

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment

By Dustin Lowe

The headline for the Delaware Journal Gazette on November 6, 1920 announced that for the first time in the nation's history women had voted in a presidential election. It was an event that had been decades in the making.

The women's suffrage movement began in 1848 when the first Women's Rights Convention convened in Seneca Falls, New York. The Declaration of Sentiments was written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton during this time which created an agenda for women's rights. Stanton adopted part of the Declaration of Independence by stating "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed."

Because of the federal system, the women's right to vote could be achieved via either a federal or state constitutional amendment. The early suffrage movement tied themselves to the abolition movement. Those dynamics changed after the Civil War.

In 1869, the movement became a national movement known as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), founded by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Another conservative organization called the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was founded the same year. They favored to amend individual state constitutions. It wasn't until around 1910 when the women's suffrage movement, among other reform issues like prohibition, started to move to the forefront of American politics.

The State of Ohio had a lot of early suffrage activity along with two women's rights conventions. As early as 1858 a vote by the Ohio House to give women full suffrage ended in a tie. In 1896 partial suffrage was granted for local offices such as school boards. At the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Sojourner Truth delivered her memorable speech "Ain't I a woman?"

Harriet Taylor Upton served as president of Ohio Woman Suffrage Association from 1899 up until 1920. On February 15, 1917, the Reynolds' presidential suffrage bill was passed by the Ohio senate by a vote of 19 to 17 and followed the house in passing the bill, however it was struck down in a referendum the following November.

On June 16, 1919, Ohio voted to ratify the 19th amendment shortly after it was approved by congress. So no matter what, the women of Ohio



Color postcard version of a poster designed by Cornelia Cassady-Davis of Cincinnati for the "Votes for Women" campaign. Via Ohio Memory.

were going to vote in national elections for the first time. The larger battle of universal suffrage was still being fought. By August 1920, 36 states including Ohio voted to ratify the amendment and it soon became a part of the U.S. Constitution. By November 2, 1920, the precincts in Delaware County more than doubled in voter registrations. The newspaper paper declared that "never before in history was there so many votes cast—due to suffrage." Presiding judges at the local polls were astonished by the large number of women voters. "Where do they all come from?" was continually asked.

The winner of the 1920 presidential election was Republican Senator Warren G. Harding who defeated Democratic Governor James M. Cox, both of Ohio. As the election was the first in which women had the right to vote in all 48 states, the total popular vote increased dramatically, from 18.5 million in 1916 to 26.8 million in 1920.

The passage of the 19th Amendment 100 years ago has allowed women to vote on the matters that will affect them, and the vitally important hard work of suffragists must be recognized for their impact should always be celebrated.



Suffragettes representing Ohio counties gather at the Ohio Statehouse.

(Photo from Ohio Memory)

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