

**The War of the Roses:
The Ratification of the 19th Amendment in Tennessee**



Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives

It was early in the evening of June 4, 1919 when members of the Sixty-Six Congress of the United States reached the two-thirds majority required under the Constitution for passage of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, to become the 19th Amendment upon ratification of 36 of the 48 states. Since 1878, 21 successive Congresses had rejected this federal Suffrage Amendment. But with passage in Congress secured, the battle-weary suffrage forces did not celebrate. In spite of over 70 years of petitioning, lobbying, politicking, and recently adopting the strategy of picketing, prominent women's rights leaders cautioned their foot soldiers that a fierce battle lie ahead on the horizon. They understood that a methodical, well-calculated strategy was needed in order to secure the 19th Amendment a firm foothold in the supreme law of the land.

Less than an hour after receiving word of the passage of the 19th Amendment, 60 year-old Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), sat at her desk in the organization's New York headquarters hastily sending out telegrams to the governors of all states in which the legislatures had already adjourned for the term. Catt urged these governors to call a special session of their legislatures to act immediately on ratification. She then addressed each of the 48 state suffrage societies, admonishing them to

commence their long-planned ratification campaigns to keep pressure on their governors where necessary and to lobby the men in their legislatures. After hours spent dispatching messages to her lieutenants, Catt took the time to read the congratulatory messages that were pouring in following the passage of the 19th Amendment. Among these messages included a two-word cable from President Woodrow Wilson, who was in France at the Paris Peace Conference negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, that read: “Glory Hallelujah!”

While there was no constitutional timetable imposed for ratification, the suffragists were eager to push the amendment through the state legislatures as quickly as possible. Although some cynics predicted that it would take 20 years for the amendment to become law, suffragists were determined to act both before memories of American women’s contributions to the Allied victory (World War I) war effort faded and before the presidential 1920 election. Even more pressing for the suffragists was the psychological—many Americans were becoming receptive to the Republican call for a “return to normalcy.” Thus it became imperative to proponents of woman suffrage to press the state governors and legislatures to ratify the 19th Amendment before the spirit of progressive reform evident in early twentieth-century American society rescinded.

Despite the apprehension of leading suffrage leaders, many predicted that ratification would be locked up prior to the celebration of Susan B. Anthony’s 100th birthday on February 15, 1920. Fifteen states had already bestowed full voting rights for women by state amendment and several foreign nations, primarily in Europe, were conferring suffrage on their women citizens. In the ensuing weeks several mid-western and northeastern states hastened to ratify the amendment with little opposition. Fourteen states had ratified the amendment in less than a month—several other legislatures were poised to do so as well once their governor called them into special session. Woman suffrage appeared to be an issue whose time had come; however, events transpiring in a couple southern legislatures in the summer of 1919 revealed an ominous sign that indicated the road to ratification that lay ahead would be fraught with roadblocks.

By mid-summer, the fervent pace of ratification slackened and then nearly grinded to a halt as both the Georgia and Alabama legislatures refused to ratify the amendment. In addition, the failure of western states, which had been the first to grant its women citizens full suffrage, to hasten to the aid of the suffragists and the resurgence of a fierce Anti-Suffragist opposition led many in the cause to become distressed. The suffragists answered by redoubling their efforts—more meetings, more speeches, more lobbying for special sessions and votes for ratification, and more foot soldiers on the front lines.

As the New Year dawned, the ratification total had reached 22 states. Then, as the anniversary of Anthony’s birthday neared, there was a rush of states to ratify the amendment. New Jersey ratified the amendment on the anniversary of Anthony’s birthday to become the 29th state. Idaho and Arizona followed over the next two days. New Mexico joined the suffrage camp a week later, leaving 4 more states to ratify the amendment to make it the law of the land. The drama of ratification only further intensified as compelling narratives unfolded in the remaining states that propelled previously unknown state legislators and suffragists to instant fame, and in some states, infamy.

In Oklahoma, some predicted that the vote would be close. Suffragist supporter Miss Aloysius Larch-Miller, ill with influenza and under orders from her doctor to rest, got up from her sickbed to confront a prominent Anti-Suffrage state politician in debate at the Democratic convention. Two days later, she was dead; however, her sacrifice proved invaluable as some legislators switched sides to join the suffragist camp and secure Oklahoma as the 33rd state to ratify the 19th Amendment.

Nearly two weeks later, West Virginia lawmakers found themselves hopelessly deadlocked. State Anti-Suffragists sought to close up shop and head back home. But pro-suffragist forces implored Senator Jesse A. Bloch to rush back home aboard a special train from California. Reporters tracked Bloch's five-day journey across the continent while his embattled colleagues fought mightily to fend off adjournment. Bloch arrived safely and cast the deciding vote that put West Virginia into the suffrage column. Then, another two weeks would pass before Washington came into the suffrage fold unanimously following the governor's procrastinated decision to call a special session. Who would be the next state to become forever heralded as the 36th to ratify the 19th Amendment, thereby making it the law of the land?

