

Women of the Nation Arise! Staten Islanders in the Fight for Women's Right to Vote



Women in the United States won a long-fought national victory in 1920 when the 19th Constitutional Amendment establishing their right to vote was ratified.

Use this guide to uncover stories of Staten Island suffragists and the four tactics they used to win the right to vote:

Educate, Organize, Agitate and Publicize!

W H Y ?

Why are you paid less than a man?
 Why do you work in a fire-trap?
 Why are your hours so long?
 Why are you all strap hangers when
 you pay for a seat?
 Why do you pay the most rent for the worst
 houses?
 Why does the cost of living go up while wages
 go down?
 Why do your children go into factories?
 Why do you eat adulterated food?
 Why don't you get a square deal in the courts?

Because you are a woman and have no vote.

Votes make the law.
 Votes enforce the law.
 The law controls conditions.

Women who want better conditions MUST vote.

Join the Wage-Earners' Suffrage League
 Meetings the Second and Fourth Mondays of every month, at 8 P. M.
 At Headquarters, Room 212 Metropolitan Tower
 Fees: Ten Cents a month.

FILL IN THE SLIP BELOW AND COME TO THE NEXT MEETING

I,

Occupation.....
 Home Address..... Street..... City.....
 believing in votes for women, hereby agree to join the Wage-Earners'
 Suffrage League and work for it.

Handbills were used to recruit both working women and women in the home to the suffrage cause.

- What ideas are they sharing?
- What problems did women face?
- Do the arguments surprise you?
- Are these arguments relevant today?
- **Create** a handbill on the importance of voting today.

SUFFRAGE- the right to vote

SUFFRAGIST- someone who fights for a groups right to vote

Visit [INTRODUCTION](#) in the online exhibit and view the gallery to explore additional **handbills** and learn more about the issues that women faced before they could vote.

EDUCATE

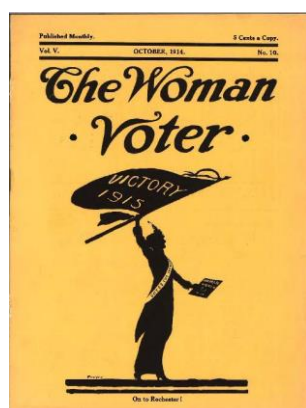
Staten Island suffragists had to educate both men and women that women's views mattered and that they had a right to participate in government by:

Changing Norms

Women were politically active long before they had the right to vote. They joined in national movements advocating for the abolition of slavery and temperance in alcohol consumption. However, both laws and social norms kept women from participating fully in civic life.



Elizabeth Neall Gay attended the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, at which women were barred from entry. She was dedicated to ending slavery, active in the Underground Railroad and committed to women's rights.



Changing Laws

New York women earned the right to vote in 1917, after the three-year Empire State Campaign "Victory in 1915" fell short.

Elizabeth Burrill Curtis was an advocate for voting rights and civic education for women. At the 1894 New York State Constitutional Convention, Curtis argued, "Because the protection and safety of the home are so vital to most women...I plead for the power to effectually guard that home." Curtis founded the Political Equality Club, "the first organization on Staten Island to preach the equality of women and men," in 1895. She continued the legacy of her father, **George William Curtis**, who supported universal suffrage, the extension of voting rights to men and women regardless of race or color.

Changing Strategies

Local suffragists, like **Mary Otis Willcox**, participated in automobile tours and open-air meetings, seeking to unite women from the various towns on Staten Island in an active campaign for the vote. Their aims were to engage with voters, recruit women to the cause, and encourage women to talk about suffrage with the men in their lives, since only men's votes could secure woman suffrage.



Design your own pennant to encourage people to vote! Use words, images and colors to share your message.

Visit **EDUCATE** in the online exhibit to learn more.

ORGANIZE

Prior to the 19th Amendment, laws barred women from voting, but not from organizing. Staten Island women founded church groups and women’s clubs that debated issues, voted on decisions, and elected officers. Suffragists used these networks to organize their campaign for suffrage.

