

1868-1923

Delaware Women's Suffrage Timeline

Compiled by the Delaware Historical Society.

Edited and updated for Delaware Humanities, Summer 2019, by Anne M. Boylan.

1869

– Nov. 12, Wilmington's first women's rights convention. Abolitionist Thomas Garrett presides, Lucy Stone speaks. Delaware Suffrage Association, with Emma Worrell as Corresponding Secretary and Dr. John Cameron as Recording Secretary, founded. It affiliates with Lucy Stone's American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).

1878

– Mary Ann Sorden Stuart testifies before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in favor of women's suffrage. Stuart is the Delaware representative for the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

1868

– Mary Ann Sorden Stuart of Greenwood begins to fight for women's rights

1870s

– Married women in Delaware receive the right to make wills, own property, and control their earnings.

– Delawareans Dr. John Cameron, Isabella Hendry Cameron, Dr. Mary Homer York Heald, Samuel D. Forbes and Mrs. Elizabeth Forbes regularly attend AWSA conventions as delegates.

1881

– Mary Ann Sorden Stuart, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony address Delaware general assembly in an attempt to amend the state constitution to allow women's suffrage.

1884

- Belva Lockwood, the "woman's rights candidate for president," speaks at Delaware College in Newark at the invitation of the college's women students. In 1885, the college's trustees end coeducation, an "experiment" begun in 1872.

1890

- The AWSA and NWSA unite to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

1896

- **December**, Delaware State Grange endorses woman suffrage.

1900

- Wilmington's Emily Bissell testifies before U.S. House & Senate Committees opposing woman suffrage.

1888

- Delaware Woman's Christian Temperance Union endorses women's suffrage.

1895

- Commencement exercises at Howard High School feature a debate on woman suffrage and an address by Mary Church Terrell, first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

- Wilmington Equal Suffrage Club (or Association) organized.

- Delaware Equal Suffrage Association (DESA) founded, affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). By May, 1896, DESA has seventeen affiliated clubs.

1897

- **Jan. 13**, Carrie Chapman Catt, Martha Churchman Cranston, Emalea Pusey Warner, Margaret White Houston, and Emma Worrell address hearing at Delaware constitutional convention in favor of suffrage. The Committee on Elections votes against women's suffrage.

1909

- DESA signs on to help NAWSA "great petition drive" for a federal suffrage amendment.

1911

- Dr. Josephine White De Lacour, M.D., runs for election to the Wilmington school board, her second time; she is supported by the Wilmington Equal Suffrage Association.

1912

- Led by Frank Stephens, the Arden single-tax colony forms a suffrage club, affiliated with DESA.
- Alice Paul becomes chair of Congressional Committee of NAWSA, bringing new life to the suffrage movement through a demand for an amendment to the United States Constitution alongside state-by-state efforts.

1914

- **March 19**, Led by Alice Moore Dunbar (later Dunbar-Nelson) Emma Gibson Sykes, Blanche Williams Stubbs, Mary J. Woodlen, Alice Gertrude Baldwin, and others, African American suffragists organize the Equal Suffrage Study Club.
- **March**, Florence Bayard Hilles becomes Delaware chairman of the CU; begins to plan suffrage parade in Wilmington, May 2.
- **April 25**, DESA plants suffrage tree, a pin oak, at north end of Van Buren Street Bridge in Wilmington.
- **May 9**, Some Wilmington suffragists travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in national parade.
- **Summer**, Florence Bayard Hilles and Miss Elsie Hill speak in 7 towns on a two-day tour of Delaware.
- **October**, Wilmington Equal Suffrage Association holds school contest for best essays on woman suffrage.

1913

- Equal suffrage amendment to state constitution fails in Delaware General Assembly.
- **February 13**, "General" Rosalie Gardner Jones and her group of "suffrage pilgrims" walk through Delaware on their way to the March 3 national suffrage parade in Washington, D.C.
- **March, 3**, Delaware suffragists participate in the big national suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. planned and carried out by NAWSA's Congressional Committee, led by Alice Paul. Spectators mob the suffragists.
- Alice Paul forms the Congressional Union (CU), affiliated with NAWSA but run separately, and focusing on a national amendment.
- **Summer**, Wilmington's Mabel Vernon hired as a CU organizer for Delaware; holds a series of suffrage meetings, including street corner speeches and rallies.
- **September**, Florence Bayard Hilles hears Mabel Vernon speak at DESA's suffrage tent at the State Fair in Wilmington and is converted to the suffrage cause.
- **September**, Joint CU-DESA headquarters open at Seventh and Shipley streets in Wilmington with Mabel Vernon in charge.
- **November, 23**, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, noted English suffragette, speaks in Wilmington.
- **December**, Emily Bissell speaks before the U.S. House Rules Committee as President of the Delaware Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.

