



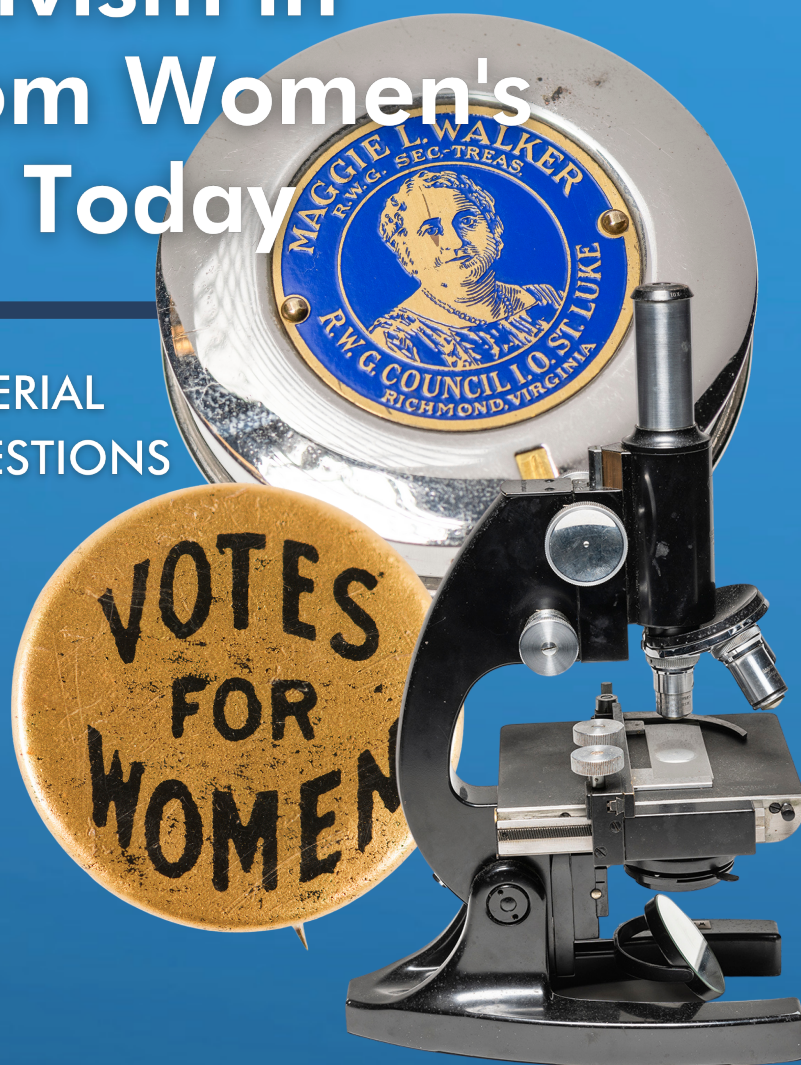
# COLLECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

*TEACHERS GUIDE & RESOURCES*

## AGENTS OF CHANGE: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

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PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL  
AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## IMAGE CREDITS

All images and objects are from the Virginia Museum of History & Culture collections, unless otherwise noted.



## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Organized in conjunction with the statewide Women's Suffrage Centennial, *Agents of Change* features artifacts from the museum's existing collections as well as new acquisitions made through a major collecting initiative in order to celebrate a century of women's social and political activism in the Commonwealth. The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 radically re-defined the meaning of American democracy by banning gender-based restrictions on voting. This landmark legislation marked the culmination of a concerted fight for women's suffrage and heralded a new age of female participation in American civic life. By highlighting the efforts and impact of a selection of female changemakers, *Agents of Change*, seeks to focus on women bringing about positive change in their communities, the Commonwealth, and the nation. These women created new models for female empowerment and new opportunities for women. This packet will help you and your students understand the broader impact of women's activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### READING AND ANALYZING

#### Background: Primary Source Material

This primary source packet is designed to help familiarize students with a variety of primary source materials from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture exhibition *Agents of Change*. The sources included will expose students to a variety of collection materials, including propaganda, published articles, objects, textiles, letters and personal notes. Prompt your students to consider the intersections of things like race, gender, and socioeconomic status. When analyzing the materials, keep in mind the origin of the source – was it meant to be public or private? Who is to, and who is it from? Does it contain opinions or facts, and, can you tell the difference? Is it written or illustrated? Is it a paper source or an object? These questions, the material in the corresponding source packet, the contextual information and images, and the guidelines below will provide an avenue for integrating museum collections into the classroom.

