VOTES for WOMEN

The Centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment
The Nineteenth Amendment guarantees all American women the right to vote, but achieving universal suffrage required a lengthy and difficult struggle. Women citizens organized nation-wide for the right to vote, protesting first in their states or territories and then through petitioning for a federal amendment. Eventually, women’s sacrifices and tireless efforts culminated in the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. The women’s suffrage movement in Virginia began in 1870 but did not gain significant attention until 1909, when a small group of prominent Richmond women founded the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. They spent the next decade advocating first for an amendment to the Virginia Constitution and later for an amendment to the United States Constitution that would guarantee women’s right to vote. The league’s members were all white women, with a minority of white male supporters. They did not advocate for the right of African American women to vote.

Between 1912 and 1916, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia brought women’s voting rights to the floor of the Virginia General Assembly three times. Each attempt was defeated. During this period, the Virginia suffragists fought against a strong anti-suffragist movement that tapped into conservative, post-Civil War beliefs in white supremacy and a traditional domestic role for women. This was particularly true in the socially conservative South, where ideals of southern womanhood still dictated that white women focus on the home and family, and avoid the “male” realm of politics and government.

On May 21, 1919, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Nineteenth Amendment and two weeks later the U.S. Senate followed. The amendment passed its final hurdle of obtaining the agreement of three-fourths of the states when Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the amendment on August 18, 1920. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified the ratification on August 26, 1920, changing the face of the U.S. electorate forever.

This exhibition celebrates the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment and Virginia suffragists, who worked tirelessly in their advocacy for equality.
The American suffrage movement began as an outgrowth of antislavery activism. After the United States Civil War, a generation of suffrage supporters began organizing through lectures, publications, marches, political engagement, and civil disobedience. Among the national leaders was Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucy Stone. They had witnessed the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in 1868 and 1870, which guaranteed citizenship to everyone born in the United States and granted African American men the right to vote. Many educated white women were appalled when they saw formerly enslaved black men obtain the right to vote before they did and insisted that the gender restriction of “male” be struck down.

In Virginia, Anna Whitehead Bodeker (1826–1904) led the earliest attempt to organize for women’s suffrage in the Commonwealth. Bodeker brought national leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, such as activist Paulina Kellogg Wright Davis, to Richmond to speak to civic leaders. After her first visit to Richmond, Davis reported in The Revolution, a pro-suffrage weekly newspaper, that Bodeker was brilliant and would “reach the whole south.”

Bodeker helped establish the Virginia State Woman Suffrage Association (VSWSA) in 1870. The VSWSA was the first women’s suffrage association in Virginia, with Bodeker as the group’s first president. The women arranged for nationally known suffragists Susan B. Anthony, Lillie Devereux Blake, Isabella Beecher Hooker, and Josephine Griffing to speak publicly in Richmond. Emboldened, Bodeker and the VSWSA encouraged women to vote in the 1871 municipal elections, citing the Fourteenth Amendment and Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Bodeker did so, arriving at the second precinct of Marshall Ward in Richmond ready to cast her vote. When election officials refused her ballot, Bodeker requested that the following note be placed in the ballot box:

“By the Constitution of the United States, I, Mrs. A. Whitehead Bodeker, have a right to give my vote at this election, and in vindication of it drop this note in the ballot-box, November 7th, 1871.”

Bodeker was inspired by nationally prominent suffragists such as Victoria Woodhull. In the engraving below from 1873, Woodhull is shown as the first woman to address a congressional U.S. committee. She declared that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments granted women the right to vote. Woodhull attempted to cast her ballot in a New York election that November, as did suffrage advocate Bodeker in Richmond.

The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia was formed out of a series of meetings in November 1909 at the home of Anne Clay Crenshaw, 919 West Franklin Street, in Richmond. Like similar suffrage organizations in other states, the league’s goal was to secure voting rights for women. Among the original eighteen founders were Lila Meade Valentine (president), Kate Waller Barrett (vice president), Adèle Goodman Clark (secretary), Nora Houston, Ellen Glasgow, and Mary Johnston. In the first year, the league enrolled an astounding 120 members, with most being socially prominent white women.

Early efforts of the group included canvassing, distributing leaflets, and public speaking events. Leaders across the state visited women’s colleges, schools, fairs, and union meetings. In Richmond, a group of businessmen were encouraged to join the effort and founded the Men’s Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. By 1911, the headquarters for the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia had been established in Richmond, with an office at 802 East Broad Street, conveniently located near Capitol Square.

Despite the growing influence and vitality of the Equal Suffrage League, woman suffrage resolutions were defeated in the Virginia legislature three times between 1912 and 1916. When Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in June 1919, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia fought hard for ratification at the state level. Virginia, however, was one of the nine southern states to initially withhold ratification of the amendment.

