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### Election Day 1801

*Adrienne Whaley:* Hi! I'm Adrienne Whaley, the Museum's Director of Education and Community Engagement.

This life-size scene shows you a moment frozen in time. Three women stand inside the Rocky Hill Inn in Montgomery Township, Somerset County, New Jersey, in 1801. What's their story?

Between 1776 and 1807, New Jersey had no gender or racial qualifications to vote. Over a century before the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed women the right to vote on a national level, New Jersey women voted in the early United States. We highlighted this story in an exhibition in 2020 and 2021 called *When Women Lost the Vote*. You can still explore it online, at our website, [amrevmuseum.org](http://amrevmuseum.org).

Here, two white women stand in line in front of a ballot box. The older woman is about to drop her ballot into the box and cast a vote. We might think of her as one of the "petticoat electors," a label for voting women that referred to a slightly older style of gown, which featured a separate skirt called a petticoat. A younger woman stands behind her. Perhaps she is a "Wolstonecraftian," one of the young women who admired the writings of the European feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. On display nearby, there is an image of a similar fashionable woman, Rebecca Githens, who voted in Burlington County in 1807. The third figure in this scene is a young black woman. Is she in line to vote or off to one side? In 1801, black women who owned property were legally entitled to vote in New Jersey, though we have yet to identify any who actually did. But owning an enslaved person was also enough property to entitle a white woman to vote. Is this woman there as a voter or as proof of someone else's property ownership? What is she thinking?

Imagine yourself at the polls with these women. Consider this moment in their lives. What did it feel like to cast a vote in this bustling tavern? What did it mean to them? What does it mean today?