#### Background: Agents of Change

In 1920, the United States ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, guaranteeing some women the right to vote. Citizenship laws barred some, while poll taxes and violence kept others from participating. However, this milestone event was the proud culmination of a 70-year-long struggle for female suffrage that began in earnest at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. The ability to vote ushered in a new age of women's civic activism that soon began to address other inequalities in American society. Over the ensuing century, women expanded their fight for equality beyond the ballot box to other arenas, including educational institutions, professional opportunities, and social justice issues. And the battle against persistent sexism and gender-based disparities continues today.

In Virginia, the 1909 founding of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia marked the starting point of a concerted effort by white women like Adele Clark, Nora Houston, and Lila Valentine in advocating for women's suffrage. They held leadership positions in the ESL and campaigned across the Commonwealth for voting equality for women—often confronting opposition from those who believed that women should not descend into “the filthy pool of politics.” Black women like

Maggie Walker, Janie Porter Barrett, and Dr. Zenobia Gilpin advocated for their communities, and made sure to include the rights of black people as essential aspects of suffrage. Their civic engagement extended to creation of jobs and improved access to education and medical resources. Initially, most women used their civic voice to advocate for topics considered to be extensions of the women's sphere such as childcare and education. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, women continued to advocate for further equality and improvements in those areas, and began to work in traditionally, or exclusively, male-dominated industries, like military service and political offices. 2020 has record numbers of women winning elected office, including in Virginia's General Assembly. This trend underscores the importance of representation—of having a seat at the table where decisions are made and of having a government that reflects the American people.

However, women are not a homogenous group. They represent different races, socioeconomic statuses, individual opinions, and larger ideologies. They have never agreed on the best ways to achieve equality, or

even what “equality” means. Suffrage itself was not supported by all women, and even within the pro-suffrage movement there were differences of opinion. Contemporary feminists often look to Alice Paul’s 1923 proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was designed to end legal distinctions between men and women. The ERA was not popular with some people, including suffragists, who felt that equality between men and women had been achieved with the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment or for women who felt that they needed additional protections or guarantees under the law. The ERA failed to pass Congress in 1920s, although it seemed hopeful to pass in the 1970s. In January 2020, Virginia became the 38<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the ERA. Constitutional scholars disagree over whether the ERA could ever be added to the Constitution in its current form, since the time period for ratification has passed.

Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of female activism surrounding persistent sexism, gender bias, and socio-economic disparities in America. Like the suffragists of a century ago, contemporary activists build networks, organize marches, and demand change—but using new tools of the digital age. Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Women’s Marches, pay equity, and climate change are just a few of their movements and causes. These new digital tools and public gatherings also create space for young activists to make their voices heard. Richmond activist Stephanie Younger (b. 2002) states “Even though we can’t vote, young people ... have been leading the fight to end gun violence, LGBTQ+ liberation, voters’ rights, and feminism. [We] are the catalysts of social and political change.” Today, female agents of change are concerned with a variety of progressive issues. The women represented in this packet worked, and are working, towards a more equitable and equal future for all.

## LIST OF SOURCES

<i>Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote</i> , Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 1916	Title Page, Virginia Medical Monthly, 1948	Political Buttons, 1970s-1980s
<i>Facts of Government Every Virginia Woman Should Know</i> , Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 1920	Catalogue, Rosemont Industries, 1927	Notebook With Comments, Carol Schall, Mary Townley, and Emily Schall-Townley, 2014
Coin Holder, Independent Order of St. Luke, 20 <sup>th</sup> Century	WAVES Uniform, Nancy Bailey, 1943	Turtle Hand Drum, Chief Anne Richardson, early 20 <sup>th</sup> century
	Letter, Evelyn Butts, 1961	Protest Sign, Suzanne Summer LaPierre, 2017
	Certificate of Appreciation, Flora Crater, 1972	



## OVERALL DISCUSSION AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

### OBSERVE

1. What do you notice first?
2. Find something small but interesting.
3. What do you notice that you didn't expect? What do you notice that you can't explain?  
What do you notice now that you didn't earlier?

### REFLECT

1. Where do you think this came from?
2. Why do you think somebody made this? What do you think was happening when this was made?
3. Who do you think was the audience for this item?
4. What tool was used to create this?
5. Why do you think this item is important?
6. If someone made this today, what would be different?
7. What can you learn from examining this?