Ratification of the 19th Amendment was so close, so tantalizingly close. At the very moment suffragists could sense victory, the ratification campaign stalled for a second time. This second derailment for the suffragists did not bode well for their cause. In the previous months, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland echoed the course of action pursued by both the Georgia and Alabama legislature earlier to reject ratification. The only 7 states remaining to act were; Connecticut, Vermont, Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida, Delaware, and Tennessee. Strong Anti-Suffragist Republican governors that remained steadfast in their refusal to consider calling their pro-suffrage legislators into special session controlled the New England states of Connecticut and Vermont. The prospect of Louisiana, North Carolina, and Florida responding positively to the amendment was unlikely, especially given their memories of federally controlled elections during Reconstruction. The provision included in Section 2 of the Anthony Amendment, granting federal enforcement powers to Congress, sounded eerily familiar to provisions included in all federal amendments enacted since the end of the Civil War that southerners loudly protested. Southerners also objected to woman suffrage on the basis that a woman's place was in the home, that the Bible upheld male supremacy, and that allowing woman the vote would likely draw attention to the Jim Crow mechanisms put in place to disenfranchise black men. The question, of which state would become the "Perfect 36," as a cartoonist labeled the elusive ratification, was to be decided between Delaware and Tennessee.

Delaware, the first state to ratify the Constitution, stood poised to become the last state required to make national woman suffrage a reality. However, a bitter feud developed within the state Republican party that forestalled progress on ratification. When Republican Governor John G. Townsend came out publicly in support of the amendment, his Republican detractors, once firmly in the suffrage camp, switched sides and allied with the Anti-Suffragist Democrats. Therefore, when the roll was called on June 2, 1920, Delaware's state legislature defeated the measure.

Thus, Tennessee proved to be the last hope for suffragists. Situated between pro-suffrage states to its north and west and anti-suffrage states to the south and east, Tennessee proved a

pivotal border state in the struggle to secure ratification. Indeed, the last battle to be fought in the campaign for national woman suffrage proved to be a fierce engagement as “suffs” and “antis” (as they were sometimes called) converged on Nashville in the blazing summer of 1920 to do battle.

Although the fight to secure ratification in Tennessee would be an arduous task, a well-organized, well-staffed network of suffragists existed throughout the state’s grand divisions—East, Middle, and West Tennessee. The origins of the suffrage movement in Tennessee did not begin until the late 1800s. However, a talented corps of well-educated urban middle class and upper class women—white and black—that would assume prominent roles in the larger, national struggle to achieve woman suffrage also resided in each of Tennessee’s key geographical regions.

In 1889, Lide A. Meriwether formed the state’s first women’s suffrage league in Memphis. Maryville and Nashville followed suit in 1893 and 1894 respectively. By 1897, there were ten suffrage societies in Tennessee. Thus a solid base existed for a gathering of women for “Suffrage Day” at Centennial Park in Nashville that same year in which national leaders such as Jane Addams and Susan B. Anthony spoke to those in attendance. Later that year, Meriwether organized a statewide convention in Nashville that led to the formation of the Tennessee Equal Rights Association (TERA) and the election of Meriwether as its president. TERA was an affiliate of the National American Woman Association (NAWSA), whose president Carrie Chapman Catt, came to Memphis in 1900 to address the organization’s second convention.

Despite the initial wave of enthusiasm for woman suffrage in the Tennessee in the late 1890s, suffrage activity declined and the issue lay dormant in the state for several years as it did in most of its southern neighbors. Suffrage activity on the local level resumed in 1910 when Lizzie Crozier French, the founder of the East Tennessee Female Institute, formed a suffrage society in Knoxville. The following year, Anne Dallas Dudley, an active proponent of suffrage from a wealthy Nashville family, organized a society in her native city. Suffrage societies quickly sprang up throughout the state over the next 3 years with clubs formed in Morristown, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Franklin, Gallatin, and Murfreesboro. By the close of 1917, there were more than 70 suffrage societies in Tennessee. With the exception of Texas, no other southern state was so well organized.

In the 1910s, local suffrage societies held parlor meetings, conducted house-to-house canvasses, sponsored public lectures, debates, and essay contests, distributed large quantities of literature, entertained potential proponents with teas, luncheons, and balls, saturated newspapers with suffrage information in hopes of winning their editorial support, and operated suffrage schools to make more effective workers of their members.

Although the Tennessee women’s suffrage movement received its direction from the NAWSA and its president Catt, the radical National Woman’s Party (NWP) began to organize in the state as well. The NWP had formed in 1916 when Alice Paul, dissatisfied with NAWSA’s methodical, diplomatic, and ladylike lobbying, bolted NAWSA with the intention to organize her own party to employ demonstrations, civil disobedience, and violence to achieve her demands. The NWP implemented their strategy in Washington, D.C. targeting the White House and

President Woodrow Wilson. The radical suffragists picketed the White House 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with signs that twisted Wilson's words and compared the United States president to the German Kaiser. Sue Sheldon White of Jackson, Tennessee, who served as the state chair for the NWP, was arrested and spent five days in jail for burning an effigy of Wilson in front of the White House gates.

