

Amendment

Jeannette Rankin Pioneer and Pacifist

The vote was 388 to 1 on December 8, 1941, when the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution declaring war on Japan. The lone dissenter, Jeannette Rankin, a Republican from Montana, had also voted against the United States' entry into World War I.

A lifelong pacifist, Rankin voted her conscience that day, but the hoots and jeers that arose from the gallery so unnerved her that she could not vote "nay" again three days later when the House took up resolutions of war against Germany and Italy. Each time she quietly said "present," the equivalent of "nay"; but her "presents" were recorded as zeroes, so the resolutions appeared to have passed unanimously.

During both of Rankin's congressional terms, 1917-19 and 1941-43, the United States went to war. Not only did her opposition twice cost her reelection, it also obscured her major achievement: she was the first woman to sit in the U.S. Congress, a victory won four years before the 19th Amendment guaranteed all women the vote.

Born in 1880 on a ranch not far from Missoula, Montana, Jeannette Rankin worked briefly as a social worker before taking up the causes of pacifism and women's suffrage. In 1913 she joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association as a field secretary, working in campaigns in 15 states. As chairman of Montana's state suffrage committee, she helped gain passage of the state's voting-rights law in 1914. Two years later, vowing "to repay the women of Montana who had worked for suffrage," Rankin ran for Congress.

During her first term, she focused on aid for children and women and on promoting women's suffrage nationally. Four days after she took her seat, she voted against entry into World War I. Though the stand was controversial, it was not exceptional; 55 other members of Congress voted the same way. Rankin was confident enough of support that she



1917: Suffragist Jeannette Rankin, at right, stands with Carrie Chapman Catt.



1937: Rankin as an officer of the National Council for Prevention of War.



Fifty-one years after the United States entered World War I, the Jeannette Rankin Women's Peace Brigade demonstrated before the Capitol. Rankin did not march.

ran for the Senate in 1920.

Defeated, she devoted the next 20 years to pacifist causes. In 1940 she ran for Congress again, promising to "keep our men out of Europe," and Montana's women came through for her. But that was before Pearl Harbor. Stunned and angered by her dissent, her constituents refused to reelect her in 1943.

True to her beliefs, however, Rankin

remained in the forefront of the pacifist movement. She opposed the Cold War and American intervention in Korea. In 1968, when she was 88, 5,000 women were gathered into the Jeannette Rankin Brigade for a march in Washington to protest the Vietnam War. When she died in 1973 at 92, Rankin had secured her place among America's political pioneers.