

Jeannette Rankin First Woman Elected to Congress, Peace Advocate, Daughter of Homesteaders 1880-1973 Missoula, Montana

Jeannette Rankin was the first of six children born to Canadian immigrants John and Olive Rankin. Her parents had journeyed to Montana in search of gold, but they eventually became successful ranchers and merchants instead. They already owned a good deal of land when they claimed another 160 acres in 1890s under the provisions of the Homestead Act.

In 1916, Jeannette Rankin became the first woman in U.S. history to be elected to the House of Representatives. On April 2, 1917, just four days after taking her seat in Congress, she caused a stir on Capitol Hill by voting against the resolution calling for the United States to formally enter World War I. The vote generated much ill will, and she was defeated in her bid for re-election in 1918.

In 1940, Rankin, then 60 years old, successfully ran for congress again. On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, she cast the only "nay" vote on the resolution to approve President Franklin Roosevelt's declaration of war against Japan. Her vote against U.S. involvement in World War II cost her any chance of re-election, as had her vote against involvement in World War I.

After Leaving Congress for a second time, Rankin returned to private life, traveling extensively. She returned to Washington D.C. in 1968 to lead a demonstration against the Vietnam War on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Her passion for peace earned her the nickname "the original dove in Congress." She died in 1973.