



PA House Celebrates 100 Years of Women's Suffrage

In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified. This amendment, which had been many decades in the making, finally gave women across the country the right to vote. The women of Pennsylvania always played an important part in suffrage efforts in the United States. The core beliefs of the women's suffrage movement, that all people were created equal and therefore deserving of respect and rights, can be attributed to early Pennsylvania's Quaker roots.

Long Time In the Making

WOMAN'S RIGHTS.—At the recent Women's Rights Convention, held at Seneca falls, New York, it was seriously resolved that all men and women are created equal!" The following is from the declaration of sentiments put forth by the Convention:
The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this let facts be submitted to a candid world.

The first national gathering dedicated to gaining rights for women, including the right to vote, was in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The convention yielded the "Declaration of Sentiments, Grievances, and Resolutions." It stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal," and called for civil, social, and political rights for women.

Above: Press clipping from Seneca Falls Convention. Source: *The Evening Post, New York, 12 Aug. 1848.*

The Justice Bell: Rallying for the Cause



Above: *The Justice Bell touring Pennsylvania;*
Source: *Library of Congress.*

In the early 20th century, many suffragettes saw amending Pennsylvania's Constitution as the best way to gain voting rights. To accomplish this, the passage of a joint resolution through two sessions of the legislature, as well as approval by the state's voters, was necessary. Resolutions successfully passed the legislature and the measure was put to the voters of Pennsylvania for ratification in 1915. In an effort to gain support for the proposed amendment, Katharine W. Ruschenberger commissioned a replica of the Liberty Bell. Referred to as the Justice Bell, its clapper was chained so that it would remain silent until victory for women's suffrage was achieved. The Justice Bell was taken around the state to rally support for the cause. Despite this, the amendment was rejected by Pennsylvania's male voters.

Ratification

On June 4, 1919, Congress passed the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. In order to add the amendment to the United States Constitution, three-fourths of the states were required to ratify it.

Pennsylvania's legislature voted to ratify the 19th Amendment on June 24, 1919. On August 18, 1920, the 36th state required for ratification approved the amendment. The 19th Amendment was certified by the U.S. Secretary of State on August 26, 1920.



Right: *Governor Sproul signing the 19th Amendment;* Source: *Library of Congress.*

First Eight Women Elected to the PA House

The Justice Bell rang for the first time on September 25, 1920, on Independence Square in Philadelphia. Women were able to legally vote in Pennsylvania for the first time the following November. The women in Pennsylvania wasted no time exercising their new right and quickly sought public office. In the 1922 general election, eight women from across the Commonwealth won seats in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. These first eight women, all of whom were Republicans, were: Sarah M. Gallaher, Ph.D., Cambria County, 1923-1924; Sarah Gertrude MacKinney, Butler County, 1923-1924; Martha G. Speiser, Philadelphia County, 1923-1924; Rosa S. deYoung, Philadelphia County, 1923-1924; Martha Gibbons Thomas, Chester County, 1923-1926; Alice M. Bentley, Crawford County, 1923-1928; Helen Grimes, Allegheny County, 1923-1930; Lillie H. Pitts, Philadelphia County, 1923-1932.

From this freshman class of women legislators came several other “firsts” for women Members of the House. Representative Gallaher was the first woman to defeat a male incumbent, besting William G. Griffith in the 1922 election. Representative Bentley was the first woman to Chair a standing committee, serving as Chair of the Education Committee from 1925 to 1928. Bentley was also the first woman to serve as Speaker Pro Tem on February 28, 1923.



*Pioneers of the Legislature Top Row: Speiser, Grimes, de Young
Bottom Row: Gallaher, Bentley, Pitts, Thomas, MacKinney*

Trailblazers Through the Years



Left: Anna M. Brancato, Philadelphia County, was the first woman Democrat elected to the House in 1932. A champion of New Deal-era programs, she introduced legislation aimed at improving the lives of the working class. In 1958, she founded More Women on the Ballot, Inc., which sought to “raise women politically from the status of second-class citizens.”

Right: Mary A. Varallo, Philadelphia County, was elected Minority Caucus Chair for the 1957-1958 session and elected Majority Whip for the 1959-1960 session — becoming the first woman to serve in both of those positions.



Right: Lillith M. Wilson was elected as a Socialist to the House in 1930 to represent Berks County. She is the one and only woman from a third party to serve in the House.



Left: Sarah A. Anderson served Philadelphia County from 1955 to 1972. She was the first Black woman to Chair a Standing Committee, serving as Chair of Health and Welfare for the 1969-1970 session — a position which complemented her legislative initiatives regarding sickle cell anemia treatment and vaccines for children.

Lives of Public Service Beyond the House

Many of the women who have served in the Pennsylvania House have continued their political service after their time in the House. Here are just a few that carried on serving the people of Pennsylvania — and the United States.

