

**Illustrated  
timeline for  
the writing  
of *Trifles*:  
*A One-Act  
Play*  
by Susan  
Glaspell**

**Research undertaken  
by dramaturg, playwright  
and performer Milbre Burch  
in 2010.**

**This timeline situates the  
playwright and the play's writing  
within the context of the life and  
times of Margaret Hossack, the  
real-life Iowa farmwoman whose  
murder trial, covered by Glaspell  
as a reporter for the  
*Des Moines Daily News*,  
inspired her to write the play.**

## 1830's

The Temperance Movement became the first American reform campaign to emphasize the brutality of domestic violence. Insisting that domestic violence was a direct consequence of alcohol, reformers argued that the survival of the alcoholic's wife depended upon her rights to control her own earnings, gain custody of her children, and to secure a divorce, none of which were an option for most women.



## 1839

Iowa's Supreme Court ruling outlaws slavery.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic\\_Violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_Violence)

## 1843

Margaret Murchison, after whom the character Minnie Wright is modeled, is born in Scotland.



## 1848

Seneca Falls Convention takes place in New York State. The demand for American women's enfranchisement was first seriously formulated there.

Lucretia Mott (L) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (R) who convened the meeting in Seneca Falls, New York.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Women%27s\\_Rights\\_Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Women%27s_Rights_Convention)

## 1848 (con't)

At age five, Margaret Murchison travels to US and settles with her parents and siblings in Stark County, IL.

## 1850

National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, MA.

## 1861-1865

### American Civil War

## 1862

Signed into law by Abraham Lincoln, The Homestead Act of 1862 granted an adult man claim to 160 acres of land (single women could also stake a claim). The homesteader had to live on the farm for five years and improve it by building a 12' x14' dwelling and growing crops, then could file for a deed of title to the land free and clear except for a small registration fee.

## 1866

A fellow Scottish immigrant, John Hossack begins working for Margaret's father.



Homesteading family traveling by wagon.

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act/>



Blizzard

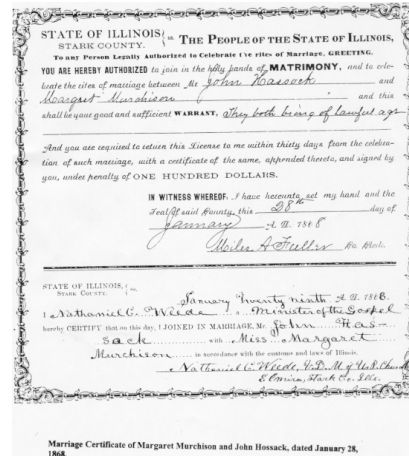
Woiceske, Ronau William, 1867-1953, American.

<http://proxy.msl.missouri.edu:12190/library/iv2.html?parent=true>

## 1867

In October Hossack purchases 120 acres of land and a small house in Warren County, Iowa. It is in Squaw Township, more than 16 miles from Indianola, the county seat.

By late November or early December, Margaret realizes she is pregnant by John Hossack.



## 1868

Margaret and John marry in January and she moves to Iowa with her husband. Except for her brother, Andrew, Margaret will never see any of her family again.

In August she gives birth to her first son. She will eventually have nine children.



The family of John and Margaret Hossack  
<http://www.midnightassassin.com/Case.html>

## 1869

Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony form the National Woman Suffrage Association to press for suffrage and property rights to married women. Lucy Stone founds the American Woman Suffrage Association.



Daguerreotype of Lucy Stone, circa 1840–1860  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy\\_Stone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_Stone)

## 1869 (con't)

The Territory of Wyoming becomes the first government in the world to grant “female suffrage” by enacting a bill granting women the right to vote on December 10, 1869.

## 1870's

By the 1870's wife beating is illegal in most states. With the 1800's came a variety of legal sanctions for battering, although often these laws are not enforced.



