



North Carolinians Take a Stand on Ratification of the 19th Amendment

Background

The Constitution of the United States, adopted in 1787, left the decision of voting rights to the individual states. Of the original thirteen colonies, only New Jersey allowed women to vote, a right that was rescinded in 1807. Several other states allowed women to vote in certain local elections, but there was no universal suffrage for women in America.

In 1848 the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. This began the orchestrated push for the extension of women's rights. The movement was essentially put on hold during the Civil War, however, as women concentrated on war work. As would happen in later wars, this work helped women gain important organizational and occupational skills that they would later use in the fight for the right to vote.

Following the war, the passage of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments contributed to a dispute that split the women's movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the more radical National Woman Suffrage Association. Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe organized the more conservative American Woman Suffrage Association. While the latter group wanted to concentrate on suffrage, the former group extended their activism to include a wider realm of social issues, such as unionization. The NWSA refused to support the fifteenth amendment granting the right to vote to African American males. They instead advocated a sixteenth amendment to include the vote for women.

In 1878, a suffrage amendment was introduced in the United States Congress. The two suffrage organizations reunited as the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890 under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Many women reformers saw suffrage as the means to achieving their ends, and so other women's groups, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, joined in the effort. During this period, women organized many such civic and reform groups, including the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Association of Colored Women, and the Ladies' Garment Workers Union, to name a few. By 1900 four western states—Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho—had granted women the right to vote. A suffrage amendment introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1897 was referred to the Committee on Insane Asylums.

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage organized in 1911. The "antis" benefited from the support of distillers and brewers, Southern congressmen, and many corporate capitalists, as well as some high-ranking Catholic clergy.

In World War I, as was the case in the Civil War, women put their political activism on hold to support the war effort. This became yet another reason put forth to give women the vote.

The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote was adopted by a joint resolution of Congress in 1919. It contained the same wording as the amendment proposed in 1878: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

By the spring of 1920, thirty-five states had ratified the amendment. One more state legislature needed to pass the amendment in order for it to become law. All eyes turned to North Carolina as it was the next state to consider action.

Within the state both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage groups campaigned vigorously and distributed materials to persuade others to support their cause. Those opposed to the amendment did so for a variety of reasons, including:

- the belief that voting rights should be the purview of the state
- women who became involved in politics would neglect the home
- women would be forced into roles they did not want, such as having to serve on juries
- giving women the vote may lead to Negro suffrage

Many who favored the amendment campaigned on the platform that women deserved an equal voice. Some, such as Sen. Furnifold Simmons and Gov. Thomas Walter Bickett, who were philosophically opposed to the amendment, urged ratification because they believed it would aid the Democrats in the presidential race of 1920.

On August 17, 1920, the North Carolina legislature defeated the measure by two votes. The next day the Tennessee legislature passed it, and the amendment became law. The North Carolina General Assembly finally ratified the Nineteenth Amendment in 1971.

Sources for further information:

Equal Suffrage Collection, Private Collections, North Carolina State Archives

Library of Congress “Votes for Women” <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/naw/>

North Carolina Museum of History Women’s Timeline <http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/nchh/womenshist.html>

Jewish Women’s Archive www.jwa.org/index.html

National Women’s History Museum www.nwhm.org/home/home.html

Working Women, 1870-1930 <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/>

CD: Songs of the Suffragettes (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

Additional Student Activities

1. Have students explore other reasons why people supported or opposed ratification of the amendment.
2. Ask them to identify these participants in the ratification movement in North Carolina: Gertrude Weil, Mary Hilliard Hinton, Furnifold Simmons, Thomas Walter Bickett
3. Have them use period newspapers to research the results of the suffrage vote by the North Carolina legislature.
4. Encourage them to identify some current issues that generate similarly strong feelings on both sides.

Activity for Students Using Primary Source Materials from the North Carolina State Archives

View the artifact and answer the following questions.

1. What is the artifact?
2. Would this have been a particularly effective advertising tool in 1920? Why or why not?
3. What group distributed this artifact?
4. What is the message the group wishes to convey?
5. Is this group for or against ratification of the amendment?

View the leaflet and answer the following questions.

1. Who issued the leaflet?
2. What is the message the group wishes to convey?
3. Is this group for or against ratification of the amendment?

View the cartoon and answer these questions.

1. What does the figure of the woman represent?
2. What does the figure of the man represent?
3. What is the message of the cartoon?
4. Is the cartoonist for or against women's suffrage? Explain.
5. How are the message of the cartoon and the leaflet similar?