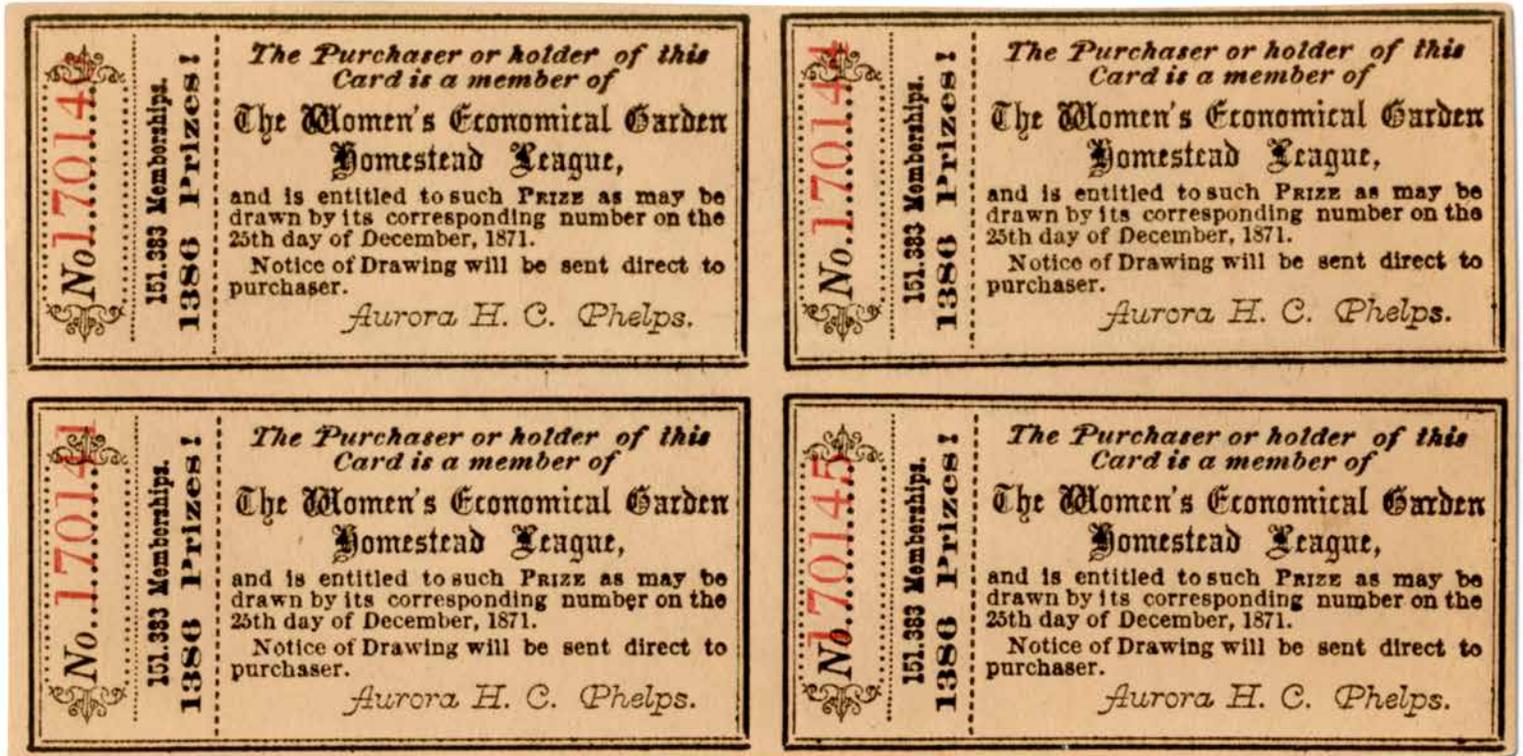


Aurora H.C. Phelps

[Block of Lottery Tickets]: The Purchaser or holder of this Card is a member of The Women's Economical Garden Homestead League

[Boston]: Aurora H.C. Phelps 1871

\$1500



Block of four printed lottery tickets. Overall measurement approximately 5¼" x 2½". Tiny nicks at the corners, else very near fine. Aurora Phelps was a women's rights activist who attended Oberlin College and served in the Civil War "as a hospital nurse of much value and efficiency" (Parker Pillsbury, "How the Working Women Live," *The Revolution*, May 13, 1869). In 1864 she founded the Women's Garden Homestead League, which advocated public grants of land for women near Boston, where they could farm and build homes. While women were eligible to claim land under the Homestead Act, in practice few women had the resources necessary to move to the West and they had to look for land in the East.

When the war ended Phelps moved to Boston where she joined a group of reformers who viewed labor rights as the next major moral issue facing the nation after the abolition of slavery. Together they established the Boston Working Women's League, which became an important voice for the city's impoverished working women. Phelps petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to purchase a tract of land that could be divided into small lots affordable to working women. Though the effort gained support from worker women and the broader labor movement, the grant was rejected by the legislature.

However, in 1871, the state incorporated the “Women’s Economical Garden Homestead League,” enabling it to hold property with a value of up to \$5,000. Phelps raised money from supporters to purchase 60-acres in Woburn, a few miles north of Boston. Thus began the construction of a utopian community known as “Aurora.” Property ownership and governance in Aurora was limited to women, an inversion of gender norms shocking to many male journalists. Despite this optimistic beginning, the community never became economically viable. Ultimately, neither Phelps nor the women who joined her in Aurora could overcome working women’s lack of access to capital or credit.

It is likely that these lottery tickets were an important part of Phelps initiative to found her utopian community. While the tickets convey membership, they are also individually numbered and advertise that the holder is eligible to win one of “1386 Prizes!” Lotteries were a traditional method of raising funds for both public and private purposes, including the United States Lottery, which helped to finance the Revolutionary War.

A fascinating artifact of a suffragette’s attempt to further the lot of women. [BTC#395951]