From her vantage point in New York, Catt worried that divisions within Tennessee's suffrage ranks might derail any real chance at securing the state's ratification of the 19th Amendment. Catt issued sharp letters to the state's suffrage leaders exhorting them to unite for the cause: "The need for ratification in Tennessee is so important that all differences should be forgotten and an absolute united optimistic front turned toward the enemy. Do not underestimate the power of the opposition which will be applied to the thirty-sixth state."

Opponents of woman suffrage sought to exploit these divisions. Josephine A. Pearson of Monteagle, who had taught in colleges in South Carolina and Missouri before returning home to care for her dying parents, spearheaded Tennessee's Anti-Suffragists. Pearson had joined the Anti-Suffragist crusade when she promised to fulfill her mother's dying wish to stamp out a woman suffrage amendment should it ever come to Tennessee. Pearson was aided by railroad, manufacture, and liquor interests that feared woman suffrage would lead to demands for higher wages for women, enactments of child labor laws, and prohibition.



Anti-Suffragist leaders (Josephine A. Pearson, far right) pose alongside a Confederate veteran outside their "headquarters" in the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville.
Courtesy of Yellin and Sherman, The Perfect 36

While both the “suffs” and “antis” mobilized their armies and prepared to converge on Nashville to do battle, the state’s chief executive pondered over a constitutional question which threatened to make ratification of the 19th Amendment in Tennessee a moot point. Democratic Governor Albert H. Roberts decided that he could not issue a call for a special session of the current Tennessee legislature to act on ratification because of a restriction in the state constitution. According to Article II, Section 32: “No convention or general assembly of this state shall act upon any amendment of the Constitution of the United States proposed by Congress to the several states; unless such convention or general assembly shall have been elected after such amendment is submitted.” Since the current General Assembly had been elected into office in 1918, prior to Congress’s submission of the 19th Amendment to the states, the governor would be in violation of Tennessee’s supreme charter should he call a special session.



New York World cartoon that depicts a young suffragist asking Colonel Tennessee, the rustic older gentleman often used to represent Tennessee, for a special session of the Tennessee General Assembly for the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives

To bolster his argument, Roberts cited a case regarding prohibition in Ohio in which the state’s citizens had, by popular referendum, successfully overturned the legislature’s ratification of the 18th Amendment. Supporters of prohibition quickly filed a lawsuit, *Hawke v. Smith*, declaring the referendum illegal based on a provision within the state constitution that stated a popular referendum on any proposed federal amendment must be held prior to action taken by the legislature. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled against the amendment’s supporters; however, on appeal, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Ohio voters could not overturn the state

legislature's ratification of the 18th Amendment by popular referendum. The Court's decision, issued by Associate Justice William R. Day on June 1, 1920, declared that the federal Constitution provided the procedure for the enactment of its own amendments and that the states had no authority to designate a different procedure: "The determination of the method of ratification is the exercise of a national power specifically granted by the Constitution; that power is conferred upon Congress, and is limited to two methods, by action of the Legislature of three-fourths of the states, or conventions in a like number of states.... It is not the function of courts or legislative bodies, national or state, to alter the method which the Constitution has fixed."

Roberts's argument rebuffed, the governor still hesitated to act. Roberts was embroiled in a bitter reelection fight that pitted him against strong Republican opposition, which sensed an opening in light of the governor's tax reform program, which alienated farmers, as well as his support of management during the labor strikes of 1919, which alienated workers. He also faced challengers from within his own party for the nomination. Aware that the suffrage debate could only cost him more support among Democrats, Roberts preferred to delay until after the fall elections.

But pressure continued to be applied on Roberts from both national and state pro-suffragist supporters, the United States attorney general's office, and the state attorney general. In a June 19, 1920 letter to Governor Roberts, Sue White requested that he take immediate action to call for a special session of the General Assembly. On June 23, Assistant Attorney General W. L. Frierson, in response to the Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Hawke v. Smith*, issued an opinion that the power of a state legislature to ratify was derived from the federal Constitution and could not be "taken away, limited or restrained" by the constitution of a state. The next day, the Tennessee attorney general, Frank M. Thompson, declared that ratification by the present General Assembly would be legal. Still the governor refused to budge.

From Nashville's historic Maxwell House, a longtime hangout for state politicians, Catherine Talty Kenny, Chairman of Ratification for the Tennessee League of Women Voters, proposed a bold strategy for winning the support of Governor Roberts. In a June 21 letter addressed to NAWSA's headquarters, Kenny described the situation on the ground in Nashville.

But alas our Governor is running for reelection and they are about to get his scalp. He is afraid to call the session because he can't afford to take time off from his campaign before the primary Aug. 5. Now here is our hope: In Tennessee we all swear by Woodrow Wilson, exhausting every adjective in our voluminous Southern vocabulary to praise and glorify his every word and deed.... Yesterday I conceived the idea of having the President wire Governor Roberts a loving message telling him to deliver the 36th state for the Democrats. I've sent a telegram to the President tonight signed by our entire State Executive Board League of Women Voters. If you know any way in the world to get that telegram by Mr. Tumulty to the President, for the love of Mike help.

