In 1879 the Massachusetts legislature voted to allow women's suffrage in school committee elections. Baldwin noted that school suffrage “so meager a share of voting power” had improved the lot of Boston area teachers and argued that expanded woman's suffrage would improve society.

A Lifetime of Reform

Often described as a “clubwoman,” she was active in the community and a member of many service organizations. With Josephine

St. Pierre Ruffin she established the Woman's Era Club with black and white women members. Among many causes the club advocated recognition of African American achievement, an anti-lynching campaign, and woman's suffrage. Baldwin spoke at the 25th annual banquet of the New England and Massachusetts Woman's Suffrage Association at Faneuil Hall on May 22, 1900.



Maria Louise Baldwin's Cambridge home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It remains a private residence. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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W.E.B. Du Bois. Baldwin conducted weekly readings in her home for black students at Harvard including future sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. Later he wrote, “Her poise commanded greater and greater respect. Her courage—her splendid, quiet courage astonished us, and so she came to larger life and accomplishment.” LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In 2002 the Cambridge School Committee voted unanimously to rename the Agassiz School the Maria L. Baldwin School. PHOTOGRAPHY: WAYNE SOVERNS. IMAGE VIA HMFH ARCHITECTS, INC.



Much in demand as a speaker, Baldwin lectured on education, historical topics, and the work of African American authors. She died suddenly at the Copley Plaza Hotel on January 9, 1922 shortly after making a presentation.