

How a Woman's Right to Vote Came Down to a Son's Love for His Mama

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Photo courtesy of The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY, COS-22

August 26, 2020 will mark the 100-year anniversary of the adoption of the 19th Amendment. The Amendment guarantees that the right of citizens to vote shall not be abridged by the states or federal government on the basis of sex. It was the culmination of a long and tumultuous fight by both fearless female suffragists and their male allies.

The suffragist movement had its roots in the abolitionist movement of the 1830's with the first woman's convention in the United States taking place in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York. California Senator Aaron Sargent introduced a woman's suffrage amendment in Congress in 1878 but it failed. *The Women's Rights Movement, 1848-1920: US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives* (n.d).

The movement struggled to gain traction and focus, causing historian Nancy Woloch to describe early suffragists' efforts as "a crusade in political education by women and for women, and for most of its existence, a crusade in search of a constituency." (1994) *Women and the American Experience*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Long before the passage of the 19th Amendment, women had either limited or full rights to vote in several states and territories. In rural areas of Kentucky, women who were head of household and paid taxes were granted the right to vote on tax and education issues in 1838. In 1894 women won school suffrage in Lexington, Covington and Newport. Although the Kentucky legislature took away these rights from 1902-1912, Kentucky women were always very active in the suffragist movement.

Virginia Penny of Louisville became Vice President of The Equal Rights Association in 1867. Mary Barr Clay of Richmond, daughter of abolitionist Cassius M. Clay, served as the Vice President of the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA) and Vice President and President of the American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA). She also helped organize the first AWSA convention south of the Mason Dixon line in Louisville in 1881. Laura Clay, Mary's little sister, was also a prominent figure in the national and southern movements. *Kentucky and the 19th Amendment: U.S. National Park Service*, (2019, September 23).

The territory of Wyoming granted women the full right to vote in 1869 and became the first state to give women this right in 1890 when it finally achieved statehood. Colorado followed in 1893 and Utah and Idaho in 1896. In 1913 Illinois extended the full right to vote to women with Montana following suit in 1914. In 1916 Woodrow Wilson, who strongly opposed a national amendment, was elected to the Presidency. Suffragists became more determined than ever to win the vote prior to the next election in 1920 and began an arduous campaign in New York.

Women gained the right to vote under New York's constitution in November of 1917. Just two months later, Jeanette Rankin of Wyoming, the first female representative to the United States Congress, presented the bill authorizing the amendment to the House of Representatives. While the House barely met the 2/3 requirement to pass the bill, suffragists had faith it would easily pass the more liberal Senate. However, the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic threw another hurdle in front of suffragists and a group of Senators consisting of Southern Democrats and Conservative Republicans were able to stop the bill. Dubois, E. (2020, March 27). *19th Amendment Ratification*.

But suffragists were not to be deterred and continued to fight for the right to vote on a national level. The United States had entered World War I in April of 1917 and, under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) became very vocal in its support of the war. Catt and other leaders argued that in order to make the world safe for democracy it was vital to include women in the democratic process at home. Women played a key role in the war, stepping into roles formerly thought to be only for men. Suffragists argued that continuing to disenfranchise women and silencing their voice would only impede their ability to fully aid the United States in its war efforts. Eventually President Wilson changed his tune and advocated for passage of the amendment. Dubois, E. (2020, March 27). *19th Amendment Ratification*.

The midterms in November of 1918 shifted control of Congress to Republicans, clearing the way for passage. The House voted yes in May of 1919 and the bill moved to the Senate. Despite a Democratic Senator's effort to amend the bill to only include white women, the Senate passed it on June 4th. Dubois, E. (2020, March 27). *19th Amendment Ratification*.

On June 10, 1919 Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois became the first of the necessary 36 states to ratify the Amendment. Editors, H. (2020, July 1). *19th Amendment*.

On January 6, 1920 Kentucky became the 24th state to ratify it and two months later the Kentucky legislature voted to give women the right to vote in Presidential Elections. *Kentucky and the 19th Amendment: U.S. National Park Service*, (2019, September 23).

The summer of 1920 brought rising tensions in Tennessee as the state legislature debated the ratification of the amendment. If passed, Tennessee would be the 36th and final state necessary for ratification. The heated battle became known as the "War of Roses" due to suffragists wearing yellow roses to signify their support for the amend-

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Minor League of Women Votes, 12/12/23. Library of Congress nppc.10094. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016836367/>.