Someone at NAWSA was able to circumvent Joe Tumulty, White House watchdog for the ailing President, to get the message into Wilson's hands. Wilson, sensing the potential that

women voters could save his League of Nations, rushed a telegram, dated June 23, to Governor Roberts:

It would be a real service to the party and to the nation if it is possible for you, under the peculiar provision of your State Constitution, having in mind the recent decision of the Supreme Court in the Ohio case, to call a special session of the Legislature of Tennessee to consider the Suffrage Amendment. Allow me to urge this most earnestly.

Finally, Governor Roberts announced that he would convene the legislature for a special session on August 9, four days after the scheduled Democratic primary. The delay, he hoped, would defuse ratification as an issue in the Democratic primary, but he insisted that should the legislature ratify the amendment, there would be “ample time for women to vote in the 1920 elections.” When Carrie Catt received word of Governor Robert’s announcement at the NAWSA’s headquarters in New York, Catt dispatched a letter to Kenny in Nashville, “not so much to congratulate you as to warn you of the pitfalls which surely lie between this date and the 9th of August.” With the Governor’s promise to call a special session, one of the most heated political fights ever witnessed in Tennessee commenced.

Marjorie Shuler, one of Carrie Catt’s able lieutenants sent to Nashville to report on the political climate, wired headquarters: “Political situation here just like Delaware, only worse.” With that, Carrie Catt boarded a train to Nashville, arriving on July 17. As she stepped off the train, she told reporters, “I have no definite plan of action for my stay in Nashville.” She explained that it was her intention to stay only a few days—it would be six weeks before she returned to New York. There was no doubt, Catt came to Tennessee determined to see the culmination of a 72-year struggle for woman suffrage through.

Catt later described the scene in Tennessee in her book, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, as suffragists spread out throughout the state to lobby legislators: “The Southern summer heat was merciless, and many legislators lived in remote villages or on farms miles from any town. Yet the women trailed these legislators, by train, by motors, by wagons and on foot, often in great discomfort, frequently at considerable expense to themselves. They went without meals, were drenched in unexpected rains, and met with tire troubles, yet no woman faltered.”

On August 5, Governor Roberts won re-election and came out publicly in support of the 19th Amendment. On Saturday, August 7, Governor Roberts formally issued a proclamation calling the 61st Tennessee General Assembly into extraordinary session at noon on Monday, August 9. Hours after Roberts’s proclamation, the first legislators began arriving at Nashville’s Union Station, on their way to check-in at the Hermitage Hotel, one of the 2 most prominent battlefield sites—the State Capitol the other—that the War of the Roses would be waged on.

The War of the Roses commenced as pro and anti-suffragists passed out yellow and red roses to their legislative supporters. Anti-Suffragists adopted the American Beauty red rose, worn by the most prominent suffrage opponent Josephine A. Pearson, whereas the suffragists chose the yellow rose as their symbol. Sweet-talking pro and anti-suffragist ladies laden with flowers picked from their summer gardens barraged legislators who had yet to declare their

preference. Upon checking in at Hermitage Hotel, Catt recalled that the lobby was a sea of red and yellow.



A cartoonist depicts a typical scene that occurred not only in the Hermitage Hotel in August 1920 but also throughout the state prior to the special session of the General Assembly as a suffragist and an anti-suffragist cajole a member of the legislature in an attempt to win his vote. August 11, 1920.
Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives

The scene inside the Hermitage Hotel concerned the suffragists, who observed various “interests” milling about, bustling arriving legislators up to the hotel’s 8th floor where it was reported that they could find in a certain suite, well-guarded in privacy as discretion and the 18th Amendment enforcement laws demanded, free-flowing quantities of bourbon, moonshine whiskey, and Jack Daniels “in the raw.” As the midnight hour passed, several lawmakers were seen and heard staggering happily up and down the halls of the hotel. When suffragists from out-of-state asked hotel staff and others why the prohibition law was not being enforced, they were told, “In Tennessee whiskey and legislation go hand in hand, especially when controversial questions are urged.”

On Sunday, August 8, a day before the General Assembly convened, Governor Roberts and his aides met to discuss the leanings of the 99 House members and 33 Senate members. The task was made easier by counting the red and yellow roses that the legislators wore on their lapels. Their tallies appeared to suggest that the suffragists held a slight majority in the House, where it was evident that ratification would face its toughest test. To make matters worse, House

Speaker Seth Walker, one of the governor's most trusted political allies and a professed suffrage supporter, performed an about face when he warned the governor that he was courting political disaster with the election looming unless he publicly announce his opposition to ratification. With Walker's defection, the governor and his aides were left to ponder the question of how many votes would the Speaker cost them. Later that evening, news of Walker's betrayal permeated throughout Nashville. When Walker made his way through the crowded hotel lobby of the Hermitage, he faced a hostile reception from Betty Gram, a suffragist supporter, who demanded an explanation: "What brought about your change? The Louisville & Nashville Railroad?" Visibly upset at the scene Gram had created, Walker responded, "That's an insult!" and stalked off.

