



Suffrage History

Molly Brown House Museum

History@Home

Although we generally credit the 19th amendment as the turning point for women's suffrage, the fight for women's right to vote began long before the 1920 amendment was passed. Women have been fighting for equal rights for hundreds of years, but many people consider the Seneca Falls Convention to have been the turning point in American women's suffrage.

The Seneca Falls convention took place from July 19th-20th 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. It was originally called the Women's Rights Convention, and only about 300 people attended it, most of whom were locals to the area. At this convention, the goal was to discuss the Declaration of Sentiments, which was a collaboration between many women but mostly written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the convention's organizers. This document first talked about 19 "grievances and demands" that many women had, and then 11 resolutions. People generally agreed with the resolutions, except for the 9th one: women's right to vote. However, it did eventually get passed.

Over the next 80 years, many more women also fought to make a change in a very public way. Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony traveled across the country giving speeches to demand the women's right to vote. However, not everyone is as strongly remembered by history, including many women of color who were pivotal to changing the tide. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a prominent African American suffragist who was one of the first women who were very vocal about the need for women's suffrage to support the 14th and 15th amendments, which allowed African American men to vote.

A few other important women they we don't often learn about include:

- Mary Ann Shadd Carey, whose legal background allowed her to stand in front of the House Judiciary Committee in 1874 and demand that women have access to ballot boxes, as they were both U.S. citizens and taxpayers.
- Mary Church Terrell, who was instrumental in consolidating Black suffrage movements that had sprung up as a result of prominent white suffragists opposing the 14th and 15th amendments.
- Ida B. Wells, who was one of the founders of the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), notably stood up against Alice Paul at a 1913 march

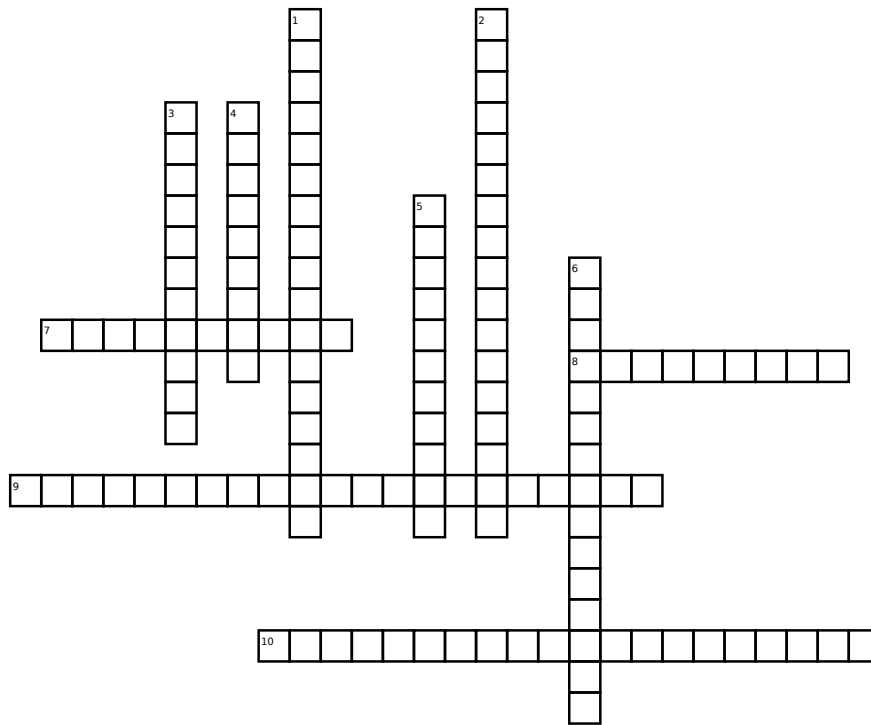
when she was asked to march at the back of a parade, saying “Either I go with you or not at all... I am not taking this stand because I personally wish for recognition. I am doing it for the future benefit of my whole race.”

On August 18th, 1920, the 19th amendment was ratified by Tennessee, the last state needed to make the 3/4 amount of states that need to agree in order for an amendment to be passed. It took over 60 years for the remaining states to ratify the law, with Mississippi being the last to do so in 1988.

However, just because women could no longer be discriminated against at the voting polls didn't mean that all women could vote. Many states, especially those that opposed the 19th amendment, adopted practices that made voting impossible for many women of color, including poll taxes, literary tests, and harassment, especially when they were attempting to register as legal voters. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed, and with that, these practices became illegal, meaning that now all women had the legal right to vote without obstruction.

Even today, it can sometimes be hard to vote-- many counties in the United States make it hard to vote by only allowing one voting station for thousands of voters in that county, for instance. The fight for all of us to be able to vote easily and without fear is still ongoing, but it is important to remember all of the amazing women who have allowed us to get to where we are today.

Women's Right to Vote



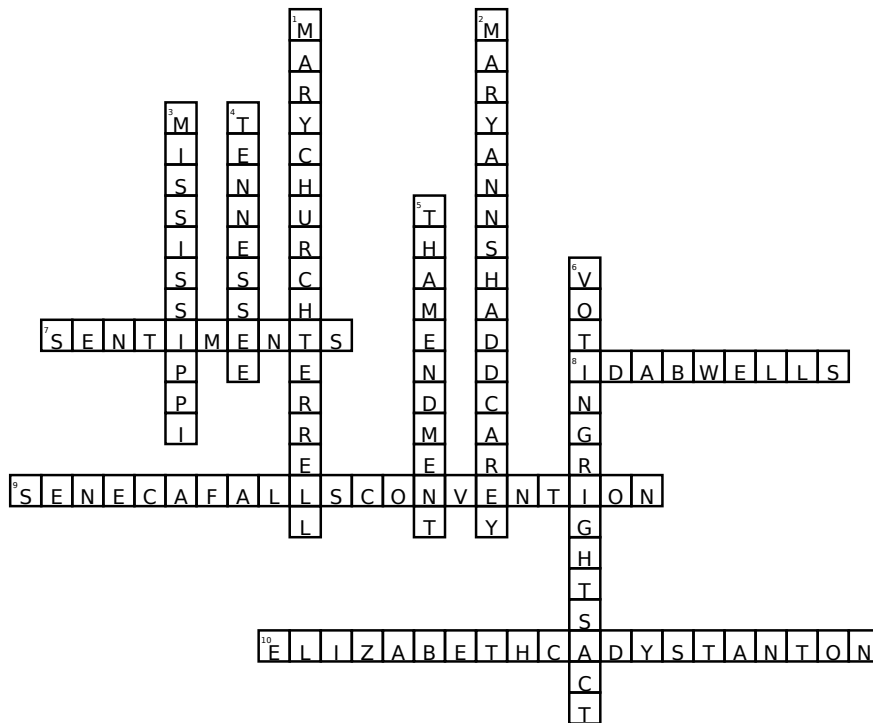
Down:

1. This suffragist helped to consolidate Black suffrage movements.
2. This suffragist stood in front of the House Judiciary Committee in 1874.
3. The last state to ratify the 19th amendment in 1988.
4. The last state needed to pass the 19th amendment in 1920.
5. This amendment forbade people from discriminating voters based on gender.
6. This law made poll taxes, literary tests, harassment, and other things illegal.

Across:

7. The Declaration of _____ included 19 grievances and 11 resolutions.
8. This suffragist was one of the founders of the NAACP.
9. This event took place on July 19th-20th 1848 and was originally called the Women's Rights Convention.
10. A prominent suffragist and one of the organizers of the famous 1848 convention.

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