

Voters gone 'wild': History of suffragist 'sex radicals'

Historian to debunk myths on 19th amendment

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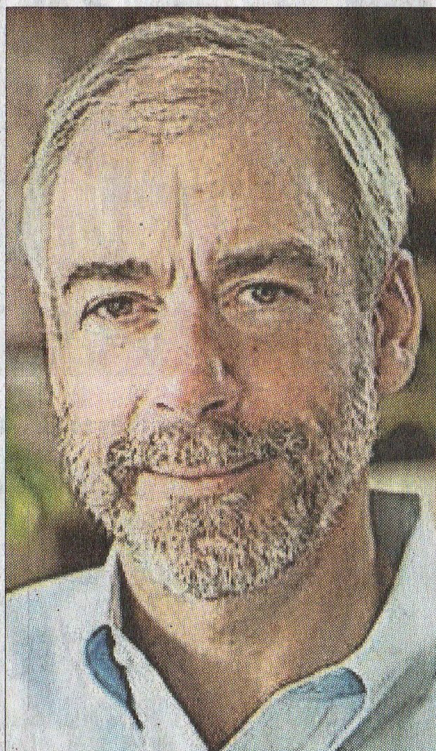
Curiosity drove Joe Miller to the history books to learn about feminism and the suffragist movement, but it turns out the history textbooks got it wrong. During the Second Saturday lecture series sponsored by the Sonoma Valley Historical Society on Feb. 8, hear what Miller learned about the women who were for women's suffrage, the larger contingent who were against it, and the ones that were part of the "Free Love" movement.

"There were some 50 different arguments against (the suffragist movement)," Miller said, adding that none of them were very persuasive.

When Miller first moved to California 40 years ago, he had a female friend whom he called "an angry feminist" whose views on gender issues he found challenging. That's when he started looking at history books – reading about feminism and the suffragist movement.

"There were six academic books about women who were anti-suffragist," Miller said, but there was no explanation as to "why women were against giving women the right to vote."

Historians skipped over this part of history "glibly," he said. There were more men in favor of giving



Joe Miller's is the first Historical Society talk to receive a PG-13 rating.

women the right to vote than there were women in favor of it, Miller said.

Five years ago he compiled what he learned and wrote an article, "Never a fight of woman against man: What textbooks don't say about women's suffrage," that appeared in *The History Teacher*, published by the Society for History Education.

The fight to get the right to vote for women was a decades-long move-

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The Second Saturday lecture, "Joe Miller presents Wild Women Suffragists and their reputation as sex radicals" – will begin at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 8, at the Sonoma Community Center, 276 E. Napa St. Admission is \$5 general.

The talk is rated PG-13, according to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society.

ment that began in 1848, but it took until 1920 to enfranchise women with the passage of the 19th Amendment. As part of the centennial celebration of Women's Suffrage, Bay Area-based historian Miller will discuss debunking the myth that men didn't want women to vote, and talk about the "wild women" and the "Free Love" movement of the era.

"Susan B. Anthony was essentially a prude," he said. She believed that if someone became a widow or a widower they shouldn't be allowed to marry again. She believed that marriage was "sacred." He called it "ironic" that she should be associated with Free Love.

The Free Love concept isn't strictly about sex, it is about the right to love whom you want, to discuss sex and birth control, and to abolish the belief that women were considered to be the property of their husband.

Miller will discuss Anthony and fellow women's right pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and their brief involvement with Free Love activist Victoria Woodhull.

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