<http://www.wyoming.gov/history.aspx>

## 1872

Lucy Stone begins to publish *The Women's Journal*. It will remain in publication for 47 years.

## 1876

On July first, Susan Keating Glaspell is born in Davenport, Iowa.

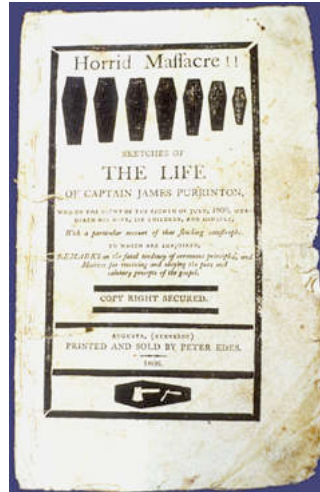


Susan Glaspell



**1879**

Law scholar Nicholas St. John Green writes: "The cases in the American courts are uniform against the right of the husband to use any [physical] chastisement, moderate or otherwise, toward the wife, for any purpose."



**1890**

<http://dohistory.org/diary/themes/purrinton/index.html>

The American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association merge to form the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Known as the "Equality State," Wyoming enters the union becoming the first state with general women's suffrage.



[http://theautry.org/explore/exhibits/suffrage/suffrage\\_wy.html](http://theautry.org/explore/exhibits/suffrage/suffrage_wy.html)

**1893**

New Zealand extends vote to women.

**1894**

Susan Glaspell graduates from high school and begins to cover local news and social events for the *Trident*, the *Davenport Morning Republic* and the *Weekly Observer*.



<http://www.provincetownplayhouse.com/history.html>

1898

Spanish-American War

1900

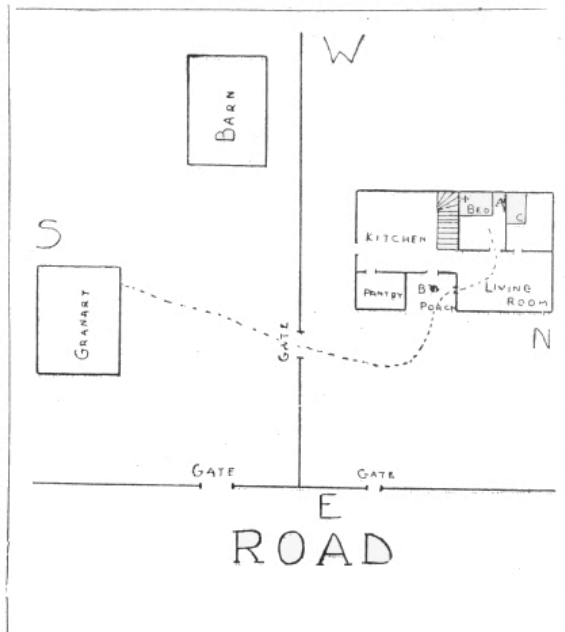
In June, Glaspell graduates from Drake University with a Bachelor in Philosophy degree and goes to work for the *Des Moines Daily News*. Her beat: the Iowa Statehouse.

In the middle of the night on December first, John Hossack is bludgeoned in bed with the sharp and dull sides of an axe. Two days later Hossack dies of his injuries attended by his family. December fifth, as she is departing her husband's funeral, Margaret Hossack is arrested for his murder.

From December 3rd until August 11, 1901, Susan Glaspell files 26 stories on the case for *Des Moines Daily News*.

1901

On April first Margaret Hossack's trial begins. Ten days later she is convicted and sentenced to life in Anamosa State Penitentiary in Polk County, Iowa.



SCENE OF THE HOSSACK MURDER.  
•—Hossack's head.  
A—Blood on wall.  
B—Blood on porch.  
1—Where James and Ivan slept.  
Dotted Line shows path of murderer from bedroom to granary.



MRS. MARGARET HOSSACK.  
Accused of the Murder of Her Husband, John Hossack.