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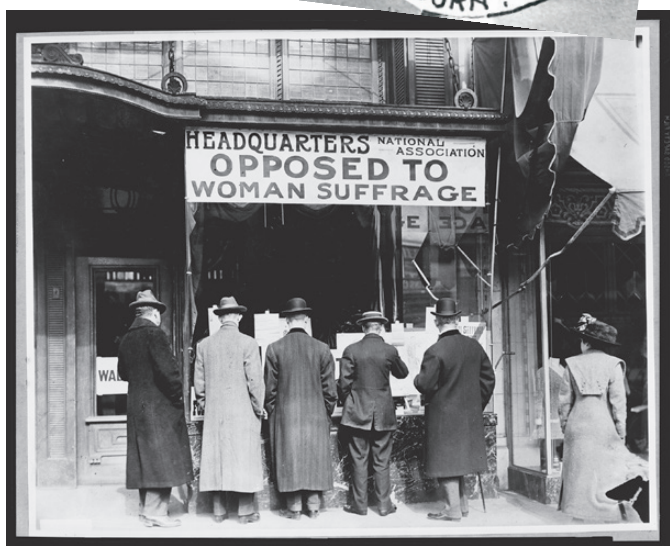
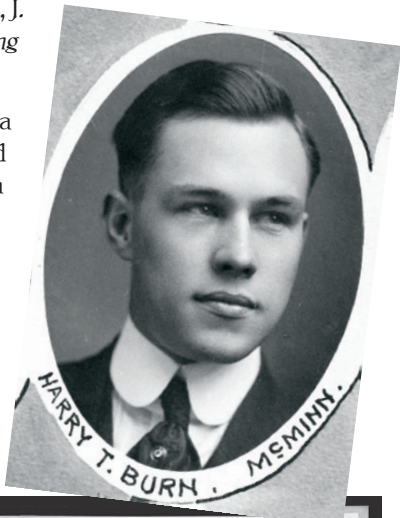
ment and anti-suffragists wearing red roses to demonstrate their dissent.

The Senate quickly passed the measure but it stalled in the House leading to weeks of debate. Anti-suffragists viewed the amendment as a continuation of the Civil War and feared that passage would threaten white supremacy. Josephine Pearson, President of the Tennessee State Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage, led the fight against the amendment to protect what she saw as the traditional southern way of life. Even many white suffragists had long been wary of allegiances with abolitionists, especially black women, for fear it would undermine the ability to ratify the amendment in Southern states. Cohen, J. (2020, May 8). *The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment*.

On August 18, 1920 the Amendment was finally called to a vote in the Tennessee House. Harry Burns, a 24-year-old senator, cast the deciding vote. Pinned to his lapel was a red rose, signifying his opposition to the amendment. In his hand he clutched a note from his mother, a woman by the name of Phoebe Ensminger Burn, known to her friends as Miss Febb. The note read, in part, "Hurrah and vote for suffrage. Don't keep them in doubt...Be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the 'rat' in ratification. With lots of love, Mama."

After shocking the room with his vote, Henry ran for safety and hid from the angry crowd. It was said that "he invoked the fury of his red rose carrying peers while presumably avoiding that of his mother—which may very well have been the more daunting of the two." Henry later defended his vote by saying "I know that a mother's advice is always safest for her boy to follow and my mother wanted me to vote for ratification"

Cohen, J. (2020, May 8). *The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment*.



National Anti-Suffrage Association. Library of Congress. Harris & Ewing. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97500067/>

On August 26, 1920, Bainbridge Colby, then Secretary of State, certified the ratification and the 19th Amendment became law. Tennessee ratifying the Amendment in the summer of 1920 allowed approximately 1/3 of eligible women to cast their vote in the presidential election in November of that year. The Republican Senator of Ohio, Warren G. Harding, defeated the Ohio Democratic Governor, James M. Cox, to become the 29th President of the United States. Dubois, E. (2020, March 27). *19th Amendment Ratification*.

August 26th, now known as Women's Equality Day, is an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the strides we have made towards achieving gender equality. More importantly though, it's a day to evaluate opportunities in our lives to continue the work of those who have gone before us. Some of these may be small, some may be large, some may come to us naturally, some we may have to actively seek out.

The LBA's Gender Equity Committee is doing the hard work to create both equity and equality for women in the law and has many opportunities to offer members who would like to make a difference. If you are interested in joining the cause, please contact lanspach@loubar.org. Hurrah!

