

***Votes for Women!***  
***The Fight for Suffrage and the Founding of the League in North Carolina***  
(Script for Girl Scouts Version of Video)  
by Dianna Wynn, LWV-Wake President

**Introduction**

**[Slide 1]** Welcome to all Girl Scouts, families, and friends. My name is Dianna Wynn. I'm president of the League of Women Voters of Wake County, and I'm a former girl Scout. We are located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Thank you for joining us today for our virtual program focusing on the fight for women's voting rights in North Carolina.

**[Slide 2]** The word "suffrage" refers to the right to vote in elections. Today women have the same voting rights as men, However, that has not always been the case.

**[Slide3]** When I think about the early American suffragists of the 1800s, I think of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, & Lucretia Mott. But I also think of Ida B. Wells, Sojourner Truth, & Frederick Douglas, African Americans who fought for racial justice while also fighting for women's suffrage. The very first women's rights convention took place in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, and it took until 1920 for women to win the right to vote with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution.

**[Slide 4]** The fight for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment took over 70 years, but the fight for voting rights for everyone continues today. This video looks at the fight for women's suffrage specifically in North Carolina and how this led to the founding of the League of Women Voters in North Carolina.

**Fight for Suffrage in NC**

**[Slide 5]** The story of women's suffrage in North Carolina begins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1894, the North Carolina Equal Suffrage Association was formed in Asheville by Helen Morris Lewis. In 1899, Helen Morris Lewis was also the first

North Carolina woman to run for elected office. While she lost that election for Superintendent of Waterworks, she should be admired for her courage to run for office when no other woman had ever done so before her in North Carolina.

**[Slide 6]** In 1897, a bill was introduced in the North Carolina legislature for a state constitutional amendment recognizing women's voting rights. The bill was referred to what at the time was called the Committee on Insane Asylums, where the bill died. Unfortunately, little progress was made toward women's suffrage in North Carolina for the next 15 years.

**[Slide 7]** However, the fight for women's suffrage accelerated in the early 1900s. In 1913, an important protest march took place called the Woman Suffrage Procession. Women marched through the streets of Washington, DC demanding their right to vote and drawing half a million people to watch the event.

**[Slide 8]** Also in 1913, Gertrude Weil formed the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League, and the suffrage movement in North Carolina was revived. This is a photograph of suffragists in North Carolina. The woman at the far left is Gertrude Weil, president of the Equal Suffrage League. Also notice the man kneeling front. There were many men that supported a woman's right to vote.

**[Slide 9]** This is a photograph of suffragists working in the office for the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League in downtown Raleigh on Fayetteville Street. Remember that in those days there were no computers or email. Suffragists wrote letters, used typewriters, or sent telegrams.

**[Slide 10]** In June 1919, the U.S. Congress finally passed the 19th Amendment legislation. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment needed at least 36 states to vote to ratify it in order for it to become part of the US constitution. So, the race to ratification began! This is a photo of the Speaker of the US House of Representative sat the time with suffragists watching him sign this important legislation.

**[Slide 11]** If at least 36 states approved it, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution would give women the same voting rights as men. It says, "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.”

**[Slide 12]** After the US congress passed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, suffragists began meeting with politicians throughout the nation to persuade them to support the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, including in Raleigh. They very often met with politicians in the lobby of a hotel on Fayetteville Street in downtown Raleigh.

**[Slide 13]** Unfortunately, there were many people who were opposed to women voting in elections. In 1920, Mary Hilliard Hinton of Wake County formed the Southern Rejection League in Raleigh, an anti-suffrage organization. A group of men also opposed to women’s suffrage formed the States’ Rights Defense League.

**[Slide 14]** In this photograph, you can see several flags. One is for the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League, while just a few doors down is the flag for the offices of the organization opposed to women’s suffrage. By March 1920, 35 states had ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, but 36 states were needed to add it to the US Constitution. So, suffragists were working hard in several states, including North Carolina, to persuade politicians to ratify the constitutional amendment.

**[Slide 15]** Unfortunately, the fight for women’s suffrage did not go well in North Carolina. On August 11, 1920, 63 North Carolina legislators sent a telegram to Tennessee pledging not to ratify the amendment and asking Tennessee politicians to also vote against women’s suffrage.

**[Slide 16]** A few days later on August 17, 1920, the North Carolina Senate met, and they voted against even considering the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment until the next year.

