



### **Delaware General History**

After many years of fighting for women's right to vote, the United States Congress passed the 19th Amendment in 1919. The Amendment would not become part of the Constitution until 36 states had ratified. After ten months, 35 states had ratified the Amendment, and only one more state was needed. The leaders of the suffrage movement had looked to the Delaware General Assembly to be the deciding vote at a special session that was called by Governor Townsend on March 1920.

During this special session, both suffrage and anti-suffrage forces descended in Dover to hopefully sway the vote in their favor. Both groups were marching through the town wear distinctive flowers, yellow for the suffragists, and red for the anti-suffragists. There were strong-willed leaders on both sides of the spectrum.

Suffragists included Florence Bayard Hilles of the National Woman's Party and Mabel Lloyd Ridgely of the Delaware Equal Suffrage Association. Hilles was the daughter of the American Ambassador to Great Britain and came from Delaware's politically prominent Bayard family. Mabel Lloyd Ridgely is a descendant of a famous Delaware Family as well and was the well-known leader for the Kent County suffragists.

Hilles and Ridgely were not the only leaders from prominent Delaware families. Mary Wilson Thompson was a leader for the anti-suffragist movement; she was active in many civic causes and was an expert lobbyist. Thompson was known for, among other things, for reducing mosquitoes in Sussex County by founding the Delaware Mosquito Control Corp. Another anti-





suffragist was Emily Bissell; she was a social reformer who founded what is known today as the West End Neighborhood House and is best known for introducing Christmas Seals to America.

In 1915, Delaware presented a bill in support of women's suffrage to the Delaware state legislature. Before the state Congressmen voting, suffragists held a parade and gave speeches outside of the Old State House. Despite the efforts of the local suffragists, Delaware politicians rejected the bill.

In 1917, the NWP decided to step up the pressure on President Woodrow Wilson and organize pickets in front of the White House. The picketing group called themselves the "silent sentinels," they picketed not only the White House but also Lafayette Park and at other government buildings. Police began arresting picketers at the beginning of the summer in 1917. The police used this tactic to scare the picketers and other suffragists from using radical tactics. Initially, the police would release the picketers without charging them, but as the protests continued, the penalties became more serious. Some of the women, including Alice Paul, were sentenced to up to 6 months in Occoquan Workhouse. Suffragists inside the prisons continued their efforts by holding hunger strikes; in the end, they were force-fed by prison authorities. Once women were released from Occoquan Workhouse, the NWP had the women go on a nationwide tour to speak to crowds while wearing their prison uniforms.

Seven women from Delaware were among the protesters who were arrested and spent time in jail: Mabel Vernon, Florence Bayard Hilles, Annie J. Magee, Annie Arniel, Catherine Boyle, and Mary Brown. Annie Arniel (a munitions factory worker) spent the most time in jail. She was





arrested eight separate times and spent a total of 103 days in prison. After one of her arrests, she told the *Sunday Star*, a Wilmington paper, “We were good enough to work in the steel plant and help load shells for the battlefield of France, but were are still not good enough to vote, it seems. Can anyone see the justice in this?”

Leaders from both groups convened in Dover to lobby and protest. According to Widener Law, “Both sides lobbied and protested in Dover. The suffragists brought Eamon de Valera, president of the Irish Free State to Delaware to convince Irish-American representatives and at one point resorted to kidnapping the chairman of a House committee so that he could not present the Amendment for a vote the suffragists were sure to lose.”

Thousands of pro- and anti-suffrage lobbyists came to Delaware and started what is now known as the “War of the Roses.” Lobbyists from both sides were handing out the roses to the legislators, yellow jonquils from the suffragists, and red roses (symbols of chivalry) from the opponents. Among the lobbyists in Dover, leading suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt and President Eamon de Valera of the Irish Free State were present.

On May 5th, 1920, the Delaware Senate finally ratified the Amendment. Both groups now had to convince the House to vote their way. Both groups continued to lobby and rally for months, and ultimately, on June 2nd, the House voted and decided to adjourn without passing the Amendment. The anti-suffragists had won.





