

Property and the Vote

Attributed to Benjamin Franklin, taken from “The Casket, or the Flowers of Literature, Wit and Sentiment,” 1828

Today a man owns a jackass worth 50 dollars and he is entitled to vote; but before the next election the jackass dies. The man in the mean time has become more experienced, his knowledge of the principles of government, and his acquaintance with mankind, are more extensive, and he is therefore better qualified to make a proper selection of rulers — but the jackass is dead and the man cannot vote. Now gentlemen, pray inform me, in whom is the right of suffrage? In the man or in the jackass?

Who Can Vote

Read the following excerpts from state constitutions created during and after the Revolutionary War. Circle, underline, or highlight words that describe who is allowed to vote. In the space below each excerpt, write down who is allowed to vote under that new state constitution and who is not allowed to vote.

Freeholder - free persons who owned land without debt or mortgage

1. Massachusetts Constitution, 1780

Every male person being twenty-one years of age, and resident in any particular town in this commonwealth, for the space of one year next preceding, having a freehold estate within the same town, of the annual income of three pounds, or any estate of the value of sixty pounds, shall have a right to vote in the choice ...

2. Pennsylvania Constitution, 1776

Every freemen of the full age of twenty-one Years, having resided in this state for the space of one whole Year next before the day of election for representatives, and paid public taxes during that time, shall enjoy the right of an elector: Provided always, that sons of freeholders of the age of twenty-one years shall be intitled to vote although they have not paid taxes.

3. New York Constitution, 1777

That every male inhabitant of full age, who shall have personally resided within one of the counties of this State for six months immediately preceding the day of election, shall, at such election, be entitled to vote for representatives of the said county in assembly; if, during the time aforesaid, he shall have been a freeholder, possessing a freehold of the value of twenty pounds, within the said county, or have rented a tenement therein of the yearly value of forty shillings.

4. Georgia Constitution, 1777

Male white inhabitants, of the age of twenty-one years, and possessed in his own right of ten pounds value, and liable to pay tax in this State, or being of any mechanic trade, and shall have been resident six months in this State, shall have a right to vote at all elections for representatives, or any other officers, herein agreed to be chosen by the people at large; and every person having a right to vote at any election shall vote by ballot personally.

The New Jersey Exception

Read the following excerpts from the 1776 New Jersey Constitution and laws amending it in the 1790s. Underline or highlight the passages that relate to voting qualifications. In the space below each excerpt, write down who is allowed to vote and who is not allowed to vote.

1. New Jersey Constitution - 1776

[A]ll inhabitants of this Colony, of full age, who are worth fifty pounds proclamation money, clear estate in the same, and have resided within the county in which they claim a vote for twelve months immediately preceding the election, shall be entitled to vote for Representatives in Council and Assembly; and also for all other public officers, that shall be elected by the people of the county at large.

2. New Jersey Voting Act, 1790

And be it further Enacted, That all free Inhabitants of this State of full Age, and who are worth Fifty Pounds Proclamation Money clear Estate in the same, and have resided within the County in which they claim a Vote, for twelve Months immediately preceding the Election, shall be entitled to vote for all public Officers which shall be elected by Virtue of this Act; and no Person shall be entitled to vote in any other Township or Precinct that that in which he or she doth actually reside at the Time of the Election; and no Person who shall be convicted of Treason against this State or the United States, or any of them, shall be entitled to vote at any such Election.

3. New Jersey Voting Act, 1797

AND BE IT ENACTED, That every voter shall openly, and in full view deliver his or her ballot (which shall be a single written ticket, containing the names of the person or persons for whom he or she votes) to the said judge; or either of the inspectors, who, on receipt thereof, shall, with an audible voice; pronounce the name of such voter, and if no objection is made to the voter, put the ballot immediately into the election box, and the clerk of the election shall thereupon take down the name of such voter in a book or poll list, to be provided for the purpose ; and if an adjournment of the poll shall take place during the election, the aperture in the top of the box shall be secured by the bolt aforesaid, and the names on the poll list shall be counted, and the number put down in writing, and the said list locked in the box, and the keys kept separate by two of the persons hereby appointed to conduct the election.

Women Voter Scavenger Hunt

In nine New Jersey poll lists dating from 1800-1807, 163 women have been identified as voters. Biographies of 30 of those women and free people of color can be found on the webpage below.

<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/exploring-new-jersey-voters-1800-1807>

Using those biographies find a woman (or women) who match the following descriptions:

1. Has a tombstone you can still visit today
2. Operated a tavern
3. Voted with another woman in her family
4. Defended her husband on suspicion of being a Loyalist
5. Owned over 54 acres of land
6. Was of Swedish descent

Women Voter Scavenger Hunt *Answer Key*

In nine New Jersey poll lists dating from 1800-1807, 163 women have been identified as voters. Biographies of 30 of those women and free people of color can be found on the webpage below.

<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/exploring-new-jersey-voters-1800-1807>

Using those biographies find a woman (or women) who match the following descriptions:

1. Has a tombstone you can still visit today

Miriam Venable
Sabillah Pearson
Eleanor Boylan
Amy Cheston
Mary Norris

2. Operated a tavern

Elizabeth Louderback
Grace Little

3. Voted with another woman in her family

Rebecca Venable
Miriam Venable

4. Defended her husband on suspicion of being a Loyalist

Rebecca VanDike (or VanDyke or VanDyck)

5. Owned over 54 acres of land

Eleanor Boylan

6. Was of Swedish descent

Christiana Kitts