### QUESTION

1. What do you wonder about...Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

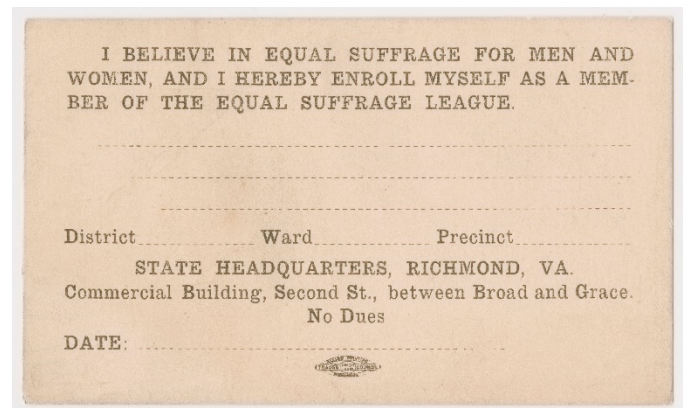
## CONTEXT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EACH SOURCE

### *Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote*, Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 1916

VMHC Call Number: Broadside 1916.1

The movement for suffrage was divided across the nation. Liberal Suffragists desired a Constitutional amendment that guaranteed women the right to vote. Conservative Suffragists, however, wanted a state-by-state approach to suffrage because they didn't believe that Southern states would support a national amendment. Sure enough, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia (ESL) failed to convince state representatives of the importance of female suffrage. Racism also created division in the long fight for female suffrage. Many white suffragists resented that black men got the right to vote before them in 1870, and most suffrage organizations, including the ESL, refused to admit black members. Suffrage opponents claimed that giving women the ballot would enfranchise enough black female voters to create "negro domination." To counter such racist fearmongering and win white support, the ESL issued this broadside asserting that Virginia's existing measures designed to limit the black vote—such as the poll tax and literacy test—would maintain white supremacy. It's unlikely that all members of the ESL believed that; however, many were either comfortable using racist rhetoric to secure public support, or they agreed with it.

1. Why would white Suffragists in the South be worried about race?
2. Have you ever disagreed with something that an organization you belong to said or did? Why might an individual who didn't support racism within suffrage still belong to the ESL?
3. What are some of the reasons this broadside uses to argue that women voting will be good for white supremacy?
4. What did you think about suffragists before reading this broadside? Has this changed your opinion at all? Why or why not?



Equal Suffrage League Membership Card  
VMHC Object Number: 2000.54.2

### *Facts of Government Every Virginia Woman Should Know*, Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 1920

VMHC Call Number: JK1901 E7 F23

As the prospect of gaining the vote grew stronger, Adele Clark, Nora Houston, and other ESL members turned to preparing women "for intelligent citizenship." They held civics classes and published study guides such as this one. Virginia's League of Women Voters continued this educational work after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified.

1. Why would educational materials like this be necessary to prepare women for civic engagement?
2. What type of information does this guide include?
3. Do you think all white men voting at the polls would know these facts?



Votes for Women Pin  
VMHC Object Number: 2005.444.14

## Coin Holder, Independent Order of Saint Luke, 20th Century

VMHC Object Number: 2005.341.15

The daughter of a former enslaved woman, Maggie Walker (1864–1934) became nationally renowned as one of the most influential and accomplished black civic leaders in Richmond’s Jackson Ward neighborhood. She fought for female suffrage and black civil rights. For instance, she organized boycotts of Richmond’s segregated streetcars, led voter registration drives, and co-founded the city’s chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). A talented entrepreneur, she led a fraternal organization, established a newspaper and department store, and chartered a bank—making her the first black female bank president in America. These enterprises provided services, jobs, and economic opportunities to the black community when white-owned firms would not. This coin holder emblazoned with Walker’s portrait is a fitting tribute to her commitment to black empowerment in the face of rampant discrimination. “Let us put our moneys together,” she stated when she founded the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank, “and reap the benefit ourselves ... Let us have a bank that will take the nickels and turn them into dollars.”

1. Why would having access to a bank account be important to the black community?
2. What message does it send to have Maggie Walker’s image on an object like this?
3. How does Maggie Walker embody the intersection of race and gender?



Postcard, St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank  
VMHC Object Number: 2002.363.9

## Title Page, Virginia Medical Monthly, 1948

VMHC Call Number: R11.V8

As a black female doctor in the Jim Crow South, Dr. Zenobia Gilpin (1898–1948) faced both sexism and racism—but still rose to national prominence. After graduating from Howard University Medical School in 1923, she dedicated her career to providing medical services to Richmond’s black communities. In addition to her own practice, Dr. Gilpin developed a program of health clinics held at black churches during a time when most city hospitals did not treat black patients. She also spoke out about racial disparities in public health and held leadership positions in civic organizations, including the NAACP and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

1. Why might medical care be inferior for black communities?
2. What are some of the articles included in this journal?
3. Do you see any symbols you don’t recognize? How might you find out what they are?



