

Contact: Merissa Blum, 215-409-6645
mblum@constitutioncenter.org

The 19th Amendment: How Women Won the Vote **Exhibit Walkthrough**

The National Constitution Center's new long-term exhibit, *The 19th Amendment: How Women Won the Vote*, traces the triumphs and struggles that led to the ratification of the amendment that banned voter discrimination on the basis of sex.

Throughout the fight for women's suffrage, a range of voices invoked the Declaration of Independence, encouraging America to live up to its founding ideals. The exhibit features generations of these diverse women who transformed constitutional history.

Beginning in the 1840s, *The 19th Amendment: How Women Won the Vote* traces the roots of the women's rights movement in early reform work, including the anti-slavery movement, and the decision to prioritize voting rights after the Civil War. It highlights the constitutional arguments and historical context of the fight for suffrage over 70 years, as well as the tactics suffragists used to persuade state legislatures and the national government to recognize voting rights for women.

Out of nearly 100 artifacts in the 3,000-square-foot exhibit, highlights include a rare printing of the Declaration of Sentiments from the nation's first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, handwritten notes from a speech given by African American suffragist Mary Ann Shadd Cary before the House Judiciary Committee in 1874, a ballot box used to collect women's votes in the late 1800s, a commemorative watch fob from Pennsylvania's 1915 suffrage campaign, a letter written from prison by Philadelphia suffragist and White House picketer Dora Lewis, Pennsylvania's ratification copy of the 19th Amendment, as well as visually compelling "Votes for Women" and anti-suffrage ephemera.

The exhibit features immersive elements developed by the National Constitution Center, including the [Drafting Table interactive](#), available online through the *Interactive Constitution*, where visitors can explore drafts of the 19th Amendment—and discover the events and documents that influenced its text. In audio zones, visitors can hear quotes that capture the arguments for and against suffrage for women over the 70-year fight. Through this audio, visitors are introduced to key ideas from the early movement such as virtual representation, the domestic sphere, and citizenship rights, as well as key ideas that carried through the movement including race, conceptions of womanhood, and states' rights. Visitors can also view an animated timeline and map that showcases changes as states started to grant women the vote—decades before the passage of the 19th Amendment. Later in the exhibit, visitors can enter a recreated prison cell to hear an actress's recording and view a silhouetted reenactment, which capture the experience of a suffragist who was jailed for picketing the White House.

The first section of the exhibit, **Fighting for Rights**, explores the time period of 1848 through 1877—covering the early women's movement, which initially focused on a broad range of equality issues and shifted to voting as the key to securing equal rights after the Civil War. Visitors can learn about the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York; the Declaration of Sentiments; the anti-slavery movement's influence on the women's movement; the split in the universal suffrage movement over race and tactics; and the efforts of women trying to exercise and argue for the vote—decades before the

amendment's passage. They can also see portraits and explore stories of the first and second generations of women's rights advocates, including Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth, and Victoria Woodhull.

From 1878 through 1916, suffragists started **Changing Tactics**. As Reconstruction ended, the movement continued to divide over strategy and exclude women of color due to mounting racism. Some women focused on rallying support for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, while others concentrated on securing voting rights state by state. Although their efforts often followed separate tracks, they all fed into one common goal: *national* voting rights for women. In this second exhibit section, visitors can learn about Pennsylvania's Justice Bell; different pathways the reformers pursued for constitutional change; the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington, D.C.; and arguments against national women's suffrage. They can also see a largescale display of women's suffrage memorabilia and learn about the meaning of popular imagery, as well as pose for a picture in a recreated suffrage parade scene. Additionally, this section features portraits and stories of third-generation women's rights advocates, including Alice Paul, Mary Church Terrell, and Carrie Chapman Catt.

By the mid-1910s, momentum grew with state-level victories, persistent lobbying, and militant protest tactics. These strategies, combined with the nation's entry into World War I, turned the tide in favor of a national amendment for women's suffrage. The third section of the exhibit, **Winning the Vote**, covers the time period of 1917 through 1920. In this section, visitors learn about the first picketing of the White House in 1917; the experience of picketers who were jailed as political prisoners; women's contributions during World War I; and the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.

The final exhibit section, **Continuing the Fight**, addresses how the fight for suffrage did not end in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment—particularly among women of color who faced discriminatory laws at the ballot box. Because the amendment only banned voter discrimination based on sex, other forms of discrimination continued and prevented millions of women from voting. Visitors can learn about what came after 1920, as some women used their influence as voters to fight for gender equality and workplace protections. Women of color continued their suffrage fight, working to remove voting barriers. Their efforts ultimately led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, when women of color began voting in large numbers for the first time. The exhibit concludes with the ongoing fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, which was first introduced in Congress in 1923, shortly after the 19th Amendment was ratified.