In 1910, local activists organized the **Staten Island Woman Suffrage Party (SIWSP)** to campaign for women’s right to vote in New York State. **SIWSP** leaders used the Island’s powerful political, social, and economic networks to recruit over 10,000 registered members by the time New York State voters passed the amendment giving women the vote in 1917.

High School Suffrage Organizing

Teachers and students at the island’s high schools participated in the woman suffrage movement. Mary Otis Willcox moderated a High School Suffrage League for students interested in helping the cause. Several teachers at Curtis High School attended party meetings and marched in New York City’s suffrage parades.



One Curtis student, Margaret Macklin, made her yearbook quote: “Her chief ambition is ‘Votes for Women.’”

What will your yearbook quote be?

Some people, even some women, organized the York State Association Opposed to Women’s Suffrage. **Prestonia Mann Martin**, an author, speaker and newspaper contributor from Grymes Hill, argued against women’s suffrage.



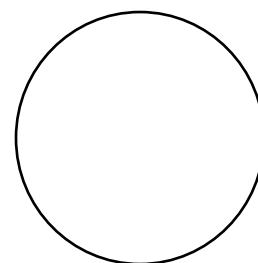
Can you think of any reasons to oppose women’s suffrage?

Visit [ORGANIZE](#) in the online exhibit to learn more.

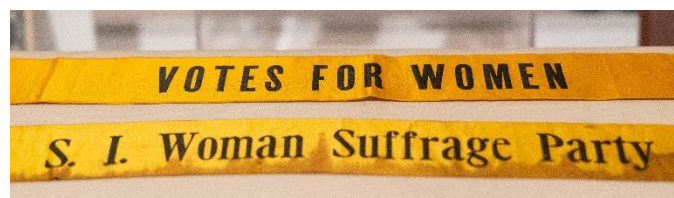


REVEREND FLORENCE RANDOLPH

African- American women on Staten Island created their own activist networks through clubs, sororities, and parish communities. **Florence Spearing Randolph**, future pastor of Rossville AME Zion Church, was dedicated to education, temperance, “race history,” and, of course, suffrage.



Decorate a button for suffrage!
What colors and symbols will you use?



Explore the gallery in the link below to view **iconic memorabilia** like buttons, sashes and pennants that helped to unify suffragists and make their cause recognizable.

AGITATE

Staten Island’s suffragists brought the movement from neighborhood parlors to the streets of New York City and even to the skies above it. Suffragists locally and across the nation took bold action to raise awareness about their cause by organizing marches, protests, and spectacles to create momentum for legislation.



Suffragists on Parade

Seven Staten Islanders participated in the first suffrage parade in New York in 1912 and many hundreds participated in the last.

Can you find the youngest parade marcher in the 1912 New York City Suffrage Parade?

Visit [AGITATE](#) in the online exhibit to explore images of a parade “duster” and shoes worn by marching suffragists.

How are these clothing items different than today’s fashion norms?



General Rosalie Jones led her “suffrage army” on two hikes for suffrage, from the New York area to Albany in December 1912 and New York to Washington D.C. in March 1913 to join the suffrage parade.

Suffrage Takes Flight!

On May 20, 1913, she made a spectacular debut in Staten Island, where she became the first suffragist to fly for the cause. She was seated in a biplane decorated with “Votes for Women” banners, scattering suffrage leaflets along the way.



Was flying in an airplane breaking a social norm for women of this era? Why?



In December 1916, suffragists schemed to interrupt President Wilson’s ceremonial lighting of the Statue of Liberty by flying over the president’s yacht and “bombing” it with suffrage leaflets to point out that women still lacked the full rights and liberties of American citizens. The plane took off from Staten Island but crashed in the local marshland without carrying out its mission. No one was seriously hurt.

How can you advocate for a cause in your community?

