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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

"Any great change
must expect
opposition,
because it shakes
the very
foundation of
privilege."
—Lucretia Mott

INTRODUCTION

In the early summer warmth of 1919, the United States Senate ratified the 19th Amendment, catapulting a once-shocking notion from the halls of the Capitol to 48 battleground states. This once-divisive policy was women's suffrage: the right to vote for half of America. The Amendment's passage signaled a remarkable victory for a movement made of an equally remarkable patchwork of woman suffrage evangelists: women and men, black and white, rich and poor. But as pleased as these crusaders were with their Congressional victory, it was the opening salvo in a new war. If the previous one, to craft a powerful amendment and equally magnetic movement, was won on the day of ratification in Washington DC, a new series of battles began as suffragists raced across the country to secure ratification for the Amendment in three-quarters of the states. There would be 36 fresh battles in this new war, and by

1920, those battles had been fought, and won. And by 2019, mostly forgotten.

How could such an epic undertaking be relinquished to the dusty stacks of history, with scant mention in textbooks and TV, few monuments or moments devoted to a cause most Americans would agree was noble and necessary? It's hard to tell, and time to remedy.

This is the purpose of the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission, created by Congress "to ensure a suitable observance of the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States providing for women's suffrage."¹

The bill to establish the Commission in 2017 seemed as widely supported as women's suffrage is in America today, with every female senator a co-sponsor. The Commission, by law, is required to meet at least every six months, until it terminates in April of 2021. This report follows the Commission's first public meeting.



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¹ Women's Suffrage centennial Commission Act S. 847

"There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers." Susan B. Anthony

SECOND MEETING

In a followup to the first, administrative-only meeting, a second meeting was called for December 7, 2018 in Washington DC. The meeting was held in the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument. It was hosted by the building occupants and legacy of women's suffrage leader, Alice Paul, the National Woman's Party. Alice Paul was known as a more radical leader, who had worked with British suffragettes, known for more violent protests. Paul's organized pickets of the White House and corresponding fires and parades were nonviolent, but controversial in 1919 United States. Paul's sensational media stunts kept woman suffrage on the pages of papers and lips of influencers until the very final battle for the vote. Her efforts were geared toward a Federal amendment, and when Congress ratified women's right to vote as the 19th Amendment, Paul and her thousands of followers fanned out across the USA to ensure 36 states would ratify it.

An equally recognized group that favored a strategy to grant women the vote state-by-state was run by rival Carrie Catt. Catt's thousands of followers, better known for their intensive research and exhaustive personal lobbying efforts, also

pursued ratification in the states, but neither Paul's nor Catt's groups saw the merit of working jointly.

The 14 Commissioners of the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission learned about each of these movements and many other poignant moments in the fight for the female vote at the December 7th meeting. Presentations included experts from the Library of Congress, National Archives, the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution. Commissioners asked questions and even solicited a few responses from the 13 registered public attendees.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Commission voted in favor of establishing a mission statement: "To commemorate and coordinate the nationwide celebration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and to educate the American people about the history and the leaders of the women's suffrage movement in the United States in a nonpartisan fashion."



http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1142388



LOGO

The Commissioners also voted to establish the above logo, featuring Susan B. Anthony, who is the namesake of the 19th, or “Susan B. Anthony Amendment”. The checkmark represents the vote, and the seven surrounding stars represent the countless activists on whose shoulders this privilege became a right.

SUBCOMMITTEES

The chartering legislation of the Commission allowed for the formation of subcommittees to divide the efforts and focus of the Commission so it could accomplish its ambitious and broad goals and duties:

The **duties of the Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission**, as written in the law, include:

1. To encourage, plan, develop, and execute programs, projects, and activities to **commemorate** the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.
2. To **encourage** private organizations and State and local governments to organize and participate in activities commemorating the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.

3. To **facilitate and coordinate** activities throughout the United States relating to the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.
4. To serve as a clearinghouse for the collection and **dissemination** of information about events and plans for the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.
5. To develop **recommendations** for Congress and the President for commemorating the centennial of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.

