



REVOLUTION and RIGHTS

An Exceptional Story

A Family Guide to When Women Lost the Vote

WOMEN played an important part in the American Revolution. They led boycotts, acted as spies, and even fought as soldiers. But what did that mean when the war was over? Did women have the same rights as men in the new nation?

This is the little-known story of America's first women voters. It begins with the American Revolution, and largely takes place in New Jersey, where women and free people of color had the right to vote from 1776 until 1807.

Use this guide to follow along and meet America's first women voters. How did they gain — and then lose — the right to vote? How did we discover this story? What does it mean to you?

KNOW Before You Go

Revolution: A radical change; the attempt by a people to end the rule of one government and start a new one

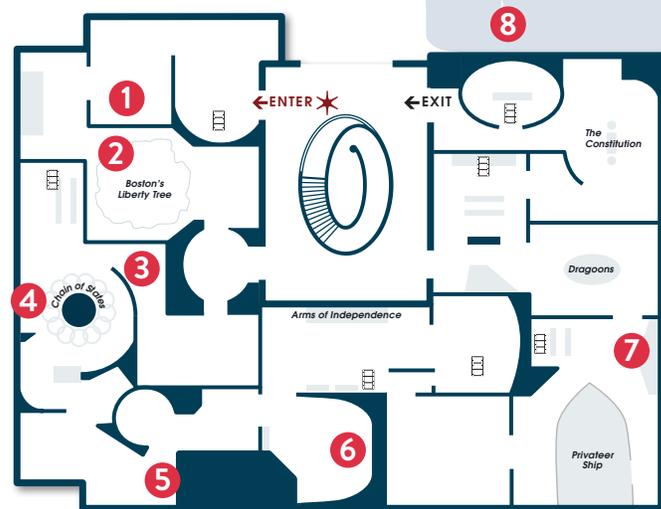
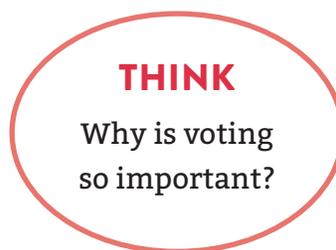
Rights: Something a person is or should be morally or legally allowed to have, get, or do

Constitution: A document that outlines and establishes the institutions and principles by which a country, state, or organization is governed

Suffrage: The right to vote

Political Party: An organization of people with shared political goals who work together to elect people to government

New Jersey: The third state to join the United States. Women and free people of color had the right to vote in New Jersey from 1776-1807



Use this map to locate the women featured inside.

MEET THE WOMEN *of the* REVOLUTION

What was it like to be a woman in Revolutionary America? Just like today, a person's experiences were shaped by many things: where she lived, how much money she had, her religion, and if she was considered enslaved or free. But the Revolution was a time of great change. For some women, the Revolution was an opportunity to secure new freedoms and independence.

MEET these **Women of the American Revolution** as you explore. Check the boxes as you find them! Use the map on the front page of this guide.



- 1 Elizabeth "Betty" Dorn**
An African American woman in New Jersey who may have been eligible to vote



- 5 Tyonajanegen "Two Kettles Together"**
A Native American woman who fought in the Battle of Oriskany



- 2 Mercy Otis Warren**
Author and historian who wrote openly for independence



- 6 Deborah Sampson**
Disguised herself to fight as a soldier in the Revolutionary War



- 3 Abigail Adams**
Revolutionary, partner to John Adams, and early advocate of women's rights



- 7 Rebecca VanDike**
A woman who appears on the poll lists of New Jersey



- 4 Elizabeth Freeman**
Sued the state of Massachusetts to free herself from enslavement



- 8 Sarah Louisa Forten**
Poet and prominent Black abolitionist, helped create the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society

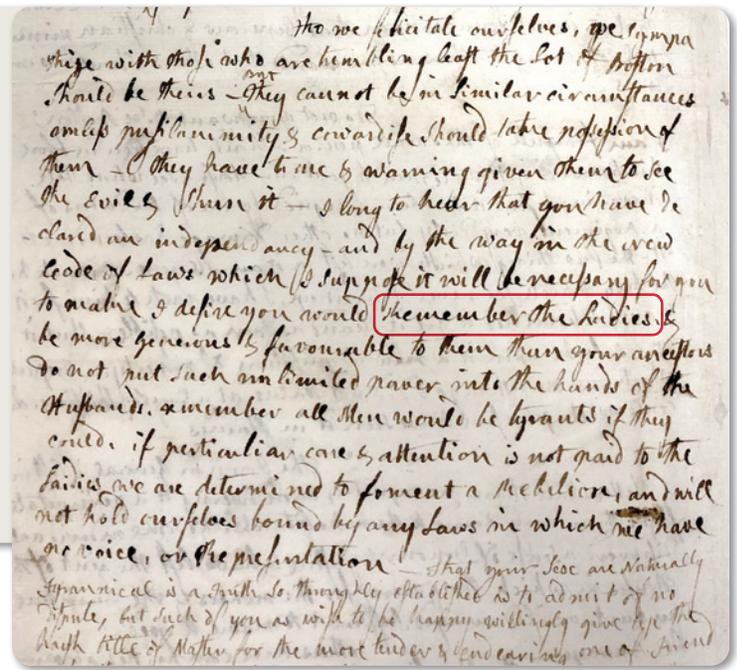
THINK

What did freedom and independence mean to these revolutionary women?

