Mother of Western Suffrage – Abigail Scott Duniway

Many words could describe Abigail Scott Duniway. Witty. Hard-edged. Acerbic. Her own grandson, the late David C. Duniway, former Oregon archivist, went so far as to say she may have delayed Oregon suffrage with her biting tongue. Above all, Abigail Scott Duniway was persistent.

Consider. Abigail Jane Scott – they called her Jenny then – grew up in a world in which wives could toil from morning to night and not own one cent of the money they might earn, not even the clothes they wore, or the children they bore. All was owned by the husband. It was a world in which a woman had no vote in home or community, yet could lose everything to a decision or judgment not her own. In a world in which a lady was supposed to know nothing of birth control, a woman could become permanently disabled from bearing too many children. A husband determined where his family would live, even if it meant a 2,000-mile trek on foot across an unknown and dangerous land. This was the world Abigail Scott Duniway came to know very well. When men who voted didn’t get it when Abigail confronted them with the logic of equal suffrage, it was enough to give anyone a biting tongue.

On her way to becoming the Northwest’s foremost suffragist, women’s rights advocate, and leading newspaper publisher, the teenaged Jenny kept her family’s Oregon Trail journal. In those pages, she recorded encounters with death and cruelty and near-starvation, as well as scenes of heart-wrenching beauty and human kindness. As a wife, she was called upon to support her growing family. With but a few months’ formal schooling, she taught school (on half a man’s salary), barely keeping ahead of her students. As the owner of a millinery shop, she learned first-hand the plight of other women with no rights. Knowing that her forte was “scribbling,” Abigail Scott Duniway turned to writing. She eventually wrote three complete novels, 21 serialized novels, her autobiography, and volumes of poetry including an epic poem. She campaigned for women’s rights and human rights in the pages of her own newspaper, The New Northwest, for sixteen years. Her lectures, writing, and women’s rights organizing gained her notoriety from coast to coast. Along the way, Abigail fought prejudice, prohibitionists, preachers, national suffrage leaders, the liquor industry, rich matrons, and her own brother, Oregonian publisher Harvey Scott. Through it all, it was Abigail Scott Duniway’s stubborn persistence that kept alive her simple belief in “absolute freedom for the mother sex.”
Selected Bibliography – Abigail Scott Duniway (1834-1915)

Newspapers edited by ASD

*The New Northwest*, Portland, 1871-87
*The Coming Century*, Portland, 1891-92
*The Pacific Empire*, Portland, 1895-98

Selected published works by ASD

*Captain Gray’s Company; or, Crossing the Plains and Living in Oregon*, S. J. McCormick, Portland, 1859
*David and Anna Matson*, S.R. Wells & Co., New York, 1876
*From the West to the West: Across the Plains to Oregon*, A.C. McClurg, Chicago, 1905
*My Musings; or, a Few Fancies in Verse*, Duniway Publishing Co., Portland, 1875

“Yours for Liberty”-- *Selections from Abigail Scott Duniway’s Suffrage Newspaper*, edited by Jean M. Ward and Elaine A. Maveety, Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, 2000 – [has an excellent bibliography]

Novels by ASD serialized in *The New Northwest*

*Judith Reid: A Plain Story of a Plain Woman*, 1871
*Ellen Dowd the Farmer’s Wife*, 1872 to 1873
*Amie and Henry Lee; or, The Spheres of the Sexes*, 1874
*The Happy Home; or, the Husbands Triumph*, 1874 to 1875
*Captain Gray’s Company; or, Crossing the Plains and Living in Oregon*, 1875
*One Woman’s Sphere; or, The Mystery of Eagle Cove*, 1875.
*Madge Morrison, the Molalla Maid and Matron*, NNW, 1875 to 1876
*Edna and John: A Romance of Idaho Flat*, 1876 to 1877
*Marta Marblehead: The Maid and Matron of Chehalem*, 1877 to 1878
*Her Lot; or, How She Was Protected*, 1878
*Fact, Fate and Fancy; or, More Ways of Living than One*, 1878 to 1879
*Mrs. Hardine’s Will*, 1879 to 1880
*The Mystery of Castle Rock; a Story of the Pacific Northwest*, 1882
*Judge Dunson’s Secret: An Oregon Story*, 1883
*Laban McShane: A Frontier Story*, 1883 to 1884
*Dux: A Maiden Who Dared*, 1884 to 1885
*The De Launcy Curse; or, The Law of Heredity—a Tale of Three Generations*, 1885 to 1886
*Blanche Le Clerq: A Tale of the Mountain Mines*, 1886 to 1887

Novels by ASD serialized in *The Pacific Empire*

*Shack-Locks: A Story of the Times*, 1895-1896
*Bijahs Surprises*, 1896
*The Old and the New*, 1897

Selected Sources on ASD