Microscope Used by Dr. Zenobia Gilpin  
Loan from the Black History Museum of Virginia

## Catalogue, Rosemont Industries, 1927

VMHC Call Number: Rare TT403 C78 1927

Laura Lu Scherer Copenhaver (1868–1940) dedicated her life to educational, economic, and spiritual uplift for communities in southwest Virginia. Among her many activities, she was a writer, teacher, and Lutheran lay leader and missionary. In 1916, she founded Rosemont Industries, a craft collective that produced household items—including hooked rugs, bed coverings, and furniture—based on traditional Appalachian designs. By using local artisans and raw materials (such as sheep’s wool), Copenhaver pioneered a business model that provided much-needed economic opportunities for rural areas that were often impoverished and underserved by state resources. Copenhaver marketed Rosemont products through mail order catalogs—she had customers across the nation and abroad.

1. What do you see in the image on this cover?
2. The woman on the cover is well dressed, engaged in a traditional feminine act of creating textiles, and sitting in a cozy home – why do you think this image would have been popular advertising for Rosemont Industries?
3. Why would a business like this have been helpful for rural southwestern communities in general, and women specifically?



Rosemont Industries Love Knot Coverlet  
Loan from Rita and Tim Copenhaver

## WAVES Uniform, Nancy Bailey, 1943

VMHC Object Number: 1995.71.1-18

World War II opened new opportunities for women in the military and on the home front. In 1943, Southampton County native Nancy Bailey (later Cogsdale) left her job as a high school teacher to enlist in the naval reserve unit known as WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) out of a sense of patriotic duty. She later recalled “There is no way to tell you how I felt when I put on my first uniform and stood up to salute when the Star Spangled Banner was played.” Stationed in Norfolk, she worked as a coding and communications watch officer, encrypting and deciphering top-secret messages. The WAVES were the first women to have equal military status and benefits (such as pensions and disability protection) to men—previously, women were limited to auxiliary units. Although many WAVES encountered sexism, Bailey described her service as “challenging,” “broadening,” and “one of my most treasured experiences.” The contributions of the WAVES and their sisters in other branches led President Harry Truman to integrate women into the armed forces in 1948.

1. Apart from military service, what are some other ways women might have assisted with the war effort during World War II?
2. How does this uniform combine traditional ideas of “ladylike” demeanor and a professional military appearance?
3. Why do you think this was such a treasured experience for Nancy Bailey?



Nancy Bailey Cogsdale  
in WAVES Uniform  
VMHC Object Number: 1995.71.2



## Letter, Evelyn Butts, 1961

On Loan from Butts Family Private Collection

Evelyn Butts (1924–1993), a Norfolk seamstress, civil rights activist, and community organizer, helped strike down the poll tax—one of the most effective means by which Virginia and other southern states disenfranchised black voters during the Jim Crow era. As a plaintiff in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Electors*, she sued the Commonwealth claiming that the poll tax disproportionately affected poor Americans. The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 1966 declared the tax unconstitutional. Butts was also active in local politics. She led voter registration drives and co-founded the Concerned Citizens for Political Education. This organization helped elect Norfolk’s first black city councilor (1968) and House of Delegates representative (1969). In 1995, the City of Norfolk renamed a street in her honor. Butts challenged injustice wherever she saw it, even within black organizations. In this letter to fellow members of Norfolk’s NAACP, she explains why she called for new elections against a “dictatorial” leadership and defends herself against the charge of radicalism, asking: “Is it radical to dream of and work for a City where Negroes are citizens, free and proud, living peacefully and in prosperity?”

1. What does Evelyn mean when she says “it is impossible for a Negro in the South to be radical. The mere fact that he is alive is conclusive proof that he is conservative.”?
2. What technique is Evelyn using to make her point in this letter?
3. How does Evelyn feel about the Norfolk NAACP in this letter? What is she accusing them of?

## Certificate of Appreciation, Flora Crater, 1972

On Loan from Walt Crater and Vivian Gray

Feminism’s “first wave” secured equal voting rights, but not full equality. The 1960s ushered in a second wave of the feminist movement with women fighting systemic sexism in a male-dominated society. Flora Crater (1914-2009) of Orange County was a leading voice for women’s equality in Virginia. A talented organizer, she established the state’s first chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1971 and campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), among other activities. Crater was instrumental in getting the U.S. Congress to pass the ERA in 1972, though the required number of states didn’t ratify the amendment. She led a group of women—called “The Crater’s Raiders”—in a dogged lobbying campaign. One longtime senator said of their efforts, “I’ve never seen anything like it in all my years,” and a newspaper account credited Crater with “one of the coups of the century.”