DISCOVER

In this letter to her husband, John Adams, Abigail Adams famously asks him to “Remember the Ladies.” She tells her husband that the “new code of laws” he and the other members of the Continental Congress were creating in 1776 should also apply to women.

John Adams relied on his wife not only to run their farm and home, but also as a partner in all his political roles. Even so, he dismisses her request and calls her “saucy.” Nevertheless, she persisted.



Tho we flatter ourselves, we sympathize with those who are humbling ^{not} the lot of Britain. There be times - they cannot be in similar circumstances - our public utility & civility should take reflection of them - They have time & warning given them to see the evils & shun it - I long to hear that you have declared an independency - and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies & be more generous & favourable to them than your ancestors do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. if particular care & attention is not paid to the Fair sex we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or the representation - that your Sex are naturally freeborn is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy will give up the weak title of Mother for the more tender & endearing one of Friend

Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

THINK

Letters like this one leave clues for historians who want to learn more about the past. What clues will you leave for historians in the future?

CREATE

Write a letter to Congress in 1776 telling them who you think should have rights in the new country.

AMERICA'S FIRST WOMEN VOTERS

A NEW NATION

The first state constitutions were written in 1776, the same year the Declaration of Independence was signed. They created new governments in each state and laid out rules for how to vote — and who could vote.

Revolutionary SHE

New Jersey's voter laws changed over time. See who could vote and when:

1776: "All inhabitants of this colony of full age who are worth 50 pounds proclamation money..."

Property holders of any race or gender had the right to vote.

1790: "All inhabitants...shall be entitled to vote...in [the township in which] **he or she** doth actually reside."

The word "she" confirmed the right to vote for women with property.

1807: "No person shall vote...unless such person be a **free, white, male citizen** of this state."

Women and people of color lost the right to vote.



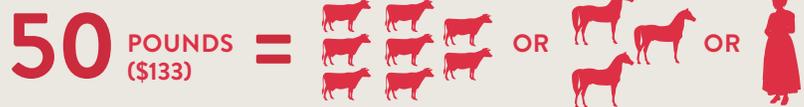
MEET

Rebecca VanDike

A woman in New Jersey, Rebecca and her husband John had a front-row seat to the American Revolution. John VanDike was a Loyalist, and Rebecca obtained possession of his property following the war, possibly securing her the right to vote.

How MUCH?

In 1790, 50 pounds was worth approximately \$133 in US federal currency. What was that worth?

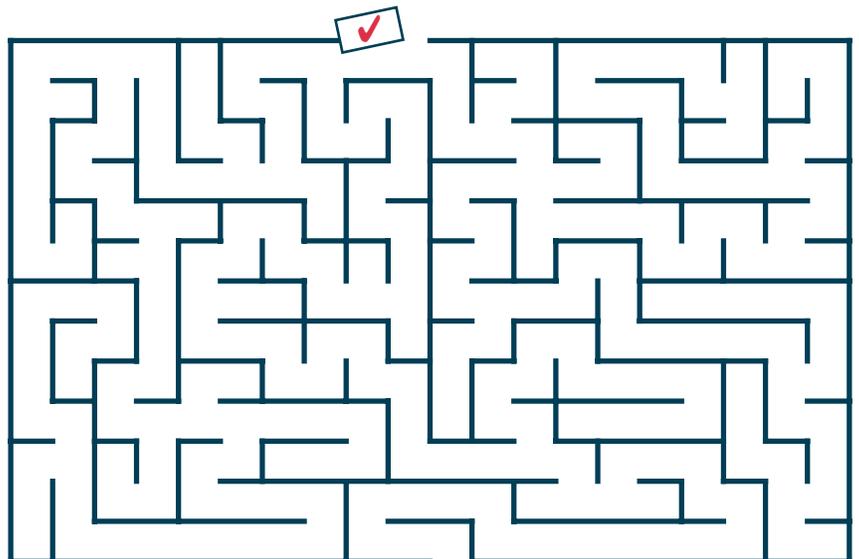


Slavery was legal in the State of New Jersey until 1837. This meant that while some free Black people could vote, enslaved people were considered property that allowed their enslavers to vote.

