

American Women's Suffrage Timeline

*Compiled by Michelle Marchetti Coughlin, 2020 Mass Humanities Project Scholar,
Discussion Series on Women's Suffrage, Falmouth Museums on the Green, 8/18/2020*

Michelle Marchetti Coughlin is a historian of early American women and the author of *One Colonial Woman's World: The Life and Writings of Mehetabel Chandler Coit and Penelope Winslow, Plymouth Colony First Lady: Re-Imagining a Life*. She is currently at work on a book on the wives of the colonial governors ("The First First Ladies"). She serves on the board of the Abigail Adams Birthplace and as Museum Administrator of Boston's Gibson House Museum, and recently guest-curated Pilgrim Hall Museum's "pathFOUNDERS: Women of Plymouth" exhibit. She maintains a website at www.onecolonialwomansworld.com.

1607 and 1620 Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, become the first permanent English settlements in North America. The colonists bring with them patriarchal ideals based on English laws and customs that differ sharply from the local Powhatan and Wampanoag peoples' matrilineal traditions, in which women inherit property and can serve as spiritual and political leaders.

1648 Margaret Brent of Maryland, a woman of means appointed by Governor Leonard Calvert to represent his estate, and by Calvert's successor to represent Maryland proprietor Cecilius Calvert's financial interests. requests the right to vote and speak in the colonial assembly so that she might fulfill her fiduciary obligations. Her request is denied.

1712 Hannah Callowhill Penn becomes acting proprietor of Pennsylvania—and the first and only female leader of an American colony—after her husband William suffers a series of strokes. She continues in this role through William's death in 1718, and, acting as executrix of his estate, until her own passing in 1726.

1776 Abigail Smith Adams famously encourages her husband John, then attending the Second Continental Congress, to "Remember the Ladies" and grant women protections and rights under the new country's code of laws. Although John usually highly values Abigail's advice, he fails to follow her counsel in this matter.

Also, that year, New Jersey's new constitution allows for women (and free Blacks) to vote, with certain restrictions. Women retain this right until 1807, when a law is passed restricting voting privileges to free, white males.

1840 The idea for a women's rights convention takes root within the minds of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and other female abolitionists after organizers of London's World Anti-Slavery Convention deny them the right to actively participate in the convention because of their gender.

1845 Margaret Fuller writes *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, which argues for equal rights for men and women.

1848 The first American women's rights convention, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and other activists is held in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments," modeled after the Declaration of Independence, states that "all men and women are created equal" and outlines the rights women are due as American citizens. A

number of reform-based resolutions are passed; the most controversial of these is the right to vote. Although Frederick Douglass speaks at the convention, he is the only African American in attendance.

1857 Suffragist Lucy Stone refuses to pay her taxes on the basis of "taxation without representation."

1866 The American Equal Rights Association is founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony with the goal of securing "Equal Rights to all Americans citizens, especially the Right of Suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex." Leadership roles were held by Frederick Douglass and women of color, including Sojourner Truth and Sarah Parker Remond.

Also, in 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton becomes the first woman to run for Congress (as an Independent). She is defeated by a large margin.

1869 The legislature of Wyoming, then a territory, becomes the first to grant American women the right to vote. They retain this right after Wyoming becomes a state in 1890.

Also, in 1869, the women's suffrage movement splits over the issue of the Fifteenth Amendment, which gives voting rights to African-American men following ratification in 1870. The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, opposes the amendment, believing that women should be included in the new law. The American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA), whose leaders include Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe, supports it. The NWSA and AWSA also differ in that NWSA is an all-women-led organization that fights for a range of reforms and works to secure suffrage on the federal level, while the AWSA includes men as well as women, focuses primarily on suffrage, and approaches ratification on a state-by-state basis.

1872 Victoria Woodhull becomes the first American woman to run for president (under the auspices of the Equal Rights Party).

1890 The National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association merge to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. NAWSA works to pressure Congress to pass a suffrage amendment via state-by-state ratification. Although women of color may join the national branch of NAWSA, they are not always welcome in state and local branches, particularly in the South.