Broadside was a popular medium for printing in America because of their minimal cost but powerful ability to deliver simple messages to a wide audience.

Women’s suffrage broadside ca. 1918. From the Adèle Clark Papers, VCU Libraries.

As an artist, educator, and political activist, Adèle Goodman Clark frequently united her passions for art and social equity. She delivered politically-minded lectures at local arts organizations and public events, and sometimes gained the attention of passersby as she painted on a sidewalk, only to then ask her audience for signatures in support of women’s suffrage. She once said, “I’ve always tried to combine my interest in art with my interest in government. I think we ought to have more of the creative and imaginative in politics.”

This 1912 postcard designed by Clark, a founding member of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, illustrates the final stanza of a poem by James Oppenheim titled "Bread and Roses.” A rallying cry for social activism, that slogan was first used in a 1912 speech by the feminist labor leader Rose Schneiderman: “The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too.” The poem, excerpted here, urges women to march for their rights and to be “No more the drudge and idle.” The border surrounding the text features stalks of wheat and roses in full bloom.

Lila Meade Valentine was born in Richmond in 1865 and her career as a reformer in the city began in 1900. Appalled by the inequities of Virginia’s education system, which made it difficult for poor, African American, and female children to receive high quality instruction, Valentine, along with several other activists, formed the Richmond Education Association.

On a trip to England, she observed the work of radical suffragists and returned to the United States eager to become involved in the American woman suffrage movement. In 1909, Valentine cofounded the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, one of the most influential southern suffrage organizations. League co-founders included artists Adèle Goodman Clark and Nora Houston; physician Kate Waller Barrett; and writers Ellen Glasgow, Kate Langley Bosher, and Mary Johnston. Valentine supposed that an electorate that included women would be more likely to support education and health-care reform.

Valentine toured Virginia in 1912 and 1913, giving more than a hundred speeches to government officials and state organizations. She proved to be so effective a speaker that she was subsequently called on to address crowds in New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and West Virginia on behalf of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Still, a suffrage amendment failed in Virginia in 1916, leading Valentine to fix her sights on an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote became law in 1920. Valentine registered to vote for the first time from her sick bed but tragically, after her arduous work for the cause of women, she was too ill to go to the polls to vote. She died on July 14, 1921. In January 1926, a joint resolution authorizing the Lila Meade Valentine Memorial Commission to erect a memorial in the Virginia State Capitol was introduced by Senator Benjamin F. Buchanan and agreed to by the House of the Delegates. The result is a memorial in the form of a marble bas-relief portrait plaque, dedicated in October 1936 and permanently located in the Chamber of the Virginia House of Delegates. The portrait was sculpted by Harriet W. Frishmuth, who also sculpted the 1931 portrait bust of Woodrow Wilson in the Capitol Rotunda.
The suffrage movement saw its first victories during the 1890s in the American West. Through state-by-state referendums, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho granted women’s suffrage before 1900. Washington gained women’s suffrage in 1910 and California in 1911. During this time, suffragists argued that securing the right to vote was a much-needed reform measure inherently vital to American democracy. To reinforce this idea in the South, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, with support from national suffrage organizations such as the National Women’s Party, developed a strong visual culture in support of its campaign. Suffragists held up states in the West, and California in particular, as models for an awakening of democracy towards enfranchisement of women in Virginia.

**Visual Culture of Virginia Suffragists**
By 1913, the nation-wide network of state and local suffrage organizations was united behind the goal of a constitutional amendment. The momentum culminated in the Women’s Suffrage Procession of 1913, when thousands of American women made history by organizing and participating in the first nonviolent advocacy march en masse on the streets of Washington, D.C. before a crowd of more than 500,000.

At the same time, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia was experiencing phenomenal growth and support, boasting 45 local chapters. In 1916 that number had grown to 115, with nearly every town in Virginia with more than 2,500 residents having a local suffrage chapter. The Equal Suffrage League had also secured endorsements from the State Teachers’ Association and the State Federation of Women’s Clubs. By 1919, after ten years of recruitment, membership in the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia had swelled to 30,000, probably the largest state suffrage association in the South. Suffragists were eager to flex their political muscle. Their strategy focused on public demonstrations and rallies, typically taking place on Capitol Square, and winning support in the General Assembly, one member at a time if necessary. Ultimately, the supreme goal of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia was to secure a voting-rights amendment to the Virginia State Constitution.

RIGHT: Equal Suffrage League of Virginia rally for women’s suffrage on the steps of the Virginia State Capitol, May 1, 1915. Among the speakers were Dr. Edward N. Calisch (1865–1946) who served as Rabbi at Beth Ahabah congregation in Richmond from 1891 to 1945. Mabel Vernon (1883-1975), a national leader in the suffrage movement, also spoke. From the Adèle Clark Papers, VCU Libraries.