**[Slide 17]** But then on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. This is a telegram sent to North Carolina suffragist Gertrude Weil thanking her for all her work and expressing appreciation for Tennessee’s decision to ratify. The next day, North Carolina politicians met again and again voted against considering ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment—even though 36 states had already ratified it and it was going to be added to the US Constitution anyway.

**[Slide 18]** The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is certified into law on August 26th, 1920, which is now known as Women's Equality Day. Even though, North Carolina politicians did not vote for women's suffrage, the US Constitution would allow women to vote in our state beginning in 1920. This is an unfortunate chapter in our state history. However, the North Carolina legislature did officially ratify the 19th Amendment in 1971 as an acknowledgement of the importance of women's voting rights.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Women of Color**

**[Slide 19]** It's important to understand that the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment did not secure voting rights for all women in our nation. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment initially mostly benefitted white women at the time.

**[Slide 20]** There were many women of color who were suffragists. For example, Charlotte Hawkins Brown of Henderson, North Carolina was an active suffragist. She was the president of the North Carolina Association of Colored Women's Clubs and was the founder of the Palmer Memorial Institute near Greensboro. Many of the women and men of color who were suffragists were often left out of the history of the suffrage movement. These men and women were usually not single-issue activists and were also fighting against racism. While the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment may have technically given women the right to vote, the 19th Amendment primarily benefitted white women in 1920 and for many years afterward. There were barriers to voting such as unfair literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation at the polls, especially in the Jim Crow South. And some portions of our population were denied citizenship and thus had no voting rights at all.

**[Slide 21]** However, People of Color continued the fight for full suffrage. Prior to 1924, Native Americans were not automatically considered US citizens. In 1924, the American government finally granted citizenship to Native Americans through the Indian Citizenship Act. However, many states enacted policies which continued to prohibit Native Americans from voting. In 1943, Chinese immigrants, including women, were permitted to become citizens and therefore were then permitted to vote. In 1952, the first generation of Japanese Americans, including women, were granted citizenship and voting rights. In the 1960s several

important laws were passed to protect voting rights for people of color and others. In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the US Constitution formally abolished poll taxes and literacy tests as barriers to voting. The Voting Rights Act became law in 1965 and prohibited racial discrimination in voting. And the Civil Rights Act of 1968 prescribes penalties for certain acts of violence or intimidation including interfering with a person's access to the vote. The fight for voting rights for all continued long after 1920 and continues today.

### **Founding of the League of Women Voters**

**[Slide 22]** The ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment resulted in the founding of the League of Women Voters in 1920. With the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, it became important to register women to vote to teach them about government and the political process.

**[Slide 23]** Carrie Chapman Catt was a suffrage leader and the successor to Susan B. Anthony. She was president of the National American Suffrage Association and led the fight for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. On February 14, 1920 (Valentine's Day), Carrie Chapman Catt formed the League of Women Voters of the United States.

**[Slide 24]** Gertrude Weil, who was from Goldsboro, North Carolina, led the fight for women's suffrage in North Carolina as president of the NC Equal Suffrage League. She founded the League of Women Voters of North Carolina in 1920 and was its 1<sup>st</sup> president.

**[Slide 25]** This is a handwritten invitation from Gertrude Weil inviting women in Raleigh to dinner to discuss joining the new organization.

**[Slide 26]** Several local Leagues were established in counties across the state including in Raleigh. The News & Observer newspaper reported on September 27, 1920 that a Raleigh League of Women Voters had its first meeting. It changed its name to the League of Women Voters of Wake County and is still very active 100 years after its first members met.

## **Conclusion**

**[Slide 27]** The fight for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment took 72 years from the time of the Seneca Falls convention in New York, but the fight for universal suffrage, including women of color continued until at least the 1960s---and continues today. The North Carolina Equal Suffrage Association is the predecessor organization to the League in North Carolina. The League was founded by those suffragists, and we are their legacy. Women today constitute a majority vote in North Carolina and in the United States, are running for office in greater numbers, and are more active in the election process than ever before in history.

**[Slide 31]** Remember that women fought very hard to win the right to vote in our nation, and I hope you will eventually make your voice matter by becoming a voter. For more information about voting, visit our website at [lwvwake.org](http://lwvwake.org). Thank you for your interest in the history of women's voting rights.