

“Women's Suffrage: The Long Journey to the Vote”

Part 5 – The Journey's End

Following the “Night of Terror” at Occoquan workhouse in November of 1917, attention was brought to the brutal mistreatment of suffragists at the facility. In early 1918, the D.C. Court of Appeals ruled that women had been illegally arrested, convicted and imprisoned for their part in the suffragists protests.

Under increasing public pressure, President Woodrow Wilson to began calling on Congress to act on the federal suffrage amendment.

On May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the 19th Amendment (including a vote from Jeannette Rankin, Montana, the only female Congresswoman to be able to vote on the measure).

On June 4, 1919, the Senate passed the Amendment resulting in Congress, with Republican majorities in both the House and Senate, proposing the 19th Amendment, sending it to the States for ratification.

Beginning in Illinois, with a Republican majority in both chambers, the Amendment was ratified on June 10, 1919, and for the next several months was ratified in 34 more states ending in Tennessee as the 36th State to ratify on August 18, 1920. In Tennessee, after weeks of bitter debate, the speaker called the Amendment for a vote. One legislator, a young 24 year old Harry Burn was anti-suffrage, intending to vote against the Amendment. However, on the morning of the vote, Mr. Burn's mother, Phoebe Ensminger Burn, wrote him a note. In her message she lamented the bitter debate and urged her son to “be a good boy” and vote for the Amendment, which he did. His vote was the deciding vote resulting in ratification.

At that point Tennessee became the last state needed for ratification of the Amendment and on August 26, 1920 (100 years ago this week), United States Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby affixed his signature to the 19th Amendment giving women across the United States full voting rights.

Amendment 19:

“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.”

Gaining the right for women to vote was a decades long fight won by women dedicated to the ideal that women, like men, deserve all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

100 years later, it remains that OUR VOTE IS OUR VOICE!