LEFT: This Equal Suffrage League of Virginia broadside advertises the testimony of Lucy Price, a major anti-suffragist speaker. She embarked on an eight-week speaking tour that included Richmond where she spoke in the chamber of the Virginia House of Delegates before a joint committee of the Virginia House and Senate. “Come and Hear Southern Speakers answer the Anti-Suffrage Arguments of Miss Lucy Price of Ohio.” 31 January 1915. Equal Suffrage League of Virginia Papers, Acc. 22002. The Library of Virginia.

BELOW: Members of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia rallying for women’s suffrage from a members’ automobile at the George Washington Equestrian Monument, Capitol Square, May 1, 1915. In the front seat is Lila Meade Valentine, president of the league, Mabel Vernon, a national suffrage leader, and the unknown African American driver. From the Adèle Clark Papers, VCU Libraries.
The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia faced organized resistance in the form of the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, founded in 1912 when woman suffrage first came before the Virginia General Assembly. The anti-suffragists vigorously attacked the Equal Suffrage League’s campaign. This group was composed of primarily wealthy white women of Richmond who aligned with the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.

Much of the anti-suffragist rhetoric placed women’s duties within the home and often focused on the idea of separate spheres for women and men, as well as protecting the status of whites. Anti-suffragists argued that children and families would suffer if women stepped outside of their designated domestic roles. Additionally, these anti-suffragists promoted the idea that giving women the right to vote would encourage black women to vote and therefore endanger whites’ control at the polls. They feared the demise of white supremacy in the South.

Anti-suffrage Movement and Opposition to Enfranchisement

"The Age of Brass" was published by the printing firm of Currier and Ives of New York in 1869 to satirize the woman suffrage movement that was gaining widespread support in America at the time. In this cartoon, a group of extravagantly dressed women are lined up at the ballot box to vote for "The Celebrated Man Tamer: Susan Sharp-Tongue" and for sheriff "Miss Hangman." These names were meant to ridicule women who were prominently involved with the suffrage movement and who would surely continue their involvement with politics after suffrage was granted. At the end of the line is a woman with strong features and dark clothes holding up her fist to a man carrying a baby, highlighting the potential effects of gender role reversal. The women are all wearing elaborate and somewhat masculine clothing, and some are smoking cigars. The message is clear—suffrage meant a change in women’s behavior and an abandonment of their domestic duties.

Anti-suffragist rhetoric became increasingly vile and, unfortunately, more effective by tapping into racial fears. Lila Meade Valentine and members of the Equal Suffrage League privately supported women’s suffrage for all, regardless of race. Publicly, however, they marginalized black women, knowing that most Virginians would be against giving African American women the vote, thereby jeopardizing any chance of achieving women’s suffrage. In 1916 the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia attempted to counter the racial argument against suffrage through a pamphlet titled “Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote.” The pamphlet argued that “the enfranchisement of Virginia women would increase white supremacy” and assured readers that literacy tests and poll taxes would prove effective in disenfranchising African Americans. The Equal Suffrage League thus perpetuated the white supremacy argument and consequently sanctioned the silencing of black women in the public debate. As Valentine, president of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia explained in a private letter, “I believe that all women, white or black, who meet the qualifications for suffrage in any State should have that right, but in working to secure that right, we should exercise common sense, and not complicate our efforts and add difficulties of the task by injecting elements of discord. As you know, the negro is the one remaining argument against suffrage in the Southern States.” She justified her rationale accordingly, “[t]his is not a matter of principle but of expediency.”

Meanwhile, most women of color lacked the privilege and public voice of their white counterparts. Yet, they remained devoted to advancing educational opportunities and addressing basic human rights. Some women of color, including American Indians, did not have U.S. citizenship and worked intensively to obtain it. After decades of lobbying, American Indians finally received full U.S. citizenship in 1924.

Despite the many obstacles erected by both suffragists and anti-suffragists, many women of color stood as steadfast leaders in the movement for universal suffrage. Shortly after the U.S. Civil War, Sojourner Truth participated in the debates over which group should get suffrage first—black men or black women. In 1867, the former slave declared: “If colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before.” Harriet Tubman advocated for women, including American Indians, did not have U.S. citizenship and worked intensively to obtain it. After decades of lobbying, American Indians finally received full U.S. citizenship in 1924.

In Virginia, after the Nineteenth Amendment became national law, black leaders in Virginia organized voter registration drives and voter education efforts. Maggie L. Walker, an African American businesswoman and the first woman in the United States to establish leaders in the movement for universal suffrage. Shortly after the U.S. Civil War, Sojourner Truth participated in the debates over which group should get suffrage first—black men or black women. In 1867, the former slave declared: “If colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before.” Harriet Tubman advocated for women, including their right to suffrage and financial independence, and successfully petitioned the U.S. Congress in 1899 for a military pension for her service in the Union Army.

