

War of the Roses

You may wonder why the title? Are we going back to the 1400's to discover the English Civil Wars, the House of Lancaster - the Red Rose and the House of York - the White Rose and the relationship to Woman's Suffrage? There really is no connection but there was a "battle" of the Roses in Tennessee in 1920 in the vote to pass the 19th Amendment.

Eight states had rejected the Amendment, including a close vote in New Jersey, and five states didn't take a vote. Tennessee was the last hope. Carrie Chapman Catt joined Anne Dalas Dudley, a prominent Tennessee leader in the drive to pass the 19th Amendment. They urged the women of Tennessee to write letters, give speeches and canvas their legislators to get their support. The Yellow Rose was the symbol that united them. The anti-suffragists wore Red Roses. The legislators "showed their colors" by wearing the roses in their lapels.

On August 9, Governor Albert H. Roberts called for a special session of the legislators. Four days later, on August 13, the Senate passed the Amendment and sent it to the House. "We covet for Tennessee the signal honor of being the 36th and last state to consummate this great reform."

The House was not so moved to pass this legislation. The Red Roses were leading 49 to 47. When they called the roll, one legislator changed his vote. They were deadlocked at 48-48. After a second roll call vote the vote remained deadlocked. There was consideration to table the legislation. It was time for a third roll. Harry Burn, the youngest of the legislators, broke the deadlock. Wearing the Red Rose, he voted in favor of the Amendment. Outrage ensued. Opponents chased Burns around the room. He escaped by climbing out a third floor window, moved along the ledge and hid in the attic of the Capital.

Why did he change his vote while wearing the Red Rose? In his pocket was a letter from his mother, Phoebe Ensminger Burn, urging him to support the amendment. “ Be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the ‘rat’ in ratification.”

Harry Burn later explained his vote. “ I knew that a mother’s advice is always the safest for a boy to follow and my mother wanted me to vote for ratification. I appreciate the fact that an opportunity such seldom comes to a mortal man to free 17 million women from political slavery is mine”

The Amendment passed in the Tennessee House on August 18 and was signed by the Governor on August 24, 1920. It was sent to the United States Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby who certified the ratification on August 26, 1920.

Amendment XIX

“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.”

By Marge Massarello, League of Women Voters of Oak Park and River Forest

Thank you to...

Winfred Conkling, *Vote for Women!: American Suffragists and the Battle for the Ballot*

Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women: The Women Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South and the Nation*

Jennie Cohen, *The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment*

Scott Bombay, National Constitution Center

Cheryl Hiers, Blue Shoe Nashville

Anastasia Sims, Tennessee Historical Society

The National Archives