1896 Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, and Mary Church Terrell help found the National Association of Colored Women to address issues of women's and civil rights. Terrell becomes its first president.

1912 Sixteen-year-old Chinese immigrant and activist Mabel Lee helps lead a New York City suffrage parade that attracts 10,000 people.

1913 Convinced of the effectiveness of the more militant tactics used by British suffragists, such as picketing and hunger strikes, and believing federal lobbying to be the most effective way to secure the vote, suffragists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns of NAWSA's Congressional Committee organize an extensive march on Washington the day before

Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. (Attempts are made by NAWSA to segregate women of color from the march.) Paul and Burns go on to organize the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (later renamed the National Woman's Party), which breaks away from NAWSA in 1914.

1916 Jeannette Rankin of Montana becomes the first woman elected to Congress.

1917–1918 Members of the National Woman's Party picket the White House; some are arrested, imprisoned, and force fed, helping to turn public opinion in their favor. Ultimately, President Woodrow Wilson agrees to endorse a women's suffrage amendment, in 1918.

1919 The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment), which guarantees women's right to vote, passes through Congress. Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan become the first states to ratify it, on June 10.

1920 The Nineteenth Amendment is ratified. Despite its passage, women of color face barriers to exercising the right to vote, including poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation, and even violence.

Also, in 1920, the League of Women Voters is founded by leaders of the women's suffrage movement.

1924 Natalie Tayloe Ross is elected the first American woman governor, of Wyoming, following the death of her husband, Governor William Ross. (In 1933 she was appointed the female director of the U.S. Mint by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.)

Also in 1924, the Indian Citizenship Act, provides full citizenship to Native Americans born in the U.S.; however, their right to vote continues to be decided by individual states, the last of whom did not grant this right until 1962.

1933 Frances Perkins becomes the first woman to serve in a presidential cabinet when she is appointed U.S. Secretary of Labor by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

1964 Patsy Takemoto Mink, who is Asian American, becomes the first woman of color elected to Congress.

1965 The Voting Rights Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, enacts protections for minorities' voting rights by eliminating poll taxes, literacy tests, and other obstacles commonly used in parts of the South to prohibit Black people from voting.

1968 Shirley Chisholm becomes the first African-American woman elected to Congress.

1972 The Equal Rights Amendment granting equality to women under the law, and first proposed by Alice Paul in 1923, passes through Congress. It fails to be ratified at the state level. Efforts toward ratification continue to this day.

Also, in 1972, Shirley Chisholm becomes the first woman and the first African American to seek the nomination of a major political party for president.

1974 Ella Tambussi Grasso becomes the first woman elected as a state governor (Connecticut) who was not her husband's successor.

1980 According to Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics, "In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible female adults who voted has exceeded the proportion of eligible male adults who voted."
<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/genderdiff.pdf>

1984 Geraldine Ferraro becomes the first woman to receive the vice-presidential nomination from a major political party.

1989 Ileana Ros-Lehtinen becomes the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.

1998 Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin becomes the first openly gay woman elected to Congress.

2016 Hillary Rodham Clinton becomes the first woman to receive the presidential nomination of a major political party. She wins the popular vote but loses the election in the electoral college.

2018 Deb Haaland (a member of New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo) and Sharice Davids (a member of Kansas's Ho-Chunk Nation) become the first Native-American women elected to Congress.

2020 Kamala Harris becomes the first African-American woman and first Asian-American woman to receive the vice presidential nomination of a major political party.

As a national election approaches, the coronavirus pandemic is predicted to produce unprecedented numbers of mail-in ballots; however, it is feared that recent U.S. Postal Service cuts and changes may cause large numbers of these ballots to go uncounted. Also of concern are weakened government protections for voting rights and new federal support for state restrictions on voting—such as voter identification requirements, the purging of voter rolls, and redistricting—all of which may prevent poorer women and women of color from exercising their right to vote.