1. Why are the words “men” and “not” underlined in this certificate of appreciation?
2. Look at the picture in the middle – what are the two symbols, and why are they hanging from a scale?
3. The ERA wasn’t supported by all women – can you think of some instances where women wouldn’t want things to be entirely equal?



“Virginia is for Lovers of E.R.A” Pin  
Loan from Crater Family

## Political Buttons, 1970s-1980s

VMHC Object Numbers: 2004.53.45, 2004.53.39, 2004.53.52, 2004.53.8, 2004.53.44, 2004.53.56

Popular in the 1920s and again in the 1970s, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) states that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Congress almost ratified the ERA in the 1970s. Conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly put in considerable effort to convince Congress and the American public that the ERA rolled back protections for women. She also argued that women had their rights; suffrage, after all, was granted in 1920. The ERA ended up failing with only 35 of the necessary 38 ratification votes. Nevada and Illinois later ratified the amendment in the 2010s. Virginia unsuccessfully tried to ratify the ERA in 2019. Democrats later gained control of Virginia’s legislature in 2020 and quickly became the 38<sup>th</sup> and final ratification state. Some scholars argue that the ERA cannot be added to the Constitution in its current form. The sunset provision, which set a deadline for Congress to ratify the ERA, passed in the 1980s. They argue that the ERA’s ratification process must restart with another introduction to Congress.

1. Why do people still make political buttons?
2. Look at these buttons as a group – what are some of the different approaches to advertising and arguing for the ERA?
3. Choose one button that you think is most successful or least successful - why?

## Notebook with Comments, Carol Schall, Mary Townley, and Emily Schall-Townley, 2014

VMHC Object Number: 2019.41.6

In 2014, this Chesterfield County couple helped overturn Virginia’s ban on same-sex marriage as plaintiffs in *Bostic v. Schaefer*, a landmark case in the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. When they entered this legal fight, Carol Schall and Mary Townley had been together for decades and had a daughter, Emily. In 2008, they married in California—the first state to legalize same-sex marriage—but Virginia did not recognize their union. This meant, for instance, that Schall could not visit or get information about Townley when she was hospitalized during her pregnancy. As Emily’s non-biological parent, Schall was also denied full parental rights. This family’s battle for legal equality reflects ongoing activism for LGBTQ+ rights. “Culture of this Country = Equality & Diversity” is one of the notes that Schall, Townley, and their daughter wrote to each other in the courtroom. Another comment, “So those celebrity 10 min marriages are good for children?” responds to the opposing side’s claim that children raised without a traditional mother-father unit are disadvantaged.

1. What are some of the comments written on this piece of paper?
2. What emotions do you think the women writing these comments were feeling? What different tones do you pick up?
3. This object was displayed in a museum exhibit – do you think the creators ever meant these notes to be seen by the public? How do you think that changed how these thoughts were written?



Necklace worn by Emily Schall-Townley  
during court ruling  
VMHC Object Number: 2019.41.1.5

## **Turtle Hand Drum, Chief Anne Richardson, early 20th century**

On Loan from Chief Anne Richardson, Rappahannock Tribe

As chief of the Rappahannock since 1998, Chief Anne Richardson (b. 1956) is the first woman to lead a Virginia Indian tribe since the early 1700s. She was instrumental in obtaining state (1983) and then federal (2018) recognition for the Rappahannock Tribe—recognition that confers sovereignty and other rights. While contending with the long legacy of displacement, discrimination, and disenfranchisement, such as loss of native lands, race erasure, and delayed voting rights, Richardson works to ensure a vibrant future for the Rappahannock and to preserve their lands and cultural traditions. “Most people, when they think about the history of [Virginia’s Indians] ... think about these things like the dinosaurs that existed and died,” she has observed. “My people still exist and will continue to exist.” Chief Richardson both practices and passes on tribal customs. She inherited her commitment to preserving native traditions from her parents, who taught tourists at the Jamestown historic site about the Rappahannock Indians. Several generations of Rappahannock leaders have used this drum in spiritual ceremonies. Under her tenure as chief, Richardson has initiated programs to teach young people native language, dance, arts, foodways, and other traditions.



Official Seal of the Rappahannock Tribe  
Image Courtesy of Rappahannock Tribe

1. Examine this drum. What materials is it made of?
2. Can you tell by looking at this drum when it might have been made?
3. How does an item like this help current and future members of the Rappahannock Tribe connect to their past?