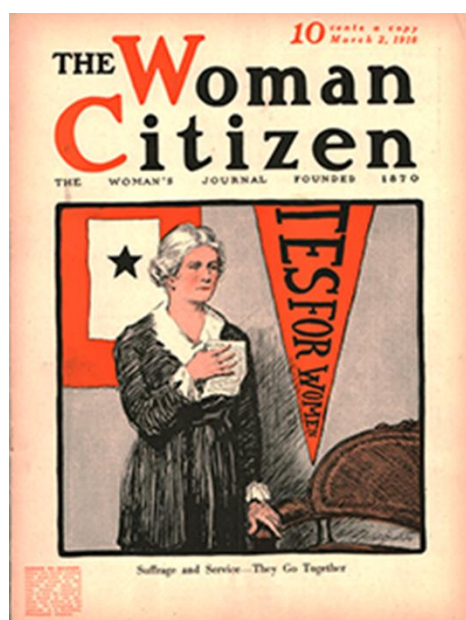
PUBLICIZE

Women claimed space in newsprint and published their own periodicals, arguing passionately in favor of women's political equality. Suffragists staffed booths at carnivals and county fairs to distribute this literature and recruit supporters.

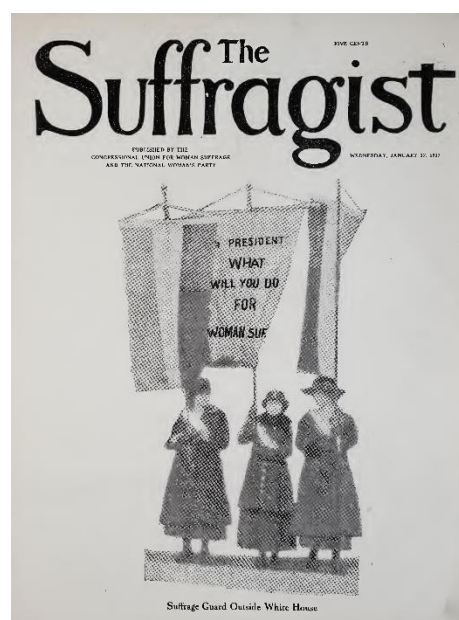
The Suffrage Press

By publishing their own periodicals, suffrage organizations retained control of their message and reached new audiences. They communicated their position to readers through news articles, editorial columns and political cartoons from the local organizations that were on the front lines of the suffrage fight.

Compare the covers of these two publications. What are the images saying?



The Woman Citizen was published by the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). They used the messaging that those who served the country deserved voting rights and that women served the country in war in many different roles including as nurses, military phone and radio operators, and most significantly as mothers who sent and often lost their sons to war.



The Suffragist, published by National Women's Party, adopted a militant approach of protesting the white house directly. They argued that they had a constitutional right to vote no matter if they supported the government or spoke out against it. Suffragists are picketing the White House, demanding a basic civil liberty - the right to vote, from the president whom they often called a tyrant, comparing him to Kaiser Wilhelm, the autocratic ruler of Germany.

Create a cartoon to enlist others to support your cause. You can design it as a cover for a magazine or a social media post. What contemporary catchphrases and expressions can be adapted to encourage voters to support your goal?

Visit **PUBLICIZE** in the online exhibit to read additional issues of these periodicals.

VOTE

On August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment became law. Empowered by state and federal legislation that gave millions of new women voters access to the polls, women participated at all levels of government. Still, because individual states could affect local voting laws, discrimination based on race, class, and ethnicity kept millions more Americans from voting for another forty-five years. The effort to achieve equitable access and representation continues to this day.

Who still did not have the right to vote? To learn more, visit the [Voting Rights Timeline](#).

After the Amendment

Organizations that campaigned for woman suffrage focused their energy on teaching women about their new rights. The New York Woman Suffrage Association became the New York League of Women Voters, an organization with civic education as their main mission. While many Staten Island suffragists remained involved, women of color continued to be excluded from the organization.