The General Assembly's galleries were packed with interested spectators adorning red or yellow roses as the special session opened on Monday, August 9. Governor Roberts transmitted a message urging ratification of the amendment "in justice to the womanhood of America," a measure he maintained that both the Democratic and Republican parties favored. Little progress was achieved on the first day; the legislators retired to the Hermitage Hotel, now being referred to as the "third House." Tennessee's ex-Governor Ben Hopper spoke in support of the amendment to an assembled caucus of legislators, exhorting them to vote their conscience. Later in the day, suffragist forces descended on the governor's offices and unanimously decided that only Tennessee women, familiar with male sensibilities and southern antipathies, should lobby on Capitol Hill.

The ratification resolutions were formally introduced in both the House and Senate the following day, August 10. The joint resolution of ratification was introduced in the Senate by Presiding Officer Andrew L. Todd of Murfreesboro and in the House by the entire Shelby County delegation. Both the House and the Senate decided to refer the resolution to their Committees on Constitutional Amendments, with a joint public hearing set for the evening of Thursday, August 12. Later, on the evening of the 10th, Judge Joseph C. Higgins, president of the Tennessee Constitutional League and an ardent Anti-Suffragist, called reporters together to issue a warning that, if ratification should succeed, the League "would be constrained to go into court and inhibit the Secretary of State from certifying it."

The next day, Wednesday, August 11, the "antis" in the House moved to delay consideration of ratification until the people of Tennessee could decide on the matter in county conventions. The resolution put forth was tabled by a vote of 50 to 37. The suffragist victory awakened them to the reality that they had few, if any, votes to spare. To secure ratification in the House, the "suffs" would have to ride herd on all pledged legislators every hour of the day, watching, guarding, and personally escorting them lest the "interests" get their hooks into them. Rumors and innuendos also began circulating widely from both the "antis" and the "suffs" camps of bribe offers being made to legislators to sway their votes.

On Day Four, Thursday, August 12, another resolution to derail the amendment was tabled yet again by a vote of 50 to 37. Both houses adjourned until the evening's joint committee public hearing. Prominent suffragist Anne Dallas Dudley and supporter U.S. Senator Kenneth Douglas McKellar of Memphis addressed the joint session later that evening in the hall of the House. The "antis" then followed with a series of speeches concluded by Major E. B. Stahlman,

a German immigrant that had risen through the ranks of the L & N Railroad from a railroad construction worker to vice president before purchasing the *Nashville Banner*, the city's most prominent newspaper and voice of conservative Republicans. The announcement of Stahlman's (and his newspaper) opposition to ratification caused elated "antis" and distressed "suff" ladies to force back their tears.

The Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendments immediately went into session after the joint hearing concluded and emerged with a victory for the suffragists as they voted 8 to 2 to report the 19th Amendment favorably in the Senate the following day. The House Committee took no action; however, the suffragists could take comfort in the Senate's action, which would likely prompt the House to put the amendment on the floor for a vote. Optimistic suffs sensed they were close to achieving a victory that would leave them one step away from their goal—then an editorial cartoon appeared that indicated the next day was Friday the 13th.



Cartoonist Ray McGill's "The Pessimist and the Optimist" depicts two suffragists wearing "Votes for Women" sashes, standing outside the General Assembly while the legislature is in special session deciding ratification. One is optimistic while the other is fearful of what will happen on Friday the 13th.
Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives

As Day Five, Friday the 13th dawned, attention focused on the Senate. The Senate committee had indeed produced a favorable report for ratification that stated, “National woman’s suffrage by Federal Amendment is at hand; it may be delayed, but it cannot be defeated; and we covet for Tennessee the signal honor of being the thirty-sixth and last State necessary to consummate this great reform.” Following the reading of the committee’s report, the Senate deliberated for three hours before the roll was called. The resolution passed by a vote of 25 to 4, 2 members abstaining. Attention then focused on the House, which decided to adjourn until Monday morning.

Carrie Catt rushed a letter to a suffragist friend in Washington detailing the situation on the ground in Tennessee: “We are up to our last half of a state.... It is hot, muggy, nasty, and this last battle is desperate. Even if we win, we who have been here will never remember it with anything but a shudder.

Both the “anti” and suff” camps dispatched spies throughout Nashville during the weekend to gather information on their opposition’s strategy. Most espionage activities occurred within the corridors of the Hermitage Hotel. Suffragists were forced to close their doors, despite the unrelenting August heat, when they discovered eavesdroppers lurking outside their rooms. Radical suffragists Sue Shelton White and Anita Pollitzer then undertook a bold mission to penetrate anti-suffragist forces in the “Jack Daniel’s suite.” After discovering the militant suffragists in their midst, the House sergeant-at-arms, who happened to be visiting, ordered them to leave the vicinity. Rather than leave, the spies took seats in the elevator lobby within earshot of the “antis” headquarters. A hotel clerk was called to request the ladies to clear the lobby but they still refused to move. Then, the hotel manager arrived and forced them into a waiting elevator and ordered the car lowered.

On Day Six, Monday, August 16, the House postponed action, pending a report from its Committee on Constitutional Amendments. Meanwhile, in the frenzy on Capitol Hill, lobbyists were scurrying about offering business loans, lucrative jobs, and political appointments for a vote. They concentrated their efforts on those who were undecided or not 100% committed to either the “anti” or the “suff” cause. One of these legislators was Harry T. Burn, a 24-year old freshman congressman from Niota in the southern valley of East Tennessee. Although his lapel adorned a red rose, he had recently given optimism to the suffragists when he told militant “suff” Anita Pollitzer “my vote will never hurt you.” Neither side was sure who held the advantage—but both knew the vote would hinge on 1 or 2 still undecided votes and Burn’s ballot would be instrumental in tipping the scale. During the evening, two members of the House committee, both pledged to the suffragist cause, were rounded up and brought to an evening session in which the committee voted 10 to 8 to report the amendment favorably in the House the next day.