Jeanette F. Reibman, Northampton County, 1955-1956; 1959-1966



Prior to Reibman's House service, she was an attorney for the United States War Department in Washington, DC, from 1940 to 1942, as well as for the United States War Production Board from 1942 to 1944. Following her time in the House, Reibman was elected to

the Pennsylvania State Senate, serving from 1967 to 1994 — making her the longest serving woman in the Pennsylvania Senate's history. Throughout her nearly 40 year career in state politics, Reibman was dedicated to improving schools and educational opportunities for Pennsylvania's youth. She served as the Chair of the Education Committee during both her time in the House and the Senate, and championed numerous successful pieces of legislation.



Reibman on a 1988 visit to the Easton Dam, Easton, Northampton County.

Faith Ryan Whittlesey, Delaware County, 1973-1975



Whittlesey in the Oval Office with President Reagan.

Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/obituaries/faith-ryan-whittlesey-79-top-reagan-aide-and-two-time-ambassador-to-switzerland-20180522.html>.

Following her time in the House, Whittlesey cochaired the 1980 Ronald Reagan for President campaign in Pennsylvania. The following year, President Reagan appointed her United States Ambassador to Switzerland, which she served from September 28, 1981 to February 29, 1983, and again from April 4, 1985 to June 14, 1988. From March 1983 to March 1985 Whittlesey served in the Reagan Administration as an assistant for public liaison in the White House. When Whittlesey left the White House for her second appointment as ambassador to Switzerland, Reagan wrote to her, "Your sacrifice and exemplary performance in the White House helped to create the enormous public support we received for a second term and for many of the policies I asked you to advocate. I have missed you since your return to Switzerland."



Source: Carty, Thomas J. *Backwards in High Heels: Faith Whittlesey, Reagan's Madam Ambassador in Switzerland and the West Wing*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2002.

Crystal Bird Fauset, Philadelphia County, 1939-1940



Fauset with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Source: Temple University, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Prior to her time in office, Fauset worked for the Institute of Race Relations at Swarthmore College, and was appointed director of the Women and Professional Project in the Works Progress Administration in Philadelphia. Throughout her campaign for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Fauset discussed the African-American community's needs for better housing and public health initiatives. She became the first African-American woman to serve in any state legislature. On January 10, 1940, Fauset resigned from the House to take the job of assistant state director of Philadelphia's WPA education and recreation programs. Because of her activism and involvement in Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaigns, Fauset developed a close relationship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, ultimately leading to her appointment in 1941 as the special director of the Office of Civilian Defense in New York City.



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Did you Know? Pennsylvania's Constitution Has an Equal Rights Amendment!



Above: State Representative Gerald Kaufman, Allegheny County, 1967-1972.

In 1970 and 1971, Representative Gerald Kaufman introduced House Bills 1678 and 1414 respectively, which called for an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth prohibiting discrimination based on gender. The bills stated "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania because of the sex of the individual." These Joint Resolutions unanimously passed both the House and Senate both years. The voters of Pennsylvania then affirmed the proposed amendment through a ballot initiative on May 18, 1971.

Winner of the Week:

The equal rights amendment passed, to the surprise of many women involved in women's rights work, whose commitment to the cause was matched only by their skepticism of the voter's knowledge and responsibility. But, there it is, the voters decided it should be in the constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and it is. This makes us the first state to have such an amendment.

Above: An editorial clipping noting the passage of the Amendment.

Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 23, 1971.



Above: State Representative Anita P. Kelly, Philadelphia County, 1963-1978.

In 1972, Representative Anita P. Kelly sponsored House Bill 2070 which called for Pennsylvania to ratify the nearly identical proposed amendment to the United States Constitution calling for equal rights for men and women. This Joint Resolution passed the House 178 to 3 and the Senate 43 to 3, making Pennsylvania one of the earliest states to ratify the amendment. When speaking on the bill, Kelly said, "... In short, Mr. Speaker, the 27th amendment will not result in any immediate sweeping changes in our society, but will provide the legal framework through which social change can take place, so that women can have the same freedom of choice and opportunity that men do in education, employment, housing, earning capacity and justice, in all facets of life." Despite Pennsylvania and many other states ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment, it failed to secure the approval of 3/4 of the 50 states needed to add it to the United States Constitution.

Final note: Following the House vote on House Bill 2070, Representative W. William Wilt, one of the three nay votes from the House, said, "I have always known that it does not pay to play games with the ladies, but that is exactly what I was doing here and I was caught. Mr. Speaker, I wish to be recorded in the affirmative please, on House Bill No. 2070."

Stay Tuned!

In the upcoming months, the House Archives and the Office of the Speaker of the House will be working to publish a book about the women of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. We will let you know when this exciting publication can be viewed easily on our website!