DISCOVER

How do we know what we know? Poll lists tell us who voted, when, and where. The Museum's historians used these poll lists to learn a lot about America's first women voters. Visit our website to explore the poll lists from New Jersey (coming Fall 2020). What will you discover?

PLAY Help this ballot make it to the ballot box!



Gloucester County Historical Society

Women and free Black people in New Jersey could vote for 31 years. In 1807, the State of New Jersey changed its constitution and redefined voters as “free, white male citizens.” This extended the right to *all* white male taxpayers, but also closed it to women, people of color, and many new immigrants. Why?

As political parties took shape, they actively recruited more voters, but also closely monitored who could vote. Some white men in New Jersey, concerned about the influence women and people of color might have in elections, argued that neither group were capable of participating in politics. Newspaper reports accused both groups of “voter fraud”; that men were dressing as women to vote or that people were voting more than once. Though there is no evidence that this actually happened, the accusations undermined the faith in fair elections.



THINK

What do the clothes you wear say about you? In what ways do your clothes make a statement?

DISCOVER

These two dresses tell us a lot about how women in New Jersey understood their role in the new United States. But no matter which style they preferred, women voters could be sure their critics had something to say about it!

PLAY

Find and circle five major differences between these two gowns.

“Petticoat Electors”

This style of dress was associated with the “petticoat electors,” referring to the petticoat typically worn underneath a gown or robe like this one. A petticoat would keep a woman warm and help achieve the desired shape of a garment. The term ‘petticoat electors’ implied that these voters were inexperienced at politics and might be overly influenced by men.

“Wollstonecraftians”

Neoclassicism celebrated the ideas of ancient Rome and Greece and influenced art, fashion, and politics. Neoclassical gowns like this one came into fashion as early as the 1790s. Gowns like this were worn by many young women who were dubbed “Wollstonecraftians” to suggest their style was part of a larger demand for women’s equality.

Image for left: Courtesy of Historic New England. Gift of Ann B. Gilbert, Carol Bretsch Kreier, Susan Goldstone and Louise Bestock Lehman Stoneborn in memory of Beatrice Weeks Bestock, 1988.5875
Image for right: The Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, Washington DC. Gift of Mrs. Anne Cliver Anderson.

MEET **Mary Wollstonecraft**

An English writer and philosopher, she wrote some of the first published works on the rights of women. She influenced the thinking of many American women of the time. Some New Jersey newspapers called women voters “Wollstonecraftians.”

VOTING RIGHTS

1807 – Today

Although the laws in New Jersey changed in 1807, **women and people of color continued to fight for the right to vote**, generations after they first cast ballots in New Jersey.

The 15th Amendment was ratified in 1870 and protected the right to vote for “all males over 21 years old.” The 19th Amendment secured that right for women in 1920. However, local and state laws prevented generations of African Americans and Native Americans — men and women — from casting ballots. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 protected voters from such laws. Following the 2013 Supreme Court ruling of *Shelby County vs Holder*, states no longer need federal approval to change voter laws. The significance of this ruling is debated today.

The right to vote has expanded and contracted over time, and it has to be protected. Today, there are many organizations that continue to fight to protect the right to vote for all.

CREATE *at Home*

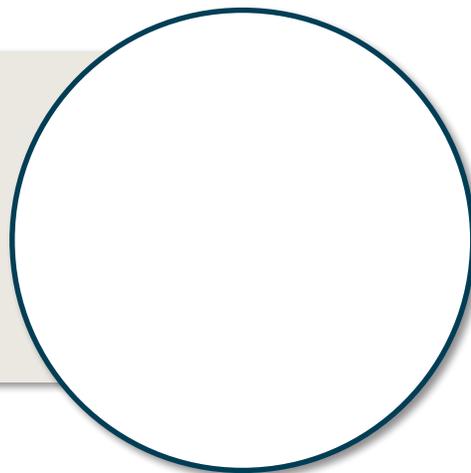
Draw your own poster.
Tell the world why voting rights are important **to you**.

MORE WAYS *to LEARN*

Coming Fall 2020, check out our online *When Women Lost the Vote* exhibition to learn about voting and women of the Revolution.

CREATE

Elections happen all the time and are a critical part of our democracy. Create your own “I Voted” button to tell everyone some day you’ll be a voter too!



WATCH

Meet Rebecca VanDike and Elizabeth Freeman in original theatrical pieces that bring these revolutionary women to life. *Coming Fall 2020*

CONNECT

Explore our Educator Resource Guide to see how this story links to your classroom! *Coming Fall 2020*
www.amrevmuseum.org/teacher-resource-guide

READ

Go here for some of our favorite books www.amrevmuseum.org/booklist.

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WHEN WOMEN LOST THE VOTE

A Revolutionary Story, 1776–1807

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Kate Shields



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