Women of color, including **Drusilla Poole** of Shiloh AME

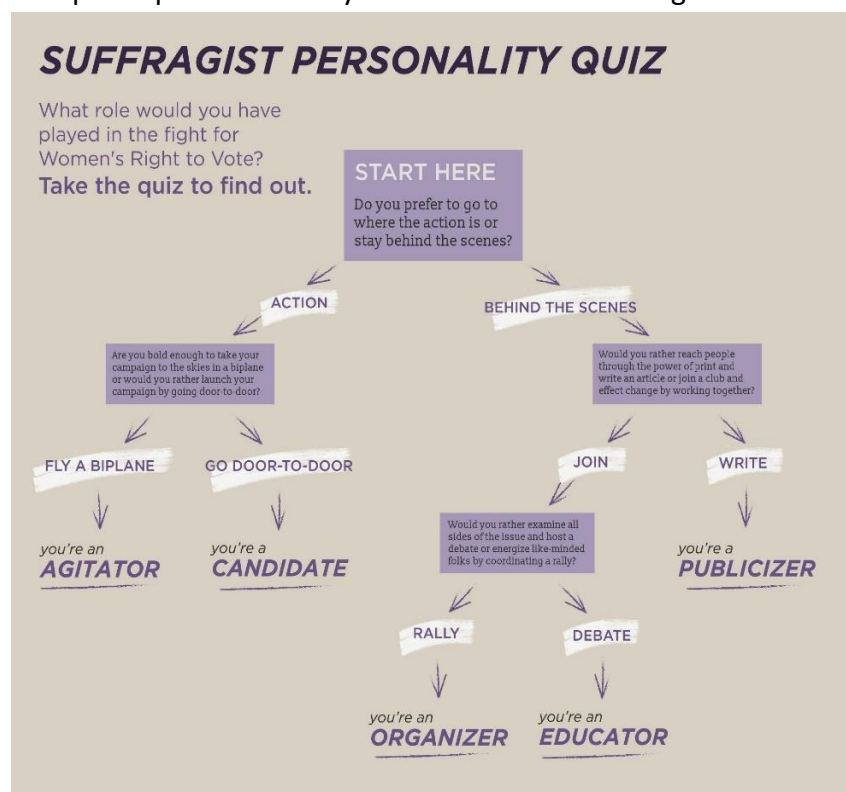


Zion Church, stepped in to fill this gap in educational resources. They founded the Women's Civic and Political Union, an organization with the goal of teaching African American women about politics and encouraging them to exercise their right to vote.

Women in Government

Some women took civic participation to an even higher level, running for local, state, and federal elective office, but it wasn't until 1973 that Elizabeth Connelly became the first woman elected to public office on Staten Island, when she won her campaign for the New York State Assembly. Today, women occupy between 20 and 30 percent of elective legislative or executive offices at the local, state, and federal levels.

Watch the video ["Passing the Torch: Women Who Lead"](#) to hear more about the importance of voting and civic participation as a way to honor those who fought so hard for women's suffrage.



Take the Suffragist Personality Quiz

What role would you have played in the fight for Women's Right to Vote?

What are some current issues or causes that you care about?

How can you use the tactics of educate, organize, agitate and publicize to engage in civic participation and improve your community?

Visit [VOTE](#) in the online exhibit to view the [Take Action Card](#) gallery and find ways that you can have a positive impact in your community.

Image Credits:

Three Suffragists casting votes in New York City, 1917. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Elizabeth Neall Gay, Reproduction Photograph. Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Resting between street-meetings while touring the state for suffrage. Bryn Mawr College Special Collection.

Votes for Women Pennant, 1910-1920. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Florence Spearing Randolph, Encyclopedia of the Colored Race 1919. University of California Libraries.

S.I. Woman Suffrage Party Sash, 1912-1917. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Votes for Women Political Ribbon. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Votes for Women Pin Button, 1910-1915. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Vote No On Woman Suffrage Button, 1910-1915. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Margaret Macklin, Curtis High School yearbook, 1913. On loan Curtis High School Library.

Youngest parader in New York City suffragist parade, Photograph, c. May 6. 1912. The Library of Congress

General Rosalie Jones Photograph, ca 1910. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Suffragist Portrait: “Just before a flight for the purpose of ‘bombarding’ the city with suffrage literature”, Photograph. Bryn Mawr College Special Collections

Votes for Women Flyer. Courtesy of Columbia University.

Drusilla Poole, Shiloh AME Church Bulletin. Gift of Debbie-Ann Paige

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