Court Sketch of Margaret Hossack

<http://www.midnightassassin.com/MurderScene.html>

## 1901 (con't)

Immediately after the trial ends, Susan Glaspell resigns from her job and returns home to Davenport.



Susan Glaspell

That summer Susan Glaspell moves to Chicago and enrolls in graduate English program at the University of Chicago.

She publishes a number of short stories in *Youth's Companion*, and sees her stories accepted by *Harpers*, *Leslie's*, *The American* and others.



<http://youthscompanion.com/>



## 1902

Australia extends vote to women.

In April, the Iowa Supreme Court reverses Margaret Hossack's conviction and grants her a new trial. She is released from the Penitentiary and returns to Warren County jail, and thence to the home of her daughter Annie Henry, to await her new trial.



Anamosa State Penitentiary  
(photo taken between 1900-1915.)

<http://www.asphistory.com/oldclassics.htm>

## 1903

In February Margaret Hossack's second trial is moved from Warren County to Madison County and results in a hung jury. The Board of Supervisors of Warren County passes a resolution that it would not further aid in the prosecution, stating its desire that the case be dismissed. She does not go back to court. Her legal ordeal is over.



Warren County Courthouse

**1904**

Susan Glaspell's short story "For Love of the Hills" receives the Black Cat prize.

**1909**

Susan Glaspell's first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*, comes out.

**1911**

Susan Glaspell publishes her second novel, *The Visioning*.



<http://manybooks.net/titles/glaspelletext05glnq10.html#>

**1913**

Militant suffragists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns split from NAWSA and found the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, later named the National Women's Party. They use White House pickets and hunger strikes to win dramatic publicity for the cause of women's suffrage.



Penn[sylvania] on the picket line (1917)  
Photographer: Harris & Ewing, Washington, DC

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/nwp/>

## 1914

Susan Glaspell marries George Cram “Jig” Cook and they move to Greenwich Village and participate in founding The Washington Square Players.

## 1914-1918

### World War One

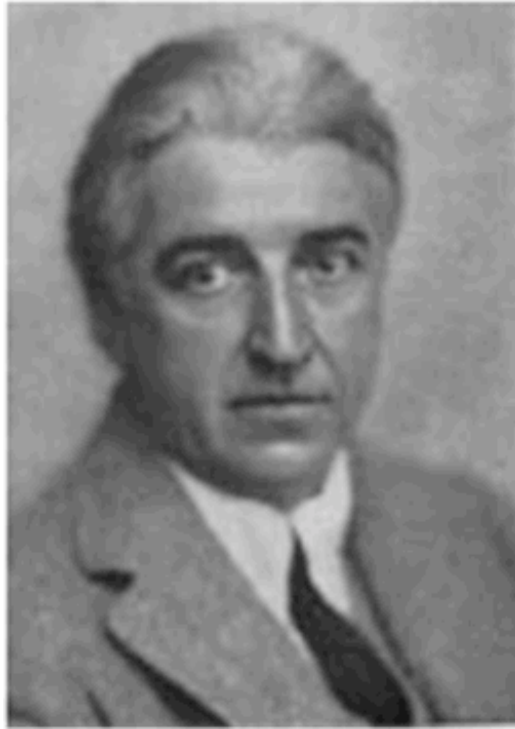
## 1915

Susan Glaspell publishes her third novel, *Fidelity*.

The Provincetown Players begins when a group of writers and artists vacationing in Provincetown present plays on July 15<sup>th</sup> on the veranda of an ocean-view cottage.

## 1916

NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt unveils a blitz campaign that mobilizes state and local suffrage organization all over the country.



George Cram Cook

<http://www.heniford.net/4321/index.php?n=Citations-S.SuppressedDesires-1m2f>



Suffragist parade (1915)

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/nineteenth.htm>

## 1916 (con't)

In the late summer of 1916, Susan Glaspell, Jig Cook and others open the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts to present their second season of plays.

Susan Glaspell writes *Trifles* in ten days just prior to its production and premiere at the Wharf Theatre.

