

Local organizations celebrate 100 year anniversary of 19th amendment

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Pictured are Erica Logan (D); Carline Shaw (LWV), Delores Foster (D&LWV); Addison Reece (LWV), Jessica Donaldson Sykes (D), Terry Thorson (LWV), Kimberley Crockett (D&LWV), Susan Pipes (LWV), Carla Hunter (D), Renny Smith (LWV), Angela Brown (D), Lanae Johnson (LWV), Michelle Barnes Russell (D), Rebecca Phipps (LWV), C. Carolyn Togans (D),

Lyn Widmyer (LWV). Members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. are denoted by D, while members of the League of Women Voters are denoted by LWV.

Submitted photo

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the enactment of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. The 19th Amendment was officially adopted in August 1920 and was a landmark moment because it prohibited the government from using sex as a criterion for voting. Unfortunately, many Black Americans would remain disenfranchised for decades by state laws that operated to keep them from the polls via poll taxes and literacy tests.

The road to women's vote was a long one. The first women's rights meeting held in the United States was in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Along the road to enactment, many women's suffrage organizations formed advocating for the rights of women. Some organizations advocated for the right of white women to vote, while others also fought for black suffrage, as well as abolition and anti-lynching.

Unfortunately, it would take more than 70 years before that right to vote was finally realized. Many white women increased their impact through the establishment of national suffrage organizations, while women of color organized through sororities, their professions, college alumnae groups, church conferences, and educational faculties. The cause of women was also advanced by large scale women's suffrage marches.

On March 3, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson's presidential inauguration, thousands of women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to champion their right to vote. This event was a real turning point in the fight for voting rights for women as organizers moved from old tactics of persuasion and patronage to confrontational techniques – large scale public processions.

While controversial, the organizers also included participation by black women; however, these participants were segregated to the back of the parade. Black women such as Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and founding members of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (the Deltas) were among the thousands of women who marched on March 3, 1913. The Delta women in attendance had just formed the organization on the campus of Howard University, and this march was its first public act of service. The women of color who marched in the 1913 Women's Suffrage Procession endured ridicule and bouts of hate. Nevertheless, they understood that they were pioneers paving the way for future Black political activism.

It was with this spirit in mind that, on the day of the parade, Wells would not be relegated to the back of the procession and declared, "Either I go with you or not at all," she told the Illinois delegation. "I am not taking this stand because I personally wish for recognition. I am doing it for the future benefit of my whole race."

Women Suffragist also endured decades of ridicule and opposition in their fight for equality. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, led countless numbers of voteless women in their fight for the vote. Catt and other suffragist leaders led the "Winning Plan," a coordinated state suffrage campaign while urging Congress to pass the constitutional amendment giving the right to vote. After the 19th Amendment was passed, Catt founded the League of Women Voters ("LWV") in 1920 to support women as they exercised their newly realized right to vote.

Both the Deltas and the LWV remain and thrive today making a positive impact on local communities. With over 300,000 initiated members world-wide, the Deltas established the Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter within the West Virginia panhandle in 2007. The Deltas are a non-

partisan organization of college educated women committed to the constructive development of its members and to public service with a primary focus on the Black community.

The LWV of Jefferson County was established in the 1980s and is also a nonpartisan organization. The LWV is dedicated to the informed and active participation of citizens in government and is open to membership by men and women of voting age who live within Jefferson County and subscribe to the non-partisan purposes of the League.

The Deltas and the LWV have co-sponsored a number of events the past few years and while they were unable to hold an in-person centennial celebration commemorating the enactment of the 19th Amendment, they were still determined to commemorate this 100th Anniversary in the visual medium on this page.

“The Vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guarantee of your liberty.” This quote was taken from a speech given by Carrie Chapman Catt in August 1920, while celebrating the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The photographer is Jessilynn Griffith and the pictures are of members from each organization.

For more information about each organization see their social media pages: @epacdeltas; <https://facebook.com/EasternPanhandleAlumnaeChapter/> and <https://lwv-jcww.org/>.