Tuesday, August 17 began with the reading of the House committee’s report. Then, Representative T. K. Riddick made a motion that the House concurs in the Senate’s adoption of the Joint Resolution, thereby ratifying the proposed 19th Amendment. A vigorous debate ensued before Speaker Walker offered a motion to adjourn until the next morning. The motion carried by a vote of 52 to 44. The suffragists believed the vote represented an ominous sign that victory had slipped through their hands. Further adding to the fears of distressed suffragists was news that the North Carolina legislature had rejected ratification earlier that day. Although the

legislative action of Tennessee's neighbor to the east was never in doubt, the defeat invigorated the opponents of woman suffrage and caused several legislators to reconsider their decisions. Suffragists were put on alert to ensure that none of their supporters left town. Night patrols were put up at both Union Station and throughout the corridors of the Hermitage to ward off departures or disappearances. Representatives were receiving fake messages summoning them home due to an illness in the family. Rumors of kidnappings abounded throughout the State Capitol. Representative Joe Hanover was attacked in the Hermitage's elevator, thereby leading Governor Roberts to reassign Captain Paul Bush of the Nashville police department to serve as Hanover's bodyguard. When a suffragist strategy session held in Carrie Catt's room broke up that evening, she told them, "There is one more thing we can do—only one; we can pray."

Day Eight, Wednesday, August 18, witnessed crowds gathering early to attend the vote on ratification that was expected to immortalize Tennessee either as the "Perfect 36" state to put the 19th Amendment over the top or yet another southern roadblock in the 72-year struggle to achieve woman suffrage. The crowds rushed up Capitol Hill, passing the equestrian statue of General Andrew Jackson and the tomb of President James K. Polk, who had been in office when the crusade for woman suffrage commenced. They ran, climbed, and hobbled their way up the 72 steps to the Capitol's main entrance—as if symbolic of the 72-year struggle. By 9:30 a.m., the Capitol was packed, the crowds spilling out onto the surrounding lawns.

The dramatic and climatic session of the legislature began with a wave of enthusiasm for the suffragists as supporter Dr. J. Frank Griffin arrived on the House floor from a trip to California. Then, R. L. Dowlen entered the chamber, assisted to his desk as he had just come from his hospital bed following an operation. Therefore, 96 of the 99 House members were present and counted for. From the polls the suffragists had conducted they could count on 47 votes, which would be two votes shy of the necessary 49 to reach a majority. The Anti-Suffragists had been conducting polls of their own and sensed victory. Next, the pounding of Speaker Walker's gavel resonated throughout the chamber and the corridors of the Capitol. The sergeant-at-arms then cleared the floor of "suffs," "antis," and dozens of lobbyists engaged in making last second offers and appeals for votes. The much-anticipated House debate had begun.

Legislators rose to deliver speech after speech that recounted the age-old arguments waged by both pro and anti-suffragists until Speaker Walker turned over the gavel to his staunch anti-suffragist colleague Representative William Overton and proceeded to take his seat on the House floor. When he had made his way to his seat, Walker requested that the chair recognize him. Assured that he had secured the 49 votes needed for the "antis" to defeat the resolution, Walker boldly proclaimed, "The hour has come. The battle has been fought and won, and I move you, Mr. Speaker, that the motion to concur in the Senate action goes where it belongs—to the table." Tabling the resolution appealed to those who remained uneasily on the fence and were eager to put the resolution off until after the November election. Besides, a vote to table the resolution, a legislator could explain to their constituents, was not a vote against woman suffrage.

The roll was called, and there was little surprise as to how the votes unfolded. Even Harry Burn, despite the conflicting signals he sent with a red rose in his lapel and the comment he had made to Pollitzer that his vote would never hurt her cause, voted with the "antis." It appeared

that the “antis” would receive 49 votes to the “suffs” 47 votes. The suffragists began to despair as the House clerk neared the end of the roll. Then, the name of Banks P. Turner of Gibson County, a professed opponent of ratification, was called. Turner did not answer immediately. He was no doubt replaying a meeting that he had had prior to that morning’s debate in Governor Roberts’s office over in his mind. At the meeting, Governor Roberts and Democratic Ohio Governor James M. Cox, who was on the phone, were both making a plea for Turner to reconsider his decision to vote against the resolution. Finally, Turner arose and instead of declaring either “Aye” or “Nay” made a brief statement: “I wish to be recorded as against the motion to table.” Both the “antis” and “suffs” were stunned at Turner’s about face. The vote was 48 to 48. Thus, the 19th Amendment was still alive in the state of Tennessee.

