

Celebrating Women's History Month in Easton



Forty years ago, President Jimmy Carter designated the second week of March as Women's History Week and increased our nation's awareness for the March 8 International Women's Day set by the United Nations.

By 1987, the entire month was declared by law as Women's History Month and ever since, educational institutions take this time to highlight the achievements and contributions of women. This year, the National Women's Historical Alliance has chosen to focus on the "Valiant Women of the Vote," acknowledging the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, securing this right for many women in our country.

Exhibits and lecture series will celebrate this achievement while also drawing attention to the continued struggle for women's rights both in our country and abroad.

The movement for women's suffrage here in Connecticut can be traced back to 1867 when Francis Ellen Burr petitioned the General Assembly to formally consider a bill securing women's right to vote. While unsuccessful, she and Isabella Beecher Hooker continued on and founded the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association (CWSA) in 1869.

Their constitution and the signatures of those who attended their meetings in Hartford are preserved today in our state library. These documents show the names of thousands of supporters who travelled from all over Connecticut to hear guest speakers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

Attendees lent their support to both the local and national effort and while full women's suffrage was not adopted by Connecticut until 1920, small victories in our state gave women increasing control over their lives. The CWSA helped push for the Connecticut Married Women's Act of 1877 that allowed women to maintain their individual legal identity separate from their husbands and enabled them to fully control their earnings and property.

Suffrage supporters also fought for their right to hold positions of leadership in schools and library boards, allowing them to vote on a local level. These achievements, however, were often frustrated by opposing forces to their progress.

Politicians voted down many progressive bills that would have advanced women's causes. Organizations like the National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage (NAOWS) passed out pamphlets and held meetings urging women not to waste their time on voting.

Where did the town of Easton stand on issues of women's suffrage? Much like the state in general, there were both supporters and detractors. We know from the records of the CWSA meetings that women and men from Easton were in attendance and supported the cause, but there were also those residents who opposed women's suffrage, believing a woman's place is in the home raising children, away from the dirty business of politics.

Interested in learning more about the suffrage movement in Connecticut and the women of Easton? Sign up for updates on our research at historicalsocietyofeastonct.org and be on the lookout for our upcoming lecture and presentation co-hosted with the Easton Library on the Suffragettes on Oct. 18. We will be posting articles on some of the

amazing women of Easton, leading up to our annual December exhibit at the town library.

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