

# The Nineteenth Amendment

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The Civil War brought many changes to life in the United States. Those changes included social values. The talk of rights for former slaves inspired conversations about rights for women. Women were considered property, not persons. She could not own property, property belonged to her father or her husband and on the death of a husband, the property was held until she married again. She could not make legal contracts nor did she have a voice legally or within her home.

The push for voting rights in Connecticut began with Frances Ellen Burr of Hartford in the late 1860's. She collected signatures for a petition to the legislature for women's right to vote. It was presented to the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1867. The bill was not passed but it was a beginning of the efforts for women's suffrage. The newly fashioned Connecticut Women Suffrage Association (CWSA) formed in Hartford organized specifically to take on this challenge!

CWSA pressured lawmakers. Women felt that as citizens, they had rights. They needed the right to vote to protect property, fight for safe labor conditions, the protection of children and civic justice. The women came from all of levels of society, some were from financially secure families, some were educated, but also factory workers looking for a voice. Litchfield lawyer, George A. Hickox, became vice president of CWSA and as publisher of a local newspaper, he did his best to keep the issue in the public eye. In spite of efforts, the issue continued to drag in the legislature. Small goals were achieved, but the energy for the right to vote waned.

In Hartford, home of dedicated abolitionist's groups that fought for the end to slavery, the Connecticut Association Opposed to Women Suffrage was formed. The right to vote for women was not mutually accepted. Many, both men and women, felt it was unnecessary as women had enough to do without getting involved in political issues. It took time but a new generation picked up the fight for a voice in government. The entrance of the United States into World War I brought new interest and new guilt. If the United States was fighting for democracy, then it certainly should have full democracy at home.

Finally, the war ended in 1918 and the Connecticut legislative session ended without a vote on women's right to vote. The lack of response caused the Connecticut Women Suffrage Association to again jump into action. Even then, still no vote. Finally the state of Tennessee in August 1920 ratified the right for women's vote. Connecticut, with an eye for November elections, opened a special legislative session and approved 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment for women's right to vote.

Plymouth women stepped up to register! September 18, 1920, one hundred seventy-four Plymouth women waited in line to take their turns at the former small brick town hall in Plymouth Center to register to vote. October 19<sup>th</sup>, eighty-three more were added to the voter list. The age range was between 21 and 83. The women were nurses, teachers, college students, librarians, business women, industrial workers and mothers became the first women of Plymouth with the right to vote!