## **Protest Sign, Suzanne Summer LaPierre, 2017**

VMHC Object Number: 2017.14

The Women’s March of 2017 was the largest single-day protest in U.S. history. Satellite marches in cities around the world, including Richmond, represented a groundswell of female activism. Largely seen as a response to the election of President Donald Trump, this group showed their support for a variety of progressive issues. Female activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century goes past simply “women’s issues.” Activists today are concerned with a variety of topics from immigration and criminal justice reform to LGBTQ+ rights. Issues regarding gender inequality and abortion rights are also still important. This poster highlights unity amongst women of different ages and ethnicities. This was important in the politically divided aftermath of President Trump’s election. The women painted on this poster illustrate the changing faces of who “is” or “looks” American in an increasingly diverse country.

1. Why did people think it was important to attend the women’s march?
2. How would you describe this poster’s appearance?
3. Who is this poster talking to? Who needs to know this is what America looks like?



## EQUAL SUFFRAGE AND THE NEGRO VOTE

The opponents of equal suffrage claim that the negro woman's vote will constitute a menace to white supremacy. This contention is altogether unfounded for the following reasons:

1. **BECAUSE** under the proposed amendment to the Constitution the same restrictions, which now apply to men must also apply to women and as these qualifications restrict the negro man's vote, it stands to reason that they will also restrict the negro woman's vote.
2. **BECAUSE** there are 191,000 more white women of voting age in Virginia than there are negro women of voting age, and white women outnumber negro men and women put together by 31,407. So the enfranchisement of Virginia women would increase white supremacy.
3. **BECAUSE** white supremacy would be further increased by the literacy test. The Constitution says, in reference to qualification of the voter that "unless physically unable, he make application in his own handwriting," and that he "prepare and deposit his ballot without aid." Illiteracy among negroes is 22 per cent. and among white people is only 8 per cent.
4. **BECAUSE** the Constitution says that the would-be voter shall pay a poll tax of one dollar and fifty cents "for three years next preceeding that in which he offers to register." This qualification will undoubtedly further increase the white supremacy.
5. **BECAUSE** the Constitution further says that "the General Assembly may prescribe a property qualification of not exceeding two hundred and fifty dollars for voters in any county, city or town," etc. (See Article II, Sec. 30, Elective Franchise and Qualification for Office.) This is a provision to be used if needed, but it has never been needed anywhere in Virginia, for there is no county or city or town where negro men qualify in larger numbers than white men. They are shut out by the present restrictions. We are secure from negro domination now—then, ever more.

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EQUAL SUFFRAGE LEAGUE OF VIRGINIA,  
100 North 4th Street, Richmond, Virginia.



[Ca. 1916]



## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Facts of Government Every Virginia Woman Should Know, Equal Suffrage League, 1920

VMHC Call Number: JK1901.E7.F23.c1

Suffrage Amendment. Boyd, pages 2-6, 31, 35, 37.

When this amendment is ratified, will State qualifications for suffrage remain the same? Boyd, Chapter IV.

How many departments has the National Government? McBain, page 176; Boyd, pages 129-135.

Tell something of the workings of Congress. McBain, Chapter XXI.

How many congressmen has Virginia? Ten.

Who is your congressman and to what district do you belong?

How many Senators has each State? Two.

Name the Virginia Senators.

Did your Congressman and Senators vote for the Federal Suffrage Amendment?

How is the President elected? McBain, pages 211, 214.

Tell something of his powers and duties. McBain, Chapter XXII.

Tell something of the President's cabinet and their departments. Pages 219, 222.

Tell something of our National courts. McBain, Chapter XXIII.

Who may vote in National elections? McBain, page 237.

\*At the next National election, how many women in the nation may vote? 15,500,000.

\*Explain how political parties control our National Government. McBain, Chapter XXIX; Boyd, Chapter IX.

Will Virginia men refuse their sanction to the enfranchisement of Virginia women? No, if they live up to the traditions of their forefathers. James Madison provided the way by introducing Article V., of U. S. Constitution.

### REFERENCE BOOKS.

Mary Sumner Boyd's The Woman Citizen, published by Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York.

McBain's How We are Governed in Virginia and in the Nation. Bell Book and Stationery Co., Richmond, Va.

Constitution of United States.

Constitution of Virginia.