Speaker Walker demanded a recount. As a second roll was called, Walker made his way to Turner’s desk, sat down next to him and put his arm around the representative’s shoulder and began whispering into his ear as the vote proceeded as it had during their first call. Everyone in the room focused on Turner and Walker as the clerk reached Turner’s name again. Turner then threw off Walker’s arm, arose again, and voted “Nay.” Once again, the vote was 48 to 48 against the motion to table.

Walker then called for a vote on the original motion, to decide the fate of the 19th Amendment. The suffragists realized that although the motion to table the resolution had gone in their favor, they would need to pick up one more vote, in addition to Turner should he stick with them, to achieve victory. The clerk then proceeded a third time to call the roll, this time, to vote on the resolution to ratify the amendment. This time, the suffragists were counting on “Ayes” as opposed to “Nays.” East Tennessean Representative W. K. Anderson of Knox County, first on the roll call, shouted his answer, “Aye,” as instructed by the suffragists, which was followed by another “Aye.” Then came four “Nays” in succession.

Harry Burn was the seventh name on the list. No one was quite sure which way he would vote given the mixed signals he had sent. But what no one could discern from the red rose that he wore on his lapel, was the inner turmoil that Burn struggled with in his mind, nor the letter from his mother that he carried inside his jacket pocket. He had just received the seven-page letter that contained among family news, a plea for her son to be a good boy and vote to ratify the 19th Amendment. He quickly announced his vote, “Aye.” The vote came so unexpectedly that many in the room were caught off guard. Several thought that the young Representative had become confused by the prior two votes and meant “Nay” instead of “Aye.” But the East Tennessean had held to his promise to the suffragists and, more importantly, his mother.

Victory for the suffragists could not be realized until the roll was finished and Banks Turner’s new found suffragist support could be tested a third and final time. As the clerk called “Turner,” he arose once again and shouted “Aye.” The resolution had carried by a vote of 49 to 47.

Stunned, Walker then arose to employ one last parliamentary maneuver as he announced: “I change my vote from ‘Nay’ to ‘Aye,’ and move to reconsider.” The vote now stood at 50 to 46. Walker hoped his measure to reconsider, which enabled any voter on the prevailing side to

control the measure for the next 72 hours, would bide him time to erode the majority or secure the votes of the three absentee legislators.

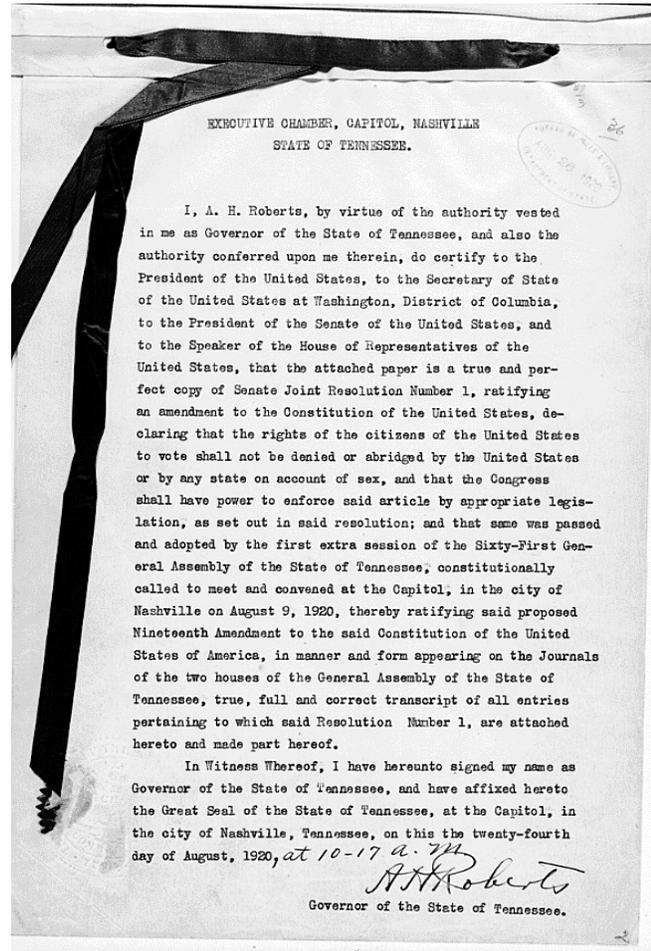
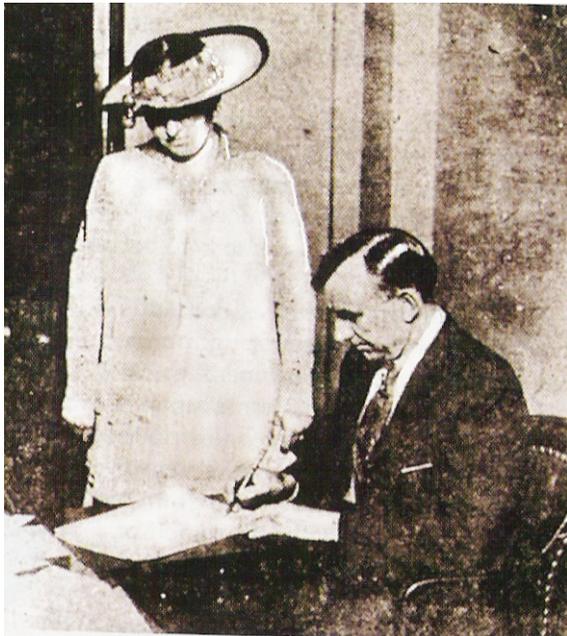
The House then adjourned and the galleries released a rush of emotions. Suffragist legislators tore off their yellow roses and threw them into the air to join the rain of yellow rose petals that fell from the galleries above. Screaming, weeping, and singing filled the halls and corridors of the Capitol, so loud that Carrie Catt, holed up in the Hermitage Hotel awaiting word of the House's decision, knew of the result before news of their victory arrived via a messenger.