Jennifer Kleier is a partner at Karem & Kleier Law and chair of the LBA's Gender Equity Committee. Dee Pregliasco is retired from Pregliasco Straw-Boone, Doheny Banks & Mudd; is a practicing mediator; and an adjunct professor at the Brandeis School of Law. ■



Celebrating 100 Years

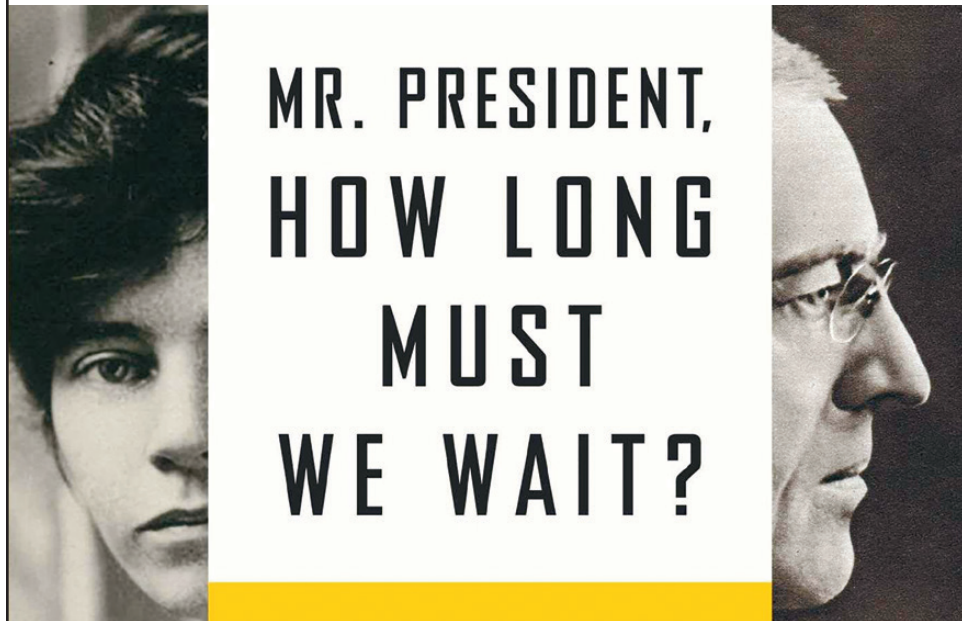
The Louisville Bar Association recognizes and honors the 100-year anniversary of the adoption of the 19th Amendment and the achievements of the women who helped secure its passage. To celebrate the anniversary, the LBA has created a page on its website, www.loubar.org, dedicated to honoring this historic achievement. The page includes upcoming webinars, podcasts, videos, articles and exhibits.

The page can be found under the Public Resources tab.

frazier

KENTUCKY HISTORY MUSEUM

Check out these free programs offered by the Frazier History Museum:



WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY: AUTHOR TALK WITH TINA CASSIDY

Friday, August 21

7- 8 p.m.

Virtual Event

Tina Cassidy, author of *Mr. President, How Long Must We Wait?* Alice Paul, Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the Right to Vote will be interviewed by journalist Pam Platt. Cassidy writes about women and culture. She is also the author of *Birth: The Surprising History of How We Are Born* and *Jackie After O: One Remarkable Year When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Defied Expectations and Rediscovered Her Dreams*. Books may be ordered online at www.carmichaelsbookstore.com. This is a virtual event in collaboration with Carmichael's Book Store. Register at www.fraziermuseum.org/wed.

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

Saturday, August 22

9 a.m.- Noon

Virtual Event

Presented by the Louisville Metro Office for Women, the League of Women Voters Louisville, and the Frazier History Museum, a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and includes presentations and inspiring speakers. Poet and artist Hannah Drake will present an original work, Tina Cassidy, author of *Mr. President, How Long Must We Wait?* Alice Paul, Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the Right to Vote will offer the keynote address. Visit www.fraziermuseum.org/calendar-of-events for more information.

LET'S TALK | BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: WHAT IS A VOTE WORTH?

Tuesday, September 8

6 -7 p.m.

Virtual Event

What is a vote worth? With the November election drawing near, we tackle that question as we commemorate the centennial of a woman's right to vote, look at the recent bipartisan agreement on absentee ballots in Kentucky's primary elections, and address ongoing concerns about voter suppression. Panelists include Joshua Douglas, Professor at the University of Kentucky College of Law; Michael Adams, Secretary of State (KY); Rick Green, Editor of *The Courier Journal*; Sadiqa Reynolds, President of the Louisville Urban League; and Amina Elahi, City Reporter at WFPL. Co-moderated by Rachel Platt and Renee Shaw, host of KET's Kentucky Tonight. Register at www.fraziermuseum.org/calendar-of-events/what-is-a-vote-worth.

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