

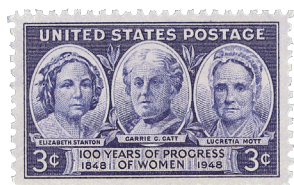
This Day in History... August 18, 1920

19th Amendment Gives Women the Right to Vote

On August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment was passed, granting women suffrage (the right to vote).

During colonial times, only white property-owning adult males could vote. Most women could not vote, although some colonies made exceptions for property-owning widows. When the US Constitution was adopted in 1789, it didn't clearly define who could vote. Instead, states made that decision. New Jersey was the only one to allow women to vote, and that right was taken away in 1807.

In the early 1800s, there were small movements and organizations that sought women's suffrage, but they were scattered and didn't work together. That all changed in 1848 when Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton arranged the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The two had first met at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention, where they were both denied entrance because they were women. The purpose for the Women's Rights Convention was to forever change the role of women, from sheltered and silent wives and mothers to productive and contributing members of society. Many famous Americans, including Frederick Douglass, attended the two-day event, held July 19-20, 1848.



Stamp commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention.

On the other hand, some supporters argued that women were more qualified than men to vote based on a somewhat higher moral character. Others thought that women, as white people born in this country, had more rights to vote than newly emancipated slaves or recently naturalized immigrants, both of whom had the right to vote by the late 1800s.



One of very few US postage stamps printed on Internal Revenue paper.



Issued for the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

Some opponents of the suffrage movement felt that women did not possess the common sense to vote. Other people used the argument that men were somehow saving women from the "contaminating and demoralizing" responsibility of having to vote.

The movement grew in strength over time, especially after the passage of the 15th amendment to the US Constitution, which gave black men the right to vote in 1870. A women's suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878, but it failed to pass. The 19th Amendment was reintroduced in Congress for every session for the next 40 years.

By the beginning of the 20th century the right to vote had been won in only four states, but the suffrage movement continued to gain national momentum. Demanding the right to vote, women across the country held rallies, gave speeches, marched in parades, and lobbied in Congress. When the grand dames of society joined the cause, suffrage even became fashionable. In the coming years, more new western states granted women's suffrage.

Carrie Chapman Catt succeeded Susan B. Anthony as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900. In the years that followed she led campaigns that earned state-level suffrage in New York. And when the US joined World War I, she placed the group on the forefront of the war effort, earning the support of President Woodrow Wilson.

President Wilson spoke openly of his support for the 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote, however, in two separate attempts in 1918 and 1919, it still failed, but only by two and then one vote.

Then in May 1919, the bill was brought to the House, which passed it by 42 votes. That June, the Senate passed it as well, after lengthy discussion. Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan were the first to ratify the amendment in the coming days. Over the next year, several more states ratified it. However, 36 states needed to ratify the amendment within a given period and that end date was fast approaching in August 1920. Finally, after holding a special session on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th amendment, making it law and giving women the right to vote.

The amendment says: "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." More than just a victory for women, it was, as the *Kansas City Star* proclaimed, "a victory for democracy and the principle of equality upon which the nation was founded."



Stamp pictures suffragists on the left and a woman voting on the right.



Stamp pictures a combination of two historic images – the 1913 procession of women at Wilson's inauguration and a 1976 march for the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois.



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