

Out and About

By Sara Barbee

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.

—19th Amendment, US Constitution, 1920

The History Museum of Carteret County commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment with a 100th Celebration of the Women's Right to Vote timeline that features remarkable women who, by their untiring and at times courageous efforts, have left a legacy for future generations. The idea of equality for women in the home, in education, in the laws, in the workplace, in the military and in the nation grew as years passed. The timeline begins with 8000 BC creation legends of our indigenous people, honoring women as life givers and spiritual intermediaries. It ends with Sacajawea looking back at those in the line. I like to think she is proud of us.

I'll just mention a few of the many notable women acknowledged. The year 1765 tells us about a Hadnot Creek native, Thankful Weeks Hicks, who participated in the Stamp Act protest and provided goods to the Continental Army. The Weekses were an old family in Carteret County as were the Hickses. Dolly Madison is mentioned as the first North Carolinian to become a first lady. Sybil Ludington is touted as the "female Paul Revere," who rode 40 miles on horseback to warn her father's troops during the Revolutionary War. By the 1800s laws governing property rights and education for women began to be challenged as did the right to vote in 1848. Our own Emeline Piggott, NC's most famous spy and smuggler, is on this timeline. Moving forward to 1917 (and skipping a lot of history), the "Night of Terror" brought the matter of voting to a head when 33 suffragists were imprisoned and brutally beaten after peacefully demonstrating in front of the White House. Later that year, 168 National Women's Party members were arrested, convicted and held as political prisoners. Some progress came in 1917. Jeanette Rankin of Montana was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Her slogan: "We're half the people; we should be half the congress!"

Contributions against all odds. Sadly, African American suffrage was in name only. Women of color faced all the restrictions and limitations imposed on white women, with the addition of all the restrictions and limitations faced by racial minorities. A few notable African American women on this wall are Alice Freeman Palmer who, in 1902, opened a school for upper-class women and Mary McLeod Bethune, born in the South to former slaves, who opened a school for poor girls, believing the power of education would provide racial equality. Early 20th century's Marion C.J. Walker was a self-made millionaire with her hair products. Beaufort's historic Godette Hotel was run by Lucy Godette and was featured in the *Green Book*, a publication that listed hotels, restaurants and black-owned businesses that were welcoming to black travelers. The Godette Hotel was built by Mrs. Godette's father-in-law, Henderson Godette, Sr., for his son Mannix, Lucy's husband. Mannix continued to work in the family farming business, leaving Lucy to run the hotel. Bessie Smith, Empress of the Blues, sang of Southern roots, lost loves, and women coming back strong. She is considered to be a major influence on Rock and the Blues as well as an advocate for changing the attitude toward women. If you're interested

in music, Google her name to hear a PBS interview about her that includes audio of her singing. More local advocates are pictured, all the way up to today.

This exhibit begins with a beautifully dressed suffragette posed in front of an authentic 1920s Morehead City street scene and ends with pictures of local 20th century women who have influenced and contributed substantially to Carteret County. There are many, but two notables are standouts. Morehead City activist Tibbie Roberts followed in her grandmother Laura Nelson Duncan's footsteps. Ms. Duncan rallied for women's suffrage and removing cocaine from Coca-Cola. I had the pleasure of working with a remarkable and widely published local writer, the late Carol Bessent Hayman, poet laureate of Beaufort and Carteret County. Her words from 1980 sum up the focus of this exhibit, emphasizing that it's not just about earning the vote: "Having the right to our own identity, not 'the daughter of, the wife of, or the mother of' did not come easy."

I simply could not include all the meaningful history told through the women who are on this timeline. You must experience this yourself. The exhibit is definitely worth your time for it is poignant and interesting and packed full of history—and as a bonus, a notebook of women's history essays from an Honors English class at Croatan High School is available for perusing.

The History Museum of Carteret County is located at 1008 Arendell Street in Morehead City and is open Tuesday through Friday from noon to 4 p.m. and on the first Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Learn more on the museum's Facebook page.

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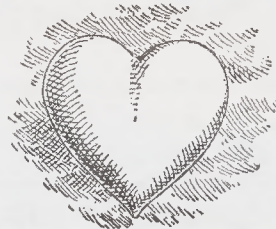


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