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A VOTE FOR WOMEN

The impact of the 19th Amendment

Theresa Navarra

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COURTESY MARGUERITE KEARNS

Rockville Centre resident Edna Buckman Kearns was a leading activist in the state and national campaigns to get women the right to vote.

Ninety years ago, the United States was a different place. There were 107 million people living here; life expectancy was 54 years for men and 55 for women; the average annual salary was \$1,236, and gangland crime was rampant in major cities. The Ford automobile was mass produced and one could be had for \$290 — although it took 13 days to reach California from New York due to the lack of paved roads. And, On Aug. 26, 1920, women were granted political power for the first time. After 72 years of a determined battle fought by American suffragists, women won the right to vote with the 19th Amendment.

“Women have come a long way,” said Rachel Krinsky of the League of Women Voters. “They fought hard for their right to vote, and today, they fight for places in office.” The League of Women Voters was formed immediately after the passage of the 19th Amendment by those who fought for suffrage.

Women fought a long and tireless battle. Although the United States Constitution never mentioned women could or could not vote, society implied they could not. “The Woman’s Rights movement grew out of the abolitionist and temperance movements,” said Krinsky. Women began to become politically active while fighting in anti-slavery movements.

In 1848, women suffragists, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, met in Seneca Falls, N.Y. to discuss women’s rights. This convention was the first of many, said Krinsky. Women hoped that the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery would help their cause. “The suffragists had great hopes that the passage of the 14th and 15th amendments would give the vote to women as well,” said Krinsky. However, she said, women were left disappointed when the 14th amendment, passed in 1868, granted former slaves their rights — with the right to vote being granted specifically to African American males.

As the 20th century approached, the role of women changed drastically. They were working more, and getting an education. By the time America entered World War I, their aid in the war brought their cause to the eyes of everyone.

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Keywords

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