

## Victoria Claflin Woodhull

Victoria Claflin was born September 23, 1838 in Homer, Ohio. She was the seventh child of Roxana and Buckman Claflin. The family moved frequently and Victoria did not receive a consistent education. On and off she had less than three years of schooling.

From an early age Victoria was a self-proclaimed clairvoyant. This connection with the spirits and her ability to "consult" with them is how Victoria and her younger sister Tennessee made a living as children.

They would travel throughout the country telling fortunes and predicting futures. These same spirits provided guidance in their decisions as adults.

Victoria's homelife was exploitative. To escape this Victoria married Dr. Canning Woodhull, when she was fifteen years old. From this marriage, she had two children, Byron and Zulu Maud. After the birth of Zulu Maud, Victoria divorced the abusive and alcoholic Dr. Woodhull.



## Onward and Upward

Following the spiritual voices Victoria consulted, she met and married Colonel James Blood in 1866. Colonel Blood assisted Victoria in pursuing her dreams and fulfilling her spiritual prophecies. In 1870, with his help, Victoria and Jennie C. Claflin opened the first brokerage firm on Wall Street owned and operated by women: "Woodhull, Claflin and Co.". Much of their investment advice came from Commodore Vanderbilt, a powerful and wealthy man who was also an admirer of Jennie C. and Victoria.

In May 1870 the Woodhull & Claflin Weekly was established. This newspaper, published by Victoria and Jennie C. was the vehicle Victoria used to express her political and social ideas. The first issue of the Weekly announced that Victoria Woodhull was running for President of the United States. She was the first woman to do so.

From the announcement of her Presidential candidacy in 1870 and for the next several years, Victoria Woodhull became one of the most publicized persons of the time. In 1871 she became the first woman to address both houses of Congress. She

argued for allowing women the vote based on the 14th amendment. This speech gained her support from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other women within the National Woman's Suffrage Association.

## Free Love

In 1871 Victoria gave her first lecture, entitled, "The Principles of Social Freedom, Involving the Question of Free Love, Marriage, Divorce, and Prostitution". By Victoria's definition, "Free Love... is the law by which men and women of all grades and kinds are attracted to or repelled from each other, and does not describe the results accomplished by either." Her public support of this Free Love philosophy and admitted practice of Free Love gained Victoria substantial publicity and ridicule.



## Hypocrisy and Scandal

In November of 1872, Victoria publicly accused the prominent minister Henry Beecher of having an affair with Mrs. Liba Tilton. This disclosure, followed by the publication of the details in the Weekly, caused a much publicized scandal.

After Victoria published the details of the affair, she, Colonel Blood, and Tennie C. were arrested for circulating obscenities through the mail. Though they were acquitted, the thousands of dollars spent on clearing their names and raising bail put a strain on their finances.

Victoria felt that disclosure of the affair would bring to light the hypocrisy and double standard within society. Yet, by revealing the affair, Victoria lost public support for herself and her ideas. Thus, someone else's scandal became her downfall.

## England

1876 held big changes for Victoria. In June she ran out of money to continue publishing the Weekly. At this time she also denied ever advocating or practicing Free Love. This change in ideology came at a time when Victoria was rethinking her future. She was trying to change how she was perceived by others thus making her ideas more acceptable. She pulled away from the Spiritualists (the same Spiritualists who four years earlier had nominated her for President) as she was moving into organized religion. In September she divorced Colonel Blood.



In 1877 Victoria moved to England. In 1880 she wrote a letter disavowing her past. That year she also announced her second bid for the Presidency. In 1883 she wed John Biddupha Martin, a wealthy banker. Victoria's last attempt at the Presidency was in 1884, with little or no recognition from others. After 1884, Victoria settled into a quiet homelife with her husband and two children.

In June of 1927, Victoria Woodhull Martin died peacefully in her sleep at home in Bredon's Norton, Tewkesbury, England. She was 89.