The subcommittees established were:

Capitol City Commemorative Committee

Mission: To develop ideas for execution in the Washington DC area to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. To cultivate concepts for events, Congressional and/or Presidential involvement. To assist and

Everybody counts in applying democracy. And there will never be a true democracy until every responsible and law-abiding adult in it, without regard to race, sex, color or creed has his or her own inalienable and unpurchasable voice in government.

-Carrie Chapman Catt

facilitate relationship building and opportunities to produce deliverables.

50 States Commemorative Committee

Mission: To develop ideas for execution in individual states to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and individual state ratifications of the Amendment. To cultivate concepts for events, legislative and or gubernatorial involvement. To originate templates for a model state celebration and suggest opportunities for Commission partnership and guidance to states with the Commission.

Multi-Media, Education and Engagement Committee

Mission: To cultivate concepts and ideas for education about the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. To identify target audiences and corresponding opportunities to engage them in education and commemorative activities. To originate ideas for web content and social platforms.

Leaders Committee

Mission: To identify leaders the Commission should highlight in its efforts to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. To advise on educational, commemorative and social platform engagements regarding these leaders.

Partnership Committee

Mission: To identify potential partners for the Commission in its efforts to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment including private sector companies, personalities, government entities, non-governmental organizations and individuals. To suggest relationship constructs with partners to benefit the Commission's mission.



Sojourner Truth, who will no doubt be a focus of the “Leaders” subcommittee
<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c19343/>

CHANGES AND PROGRESS

Since its first public meeting (second official meeting), the Commission has made changes and progress.

The WSCC has acquired a special address: P.O. Box 2020 Washington, DC 20013, to remind all who contact the commission of the upcoming centennial year.

The Commission has also begun setting up physical office space inside the Adams building of the Library of Congress. The building choice is as poignant as the P.O. Box. The building's namesake, President John Adams, took close counsel from his famously bright first lady, Abigail. “Remember the ladies,” she urged him in

a letter, “and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of the husbands,” she urged, as he was helping develop the new republic. Had Adams and other founders better heeded Abigail’s words, perhaps women’s suffrage would not have been such a fraught struggle.

The Commission has also made leadership changes to facilitate the execution of its mission as the first major centennial, June 4th, the anniversary of the Congressional ratification of the 19th Amendment, approaches. The new Chairman of the commission is Mrs. Kay Coles James, formerly the Vice Chairman, and the former Chairman, Rebecca Kleefisch, has become the WSCC Executive Director.

A new Commissioner was sworn in. Penny Nance, CEO of Concerned Women of America, was appointed by Speaker Paul Ryan and sworn into service.



www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/the-first-womens-rights-convention.htm

Because a significant part of its mission is education, the WSCC has secured a website url to collate materials and curriculum originated by its partners at the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, the Library of Congress and the Department of the Interior National Park Service.

CONCLUSION

The WSCC has announced its next meeting will be held February 27, 2019 in Washington DC. Members of the public are welcome to attend and register by following the procedure outlined in the Federal Register.

Although much has been accomplished with the setup of the Commission, the efforts and undertakings that speak to the purpose of the agency are in their infancy, much as the women’s suffrage movement was in 1848. That’s when the first Women’s Convention was called in Seneca Falls, NY. An estimated 300 men and women congregated in the Wesleyan Chapel to hear the early suffrage leaders’ “Declaration of Sentiments”, which included the desire for women’s right to vote.²

It is equally the Commission’s desire for the country to learn of and commemorate the movement and the leaders who allow women this prized right today.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

Chairman: Kay Coles James

Jovita Carranza

Susan Combs

Marjorie Dannenfelser

Heather Higgins

Karen Hill

Julissa Marenco

Sen. Barbara Mikulski (Ret.)

Nicola Miner

Cleta Mitchell

Penny Nance

Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Colleen Shogan

Debra Steidel Wall

Executive Director: Rebecca Kleefisch