1916

- **April**, Florence Bayard Hilles joins CU-sponsored "Suffrage Special" train trip through full suffrage states.
- **June**, DESA President Mary Clare Brassington attends both political party conventions to lobby for suffrage planks in party platforms.
- **June**, CU becomes National Woman's Party, completing its split from NAWSA.
- **July 4**, Mabel Vernon heckles Woodrow Wilson from the platform at an event in Washington.
- **July 8**, DESA Congressional Committee chair Mary Ospina polls all Delaware members of Congress regarding their suffrage views.
- **July**, Alice Dunbar-Nelson attends Delaware CU convention as a "fraternal delegate" from the Garrett Settlement House.
- **August**, Delaware Federation of Colored Women's Clubs forms with Blanche Williams Stubbs as president.
- **October 23**, DESA sponsors "Federal Amendment Day" in Wilmington.
- **November**, Jeannette Rankin (R-Montana), becomes the first woman elected to serve in the U.S. Congress. As an NAWSA organizer, Rankin had visited Delaware in 1913.
- **December**, Delaware CU claims 36 branch organizations.
- **December**, Mabel Vernon and Florence Bayard Hilles are in a group that unfurls a suffrage banner in Congress during a speech by Woodrow Wilson.

1915

- **Jan.-Feb.** In support of equal suffrage amendment to state constitution, the "Votes for Women Flyer," Florence Bayard Hilles's gaily decorated car, tours the state, taking the suffrage message to many small towns.
- **February**, Alice Paul re-brands the federal suffrage amendment as the "Susan B. Anthony" amendment, to differentiate it from other proposals.
- **Feb-March**, Blanche Williams Stubbs and Mary J. Woodlen publish letters in Wilmington newspapers criticizing racist opposition to African American women's quest for voting rights.
- **March**, Equal suffrage amendment to state constitution fails in Delaware General Assembly.
- **June**, DESA and CU split, with DESA moving out of joint headquarters at 305 Delaware Avenue in Wilmington.
- **July-November**, Alice Moore Dunbar (later Dunbar-Nelson) travels throughout Pennsylvania encouraging voters to support woman suffrage in the November referendum. The referendum fails.
- **September**, Mabel Vernon and Florence Bayard Hilles represent Delaware at the CU's Women-Voters Convention in California.
- **September 25**, Florence Bayard Hilles and Emily Bissell debate woman suffrage at a local Methodist Church.
- **November**, Martha Churchman Cranston retires as DESA President after 20 years of service. DESA has 270 dues-paying members.

1917

- **January**, John G. Townsend, Jr., inaugurated as Delaware's governor; declares his support for suffrage.

1918

- **December 2**, Woodrow Wilson urges the new 66th Congress to pass the suffrage amendment when it convenes in December 1919.
- **December 16**, Suffragists begin to burn Woodrow Wilson's words in watch fires in front of the White House.

1920

- **March 22 - June 2**, Special Session of Delaware General Assembly to consider suffrage amendment. Pro and Anti forces mobilize for a big fight. Great national interest because if successful, Delaware would be the final state needed to ratify. Senate ratifies; House does not.
- **April 5**, Emma Gibson Sykes published letter in Sunday Star criticizing racist opposition to woman suffrage.
- **April**, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Florence Bayard Hilles together address gatherings of Delaware African American suffragists.
- **April 20**, Big suffrage rally in Dover.
- **June 2**, Delaware General Assembly adjourns without ratifying the amendment.
- **August 18**, Tennessee becomes the final state to ratify the 19th Amendment.
- **Aug. 26**, Woman's suffrage becomes part of the United States Constitution.
- **August - November**, Delaware women organize, register, and go to the polls. DESA regroups as League of Women Voters (LWV).



1919

- **January 1-20**, Perpetual watch fires lit at the White House. Delaware suffragists Catherine Boyle, Annie Arniel, Mary E. Brown, Annie McGee, Adelina Piunti, Naomi Schopfer Barrett and others participate. Several arrested.
- **January 3**, 18th Amendment (Prohibition) ratified.
- **February 9**, President Woodrow Wilson burned in effigy at the White House.
- **Feb 10**, U.S. Senate (65th Congress) defeats suffrage amendment. Both Delaware's U.S. Senators vote no.
- **May 19**, Wilson calls new 66th Congress into special session.
- **May 21**, U.S. House (66th Congress) passes suffrage amendment.
- **June 4**, U.S. Senate (66th Congress) approves suffrage amendment. 36 states needed to ratify.
- **June 26**, DESA holds "victory luncheon" in Wilmington; makes plans for Delaware ratification.
- **Summer**, DESA and NWP lobby Governor Townsend to call a special session of the General Assembly to consider ratification.
- **Aug. 3**, NWP ratification rally in Wilmington. Alice Gertrude Baldwin speaks on "The Colored Teacher's Tale."
- **Aug. 9**, Ratification rally in Dover.
- **November**, DESA votes to open a headquarters in Dover in anticipation of a special session being called; elects Dover's Mabel Lloyd Ridgely as president.

1923

- Delaware General Assembly ratifies the 19th Amendment.

To learn more about Women's Suffrage visit:
<https://www.2020centennial.org/>
<https://www.womensvote100.org/>