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When black women were excluded from the Virginia League of Women Voters, they formed the Virginia Negro Women’s League of Voters, led by Ora Brown Stokes, to register black women voters and promote education efforts within Virginia’s black communities. As the push toward full equality began in the 1920s, the myriad of associations devoted to African American causes expanded efforts through the identification of discriminatory laws and the drafting of legislation addressing voting rights, labor rights, and equal inheritance rights.
After the success of the 1913 Suffrage Procession, Alice Paul, a national leader of the women's suffrage movement and a co-founder of the National Women's Party, made parades and protests the fundamental strategy in the nation's capital. Attention was quickly focused on President Woodrow Wilson. Born in Staunton, Virginia, Wilson was the eighth Virginian to serve as U.S. President. Suffragists, Virginians among them, began picketing outside the White House in early 1917—the first time in American history in which the constitutional right to peaceful assembly and protest was used at the White House. The suffragists' new, highly visible public tactic placed enormous pressure on President Wilson. At the same time, the suffrage movement continued to perpetuate discrimination, rarely allowing African American women to take part in the protest actions.

"Silent Sentinels" were the first to picket the White House. They assembled every day from January 10, 1917, until the amendment was ratified on August 18, 1920. Their purple, cream, and gold banners (one of which is on display in this gallery) were highly recognizable. For the first few months, the pickets amused President Wilson. After the United States entered World War I in April 1917, however, their presence became embarrassing. The suffragists pointed out the hypocrisy of fighting for democracy and freedom in Europe while denying the vote to women at home.

On March 4, more than 1,000 American women picketed the White House on the eve of Wilson's second inaugural. Mobs formed around the protestors. Ultimately, President Wilson ordered the women arrested for "obstructing sidewalk traffic," with many women arrested again during subsequent protests at the White House. Those suffragists who neither admitted guilt nor paid a fine were usually incarcerated in the Leeson Women's Workhouse, a few miles outside of Occoquan, Virginia. In all, seventy-two suffragists were confined to the Women's Workhouse, many of whom were force-fed as hunger strikers.

Barbaric and dehumanizing, the treatment these women endured soon became infamous. The night of November 14, 1917 called the "Night of Terror," made national news. The prison superintendent had ordered a brutal treatment of suffragists, leaving some women beaten and unconscious. The indignities and pain suffered by the suffragists in the Women's Workhouse built up widespread sympathy for their cause. Mounting public pressure caused the arrested suffragists to be released.

President Wilson continued to resist a constitutional amendment, but finally relented, changing his position when New York adopted woman suffrage in 1917. Support for a constitutional amendment grew rapidly in 1918 and the political balance began to shift.
In 1920, soon after women won the right to vote, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia transformed into the Virginia League of Women Voters. It was led by many of the same leaders of the league, including Adèle Goodman Clark. This handbill dates ca. 1920.

From the Adèle Clark Papers, VCU Libraries.

**Organization of the Virginia league of women voters, November 10, 1920.**

Library of Virginia.

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With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, women's suffrage groups shifted to focus on the opportunities now open to enfranchised women. Many promoted the idea that a young working-class woman, and even a woman of color, suddenly had access to a future she never had before. The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia disbanded a few weeks after the amendments ratification and reorganized as the Virginia League of Women Voters, which focused on educating women on how to register to vote and pay the poll tax, as well as lobbying efforts for social welfare issues. Adèle Goodman Clark, an original member of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, chaired the committee to establish the League and served as its president from 1921 to 1925 and again from 1929 to 1944.

Between 1923 and 1933, six women, all teachers or educators, ran successfully for the Virginia House of Delegates. In 1923, Sarah Lee Fain and Helen Timmons Henderson become the first women elected to the Virginia General Assembly, taking office in January 1924. In addition to Fain and Henderson, other female delegates during this time included: Sallie Cook Booker (elected in 1925), Nancy Melvinna Caldwell (elected 1927), Helen Ruth Henderson (elected 1927), and Emma Lee White (elected 1929).

Today, the Virginia General Assembly has achieved a level of diversity unparalleled in its history, with more women serving than ever before. Not only are women being elected in Virginia in greater numbers, they are also holding seats of power. The achievements by Virginia women may be the start of something greater, as a record number of women around the country become politically engaged and run for public office. At the heart of these dynamic changes in American culture and politics is the effectiveness of civic engagement, the power of educational opportunities, the strength in elevating women’s voices, and the fundamental right of all citizens to vote.
Votes for Women: The Centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment

An exhibition of the Capitol Square Preservation Council in partnership with the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, Virginia.

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