Though Delaware had decided to adjourn without passing the Amendment, another state stepped in and ratified the Amendment shortly after, meaning that the United States would be adding the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Delaware, unfortunately, lost its chance to make history. All of the lobbying, rallies, and marches moved on to Tennessee, which they ratified the Amendment by one vote.

Three years later, on March 6th, 1923, Delaware showed its support for women's suffrage by belatedly ratifying the 19th Amendment.

### Citations

- <http://blogs.lawlib.widener.edu/delaware/2012/03/19/the-19th-amendment-in-delaware/>
- <http://blogs.lawlib.widener.edu/delaware/2012/03/23/delawares-silent-sentinels-delaware-women-in-the-fight-for-womens-suffrage/>
- <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/columnists/harry-themal/2016/08/05/themal-delawares-history-women-and-voting/88307062/>
- <https://www.delawareeranow.org/a-brief-history-of-delawares-role-in-womens-suffrage/>
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/delaware-and-the-19th-amendment.htm>





Delaware Women's Suffrage March – Credit to Delaware Public Archives



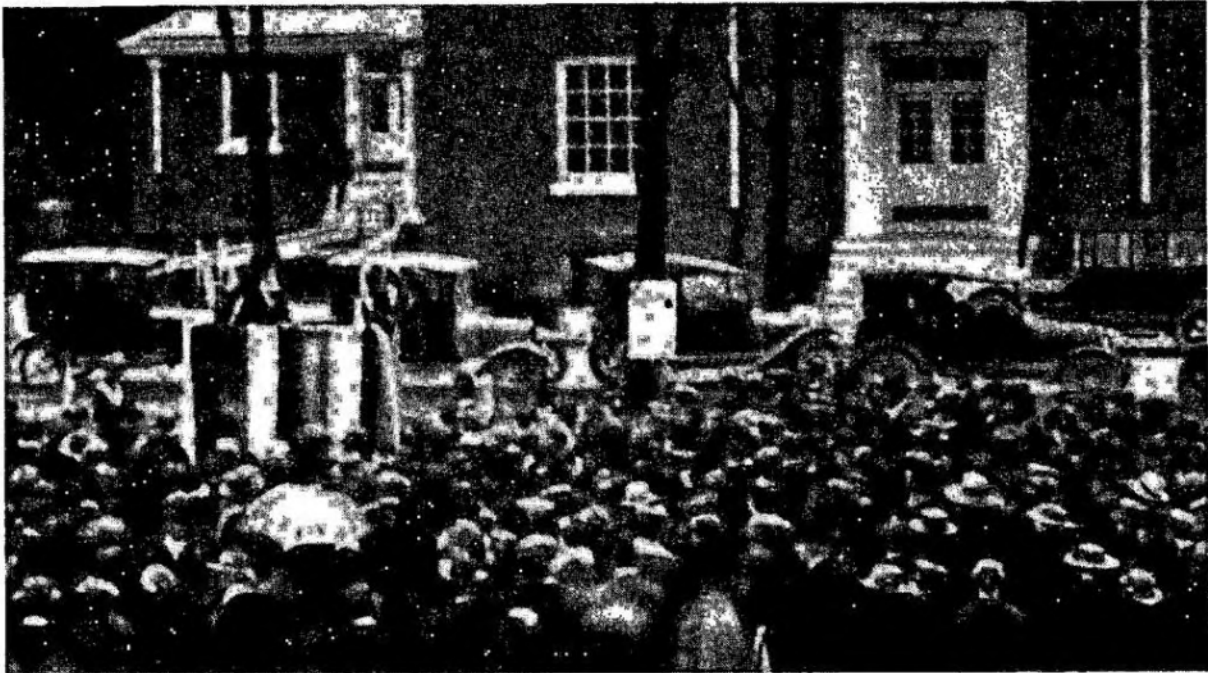


Figure 6. Suffrage rally on Dover Green, May 1920; in a final effort to win a majority of the Delaware legislature, suffragists set up a speakers' platform on the Green and decorated the trees with banners of purple, gold and white; from *The Suffragist*, May 1920.

Delaware Public Archives





Suffragists at train station in Wilmington, heading to Washington, D.C.

– Credit to Delaware Public Archives

