

Leader's Guide 2016 Cluster Training: 2020 Vision – The Perfect 36

Compiled January 2016 by:

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Introduction/Purpose of our 2020 Vision: Show **VOTE** eye chart

- Today we are going to share with you about a special event coming up in 2020. Can anyone tell me what that event is?
- We are not here today to tell you how to celebrate or commemorate this anniversary in your personal life, at your club or community.
- It is our goal to let communities know well-enough in advance so they can plan an event worthy of the day!

Overview: Tennessee became “The Perfect 36” in 1920 – the essential last state that could ratify the 19th Amendment that summer. No other state was in a position to do it. The Suffrage Amendment was ratified in Tennessee on August 18, 1920, and certified by the U.S. Secretary of State on August 26th to become part of the Constitution.

The struggle, which lasted over 70 years, took place from 1848 to 1920. This story is one of women creating one of the most remarkable and successful nonviolent, civil rights efforts the world had ever seen.

What we now take for granted as a basic right of citizenship was only achieved through a hard-fought and decades-long battle that was seriously contested and complicated by associations with other controversial issues along the way, such as states’ rights, abolition and temperance.

It is all the more remarkable when one considers the barriers the suffragists had to overcome. No financial help, no political help, no legal standing and opposition that was firmly entrenched. Without firing a shot, throwing a rock or issuing any threats, the right to vote was won. The suffragists were harassed, attacked by mobs and thrown in jail. They championed the importance of the most fundamental democratic values – the right to vote and that a peaceful political change was possible.

Early History: Excerpted and adapted from “The Seneca Falls Convention – A short history from the Smithsonian Institute:”

In July 1848, a social visit brought together Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martha Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane Hunt. All except Stanton were Quakers, a sect that afforded women some measure of equality, and all five were well acquainted

with antislavery and temperance meetings. Fresh in their minds was the April passage of the long-deliberated "New York Married Woman's Property Rights Act," a significant but far from comprehensive piece of legislation.

Women had limited if any right to property in most states at this time. With few exceptions, in most instances they had no legally acknowledged rights to their home, household items, or even their own children.

The time had come, Stanton argued, for women's wrongs to be laid before the public, and women themselves must shoulder the responsibility. Before the afternoon was out, the women decided on a call for a convention "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman."

The first Women's Rights Convention was held five days later, July 19 & 20, at the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Seneca Falls, New York. About 300 people, 40 of them men, from about five miles around attended.

Stanton had drawn up a "Declaration of Sentiments" using the Declaration of Independence as her guide and eleven resolutions making the argument for women's natural right to equality. All but one of the resolutions were adopted unanimously by the convention. The only exception was the resolution advocating women's suffrage, considered by some to be too radical a dream at that time. The eloquent persuasion of Frederick Douglas swayed the crowd into agreeing to the resolution. One hundred women and men signed the Seneca Falls Resolution. Only one young woman signer lived long enough to cast her ballot.

The Suffrage Amendment and Tennessee's Role:

Efforts to advance women's suffrage were conducted at both state and national levels with organizations to coordinate them rising, falling, fragmenting and uniting through the decades. Other major issues and events, especially the Civil War and later suffrage for the freed (male) slaves, at times pushed suffrage to the side or caused fractures among the advocates. Many advances were achieved including women voting in some elections in some states, especially in the West. There was contention about the issue of whether a federal suffrage amendment was warranted.

During World War I, suffragists had continued their efforts while women also made substantial and valuable contributions to the war effort. That combined with the increase in women in the paid labor force, often working in hazardous conditions resulted in ever-increasing pressure for change. Additional pressure came from public outrage over incidents of suffragists being harassed, attacked, jailed, and tortured. For

the first time in 1917, a President finally lent his support when Woodrow Wilson urged Congress to act on women's suffrage.

In January of 1918 the 19th Amendment was passed: *"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."* Ratification by the legislatures of 36 states was needed before it became part of the Constitution.

Tennessee became "The Perfect 36" in 1920 – the essential last state that could ratify the 19th Amendment. No other state was in a position to vote that summer. It was up to Tennessee, suddenly the focus of national attention. Carrie Chapman Catt, a leading strategist of the national suffrage movement, became actively involved in local efforts to ensure ratification. The anti-suffrage activists were out in full force as well. The capitol building in Nashville hummed with lobbying efforts from both sides. The Hermitage Hotel was swarming with women of opposing convictions, each hard at work to achieve their goals. The suffragists wore yellow roses to display their cause, while their opponents wore red ones.

The State Senate Chamber voted in favor of ratification with ample margin. Based on some preliminary and procedural votes, the representatives looked likely to defeat it when the vote was called. But then no one knew about a letter young Harry Burn from McMinn County held in his pocket, a letter from his mother,

(Can have "actress" read the letter and other quotes)

...Hurrah and vote for suffrage and don't keep them in doubt. I noticed Chandler's speech. It was very bitter. I've been watching to see how you stood, but have not seen anything yet.

Write mother every time you have a chance for I am always looking for a letter when you are away. Don't forget to be a good boy. And help Mrs. "Thomas Catt" with her "Rats." Is she the one that put rat in ratification? Ha..."

And when the vote was called...Harry Burn voted "Yea"

The house vote was 49 to 47 when Harry Burn of McMinn County surprisingly voted to ratify the amendment and prevented a tie.

Finally, on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment was certified by the U.S. Secretary of State as federal law, giving women throughout the nation the right to vote in all elections.

At the last Suffrage Convention of 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt spoke to the joyful women:

“Ours has been a movement with a soul, ever leading on. Women came, served, and passed on, but others came to take their places. Who shall say that all the hosts of the millions of women who have toiled and hoped and met delay are not here today, and joining in the rejoicing?

Their cause has won. Be glad today.

Let your joy be unconfined. Let it speak so clearly that its echo will be heard around the world.

[Let] it find its way into the soul of every woman . . . who is longing for the opportunity and liberty still denied her.

Let your voices ring out the gladness in your hearts! . . .”

We are proud of and grateful to the dedicated activists, women & men, many of whom spent much of their lifetime in the effort...and to the men in the Tennessee legislature who cast their votes to ratify.

In the words of Abigail Scott Duniway:

"The young women of today - free to study, to speak, to write, to choose their occupation - should remember that every inch of this freedom was bought for them at a great price... the debt that each generation owes to the past, it must pay to the future."

Activity: Discuss in small groups any family or community memories of local women involved in the suffrage movement. How can those stories be discovered, honored and saved for posterity? Share ideas with the entire group.

Evaluation

Review of materials in your county/club Leader's Kit:

2020 Vision Book Marks-one for each club member.

2020 Vision Mini Poster

Leader's Training Guide (2 versions): "The Perfect 36" and "Failure Is Impossible"

Resource List

Harry Burn's picture and letter from mother