## FACTS OF GOVERNMENT

Every Virginia Woman  
Should Know

*The Virginia woman will soon be a voting citizen. Realizing this fact, she should equip herself for intelligent citizenship. With this end in view, the following outline of study has been prepared, for the use of the individual woman as well as for the Suffrage Leagues of the state—Mary Pollard Clarke, Chairman of Political Study and Research.*

EQUAL SUFFRAGE LEAGUE OF VA.  
100 N. 4th Street

**Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today**

Coin Holder, Independent Order of Saint Luke, 20<sup>th</sup> Century

VMHC Object Number: 2005.341.15





# Virginia MEDICAL MONTHLY

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

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February, 1948



# Rosemont



Marion, Virginia



## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

WAVES Uniform, Nancy Bailey, 1943

VMHC Object Number: 1995.71.1-18



## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Letter, Evelyn Butts, 1961

On Loan from Butts Family Private Collection

1070 Kennedy Street  
Norfolk, Virginia  
March 9, 1961

Dear Fellow NAACP Member:

It is impossible for a Negro in the South to be radical. The mere fact that he is alive is conclusive proof that he is conservative. So, as one conservative to another, I would like to discuss the issues involved in Mr. Robert D. Robertson's removal as President of the Norfolk NAACP by the National NAACP and the issues involved in the new election ordered by the National Board of Directors of the NAACP.

First, I would like to set the record straight as to why the new election was ordered. Although many charges of improper conduct on the part of Mr. Robertson and the present administration were made by the Norfolk members and considered by the National Office, the National Office based its removal of Mr. Robertson (and all the other officers elected), on two and only two grounds, namely: First: Mr. Robertson's failure to give proper notice to the NAACP members of the meeting in which he, himself, and the members of his slate were reelected to office, as required by the Constitution; and Second: The failure of Mr. Robertson and the present administration to permit qualified candidates to run against him and his slate of officers. In the letter sent to you by Mr. Robertson, Mr. Robertson mentioned only the first ground for his removal and, for obvious reasons, didn't mention the second ground, as he was ordered to do by the National Office.

For the first time in the history of the Norfolk NAACP under the present administration, you will be given the opportunity to express your views on the organization's policies and have something to say about who will carry out these policies as officers of the Chapter. For years, you have given your money but were never given a voice in return.

Regardless of how this election comes out, I think a service has been rendered our organization and the citizens of Norfolk by our slate of candidates, in giving the people this democratic opportunity to end dictatorial practices. What will you do with this opportunity? What are the issues? It has been said that those of us who desire free elections are radical.

Is it radical to ask that the members be informed when elections are held; to ask that fair, honest and democratic elections be conducted in which any member may run for office if he chooses to do so; to ask that the financial records be shown---that the financial records be shown to members and all funds accounted for? Is it radical to ask that the presiding officer treat with courtesy and respect all members who desire to take the floor at meetings and express their opinions, especially elderly ladies and gentlemen?

Is it radical to inquire into how NAACP officers can take the membership fees of the members and claim to fight our enemies one day, support that same enemy the next day, again collect our membership fees another day, and support that enemy the next day-- , and so on? Is it radical to place a higher premium on justice, honesty, fairness, morality, and Christianity than on peace?

Is it radical to cause the racial signs to be removed from the new Public Safety Building so that our Negro citizens will not be embarrassed when they go there to transact business?



Is it radical to insist that credit be properly given to our young courageous students and children, who suffer jailing, violence and intimidation to bring about changes for our benefit? Is it radical to insist that this credit not be stolen from the young students and taken by uncourageous persons, claiming to have accomplished these benefits by "peaceful negotiations"?

Is it radical to use our efforts to secure employment for Negroes free from discriminatory bars, and not be either ashamed or afraid to engage in peaceful picketting so that Negroes can work and buy food for their children like any other citizen? Is Mr. Roy W. Wilkins, the National Executive Secretary, and the National Board of Directors, who removed the officers of the local branch, radical--are they radical for wanting the Norfolk Chapter to be one they can be proud of?

Is it radical to dream of and work for a City where Negroes are citizens, free and proud, living peacefully and in prosperity, in good times and bad times, and participating in every area of life? Are these things radical?

We admit that we are militant in fighting for the civil rights of Negro citizens. The NAACP is supposed to be a militant organization. It was founded for this purpose.

Because many of us, on account of our jobs, our families, or other reasons, cannot be militant, the NAACP was established to be militant for us. If the NAACP is not going to be militant, why do we need it? We already have peaceful social clubs, card clubs and fraternal organizations.

The most important issue in this election, my fellow members, is that stated by the words of Our Lord, "Ye cannot serve two masters". Weigh these words when you consider the inaction and the conduct of the present administration.

It is time for a change to an administration that can lead the NAACP in bringing to the Negroes of Norfolk "Peace with Justice and Honor" so that there can be a New Frontier in Race Relations.

We invite you to attend the election on Monday, March 13th at 8 p.m., Second Calvary Baptist Church, Corprew and Godfrey Avenues. We ask you to support the Militant Candidates who, when elected, will remain your servants and militant warriors in the cause for freedom.

