Today we are going to be taking a trip to the May Groot Manson Memorial, which marks a historical figure that led the women’s suffrage movement here in Long Island. Here we are at 117 Main Street in East Hampton, New York. This is the site of the May Groot Manson Memorial—symbolizing one of the most influential leaders of the women’s rights movement here on Long Island.

Women Suffrage is a huge deal in American History and the struggle took activists and reformers nearly 100 years to win. On August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment was ratified and resulted for the first time in American history, the largest extension of voting rights was granted to the people. Many activists and leaders were recognized for their hard work, notably famous suffrage leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who were known for forming the National Woman Suffrage Association. However, rarely do we see memorials dedicated to local heroes such as this one.

May Groot Manson was born in 1859, and during her lifetime time we can see from this historic marker that she was the leader of the woman suffrage league of East Hampton and women’s Political Union of Suffolk County. Her, alongside her husband Thomas Manson, believed in the suffrage movement and their activism was instrumental in bringing the cause from Seneca Falls to Long Island. Aside from this, she is also known for organizing a 1913 march in her town with Harriet Stanton Blatch as the keynote speaker. In 1915, May

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kicked off the Torch Relay Crusade, an auto rally from Montauk to Buffalo in which she drove from Montauk to Nassau County, occasionally stopping to deliver speeches to awaiting crowds. Ms. Manson was no stranger to public service, as she had helped set up hospital tents for the Rough Rider soldiers stationed in Montauk after the Spanish-American War, helped raise money for poor children in 1899 with a garden party in her backyard, and helped organize East Hampton’s 250th anniversary celebration. But as the suffrage cause was growing, she attached herself to it and brought it to life in her hometown.

Very little else about her work or her character is known about Mrs. Manson, as no biography or detailed profile of her has ever been written during her time. -May Groot Manson passed on in September of 1917, and today considered to be an unsung hero, not knowing that just two months after her death, a referendum would be passed in November of 1917 granting women full suffrage. Her work helped New York State become the first eastern state to grant suffrage to women, which was a huge victory for the movement.

This Monument stands today to promote her and her life’s work. To an ordinary passerby, it may spark some interest and encourage them to read it and learn about her importance. The historic Marker was placed here on June 1, 2017, as a remembrance to honor the most outstanding suffragist on the East End of Long Island. Until now, May Manson has been best remembered for the portrait John Singer Sargent painted of her in 1890—as a houseguest gift. This marker is the least we can do to remember her as a historical influence on women’s rights.

It is strategically placed in front of her former summer home, in which they would regularly hold suffrage meetings. Unlike other monuments, this is merely a signpost in front of May Groot Manson’s home, not a statue of her, or even any indication of what she looked like or who she really was. I assume that this may be a good reflection about how little we know about her, also because we know little of her character, it would probably be prudent to symbolize her or her work through a statue. I think that this way, there is not really positive or negative message in this monument. This historic marker has been set up so that it serves just as a memento to a deserving woman in history who played an important role in her community in the woman’s right movement. However, it definitely excels in the fact that it acts as a piece of history that people believe that we should not forget, as it shows how we have come as a country in terms of the meaning of democracy and equality for all, especially in the case of voting rights.

Although this marker was placed to memorialize and honor her, I think an argument could be made that the existence of this marker in front of May Groot Manson’s former home certainly speaks to all women in the community and Long Island as a whole and excels as a symbol of pride for all suffragists. 2017 brought the celebration of the 100th year anniversary in women’s suffrage rights in New York State. On August 24th in 2017, the League recreated the 1913 women’s rights rally, which started in front of 117 Main Street, Mrs. Manson’s former home. The current owner of the Manson house, Mary Jane Brock, participated and stated that “I think we’re celebrating a couple of things: We’re celebrating the history of East Hampton and the history of women and these very accomplished, radical women who were outspoken and took the lead in giving us some
of the privileges we have today,” she said. “They were leaders, they were fighters.” It’s no surprise that The League of Women Voters hold this historic marker and her home as an important landmark in Long Island Suffragist history.

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