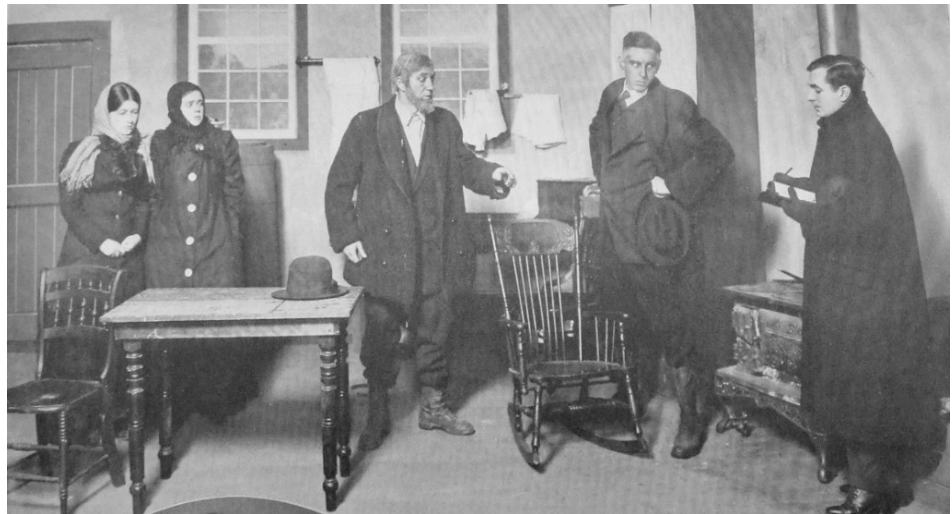
*Trifles* opens with Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook as the leads at the Provincetown Playhouse August 8th.

Margaret Hossack dies in Indianola, Iowa on August 25th.



Theatre at Lewis Wharf, Provincetown, Massachusetts

<http://www.provincetownplayhouse.com/history.html>



Performance of *Trifles*, with Marjorie Vonnegut, Elinor M. Cox, John King, Arthur E. Hohl, and T.W. Gibson, from Washington Square Theatre, Jan. 1917. (From the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center)

[http://academic.shu.edu/glaspell/About%20Glaspell/About\\_Glaspell.htm](http://academic.shu.edu/glaspell/About%20Glaspell/About_Glaspell.htm)



## 1916 (con't)

Glaspell invites Eugene O'Neill to join the Provincetown Players Project.

In the fall, the Provincetown Players move to 133 MacDougal Street in New York City and incorporate as the Playwright's Theatre, better known as the Provincetown Playhouse. They continue to produce innovative plays by American playwrights.



Interior of the Provincetown Playhouse in NYC

<http://www.provincetownplayhouse.com/history.html>

## 1917

Susan Glaspell reworks her play *Trifles* into a short story, "A Jury of Her Peers," published on March 5th in *Every Week* magazine and anthologized widely after that.

Under pressure from the temperance movement, the United States Senate proposes the Eighteenth Amendment on December 18<sup>th</sup>.



<http://www.ellisparkerbutler.info/epb/coverart.asp?y=1917>



## 1919

Prohibition is ratified in January 1919 and effected a year later.

## 1920

On August 26th the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, having been passed by Congress, is ratified, granting the ballot to American women.

## 1922

Once Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* has given some of the Provincetowners a taste for Broadway, Glaspell and Cook become disappointed by the in-fighting and ambitious scheming that divides the Players. The group votes to close the theatre for a year. Glaspell and Cook go to Greece where he dies two years later.

Though the Playhouse will continue to champion American playwrights, and Susan Glaspell will go on to win a Pulitzer Prize for her play *Alison's House* in 1931, it is the end of an era.



Political suffrage cartoon that appeared in *Judge*, March 9, 1917

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_suffrage\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_the_United_States)



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provincetown\\_Players](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provincetown_Players)