Pro-Suffrage members of the Tennessee General Assembly after passage of the Amendment by the Senate.
Courtesy of National Woman's Party Coalition, The Sewall-Belmont House and Museum, Washington, D.C.,
<http://www.nwpcollection.org>

As the 72-hour period for Walker to take action on his motion to reconsider the ratification vote came and went, the Tennessee General Assembly delivered Tennessee as the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment officially on Saturday, August 21. Despite some last-gasp Anti-Suffragists maneuvers that delayed the certification of the Tennessee's ratification, Governor Roberts, on the morning of August 24, 1920, signed the certificate of ratification and mailed it off to U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby in Washington. Less than a few months

later, Governor Roberts would be turned out of office by angry voters for his courageous stand in support of woman suffrage.



Governor Albert H. Roberts signs his name to the document that certified Tennessee's ratification—the 36th state to do so—of the 19th Amendment

*Courtesy of the National Archives & Records Administration; Yellin and Sherman, *The Perfect 36**

Prominent suffragist leaders quickly boarded a train to be on hand in Washington, D.C. for the expected ceremony when the Secretary of State would issue a proclamation certifying the ratification of the 19th Amendment; however, when they arrived two days later, the suffragists received news that Secretary Colby had signed the certificate immediately upon receipt to prevent any last minute legal obstructionism on the part of “anti” lobbyists. Therefore, in the early morning hours of Thursday, August 26, 1920, while most of the country slept, the 72-year struggle for woman suffrage came to an end—votes for women, federally safeguarded by the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, had become the law of the land.

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NASHVILLE, TENN., SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 5, 1920.



MISS ELSA MCGILL, ONE OF THE MOST ARDENT SUFFRAGISTS



GOV. ROBERTS, MRS. LESLIE WARNER (SEATED) AND A GROUP OF SUFFRAGISTS

SUFFRAGE SCENES and LEADERS



MRS. CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL AMERICAN WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION



REPRESENTATIVE HARRY BURN, THE MAN WHOSE CHANGE OF VOTE MADE RATIFICATION POSSIBLE. IN HIS HAND IS A SHEAF OF TELEGRAMS OF CONGRATULATION UPON HIS ACTION.



REPRESENTATIVE JOE HANOVER, OF MEMPHIS, FLOOR LEADER OF THE SUFFRAGE FORCES.



REPRESENTATIVE SIMPSON, OF HUMPHREYS COUNTY, WHO STOOD FIRM FOR THE SUFFRAGE RESOLUTION IN SPITE OF THE MOST TERRIFIC PRESSURE.



SETH WALKER, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.



THE HOUSE IN ACTION

19th Amendment Ratification Timetable

1. Wisconsin	June 10, 1919
2. Michigan	June 10, 1919
3. Kansas	June 13, 1919
4. Ohio	June 14, 1919
5. New York	June 16, 1919
6. Illinois	June 17, 1919
7. Pennsylvania	June 24, 1919
8. Massachusetts	June 25, 1919
9. Texas	June 28, 1919
10. Iowa	July 2, 1919
11. Missouri	July 3, 1919
12. Arkansas	July 20, 1919
13. Montana	July 30, 1919
14. Nebraska	August 2, 1919
15. Minnesota	September 8, 1919
16. New Hampshire	September 10, 1919
17. Utah	September 30, 1919
18. California	November 1, 1919
19. Maine	November 5, 1919
20. North Dakota	December 1, 1919
21. South Dakota	December 4, 1919
22. Colorado	December 12, 1919
23. Rhode Island	January 6, 1920
24. Kentucky	January 6, 1920
25. Oregon	January 12, 1920
26. Indiana	January 16, 1920
27. Wyoming	January 27, 1920
28. Nevada	February 7, 1920
29. New Jersey	February 10, 1920
30. Idaho	February 11, 1920
31. Arizona	February 12, 1920
32. New Mexico	February 19, 1920
33. Oklahoma	February 27, 1920
34. West Virginia	March 10, 1920
35. Washington	March 22, 1920
36. Tennessee	August 18, 1920

States that Rejected the 19th Amendment

Georgia, July 24, 1919; Alabama, September 2, 1919; Mississippi, January 21, 1920; South Carolina, January 21, 1920; Virginia, February 12, 1920; Maryland, February 17, 1920; Delaware, June 2, 1920; Louisiana, June 15, 1920; North Carolina, August 17, 1920

No action on the 19th Amendment had been taken by the state legislatures of Connecticut, Vermont, and Florida by the time Tennessee voted.