Very truly yours,

*Evelyn Butts*

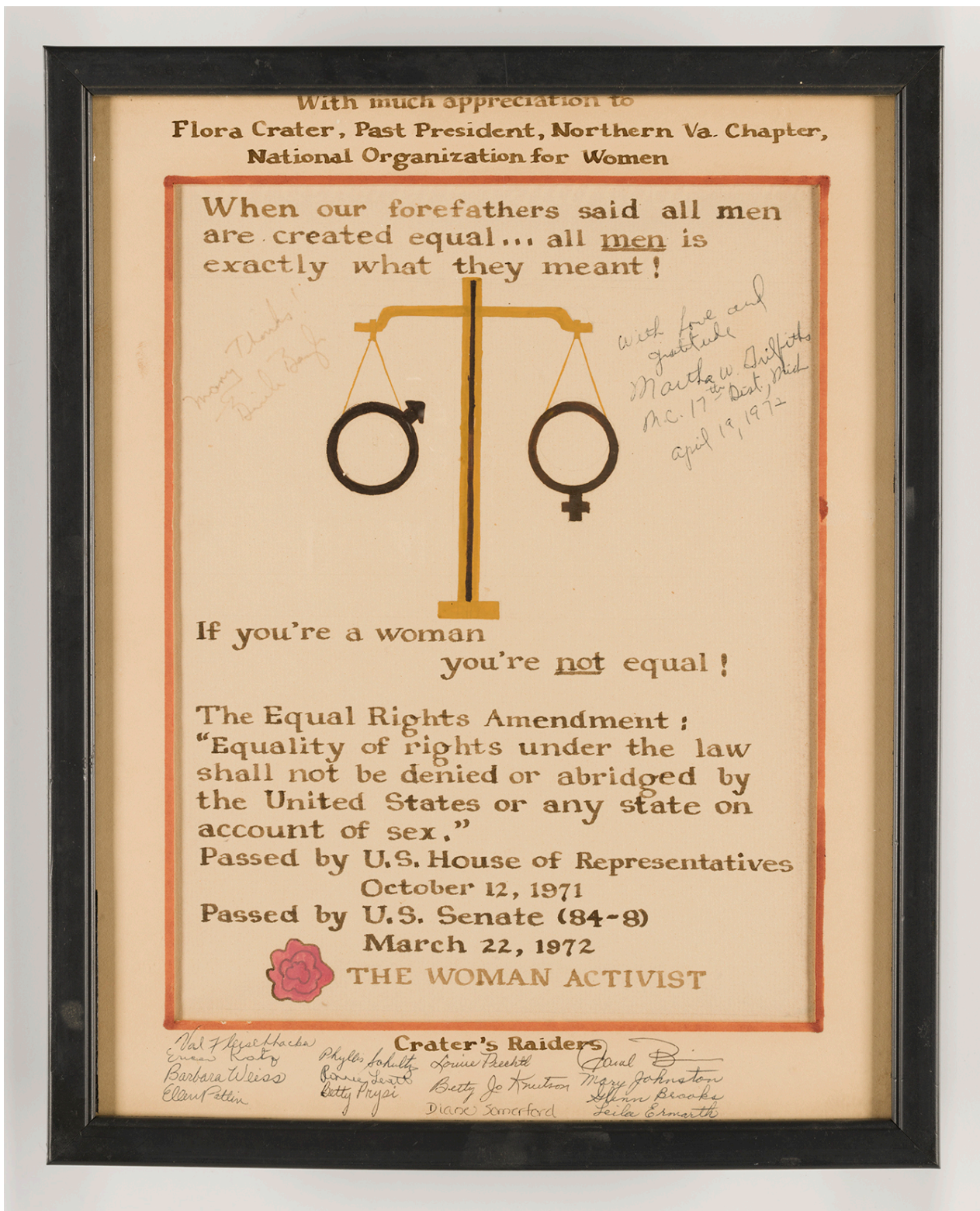
(Mrs.) Evelyn Butts



## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Certificate of Appreciation, Flora Crater, 1972

On loan from Walt Crater and Vivian Gray





## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Political Buttons, 1970s-1980s

VMHC Object Numbers: 2004.53.45, 2004.53.39, 2004.53.52, 2004.53.8, 2004.53.44, 2004.53.56



VMHC Object Number: 2019.41.6

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## Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Turtle Hand Drum, Chief Anne Richardson, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

On loan from Chief Anne Richardson, Rappahannock Tribe





Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

Protest Sign, Suzanne Summer LaPierre, 2017

VMHC Object Number: 2017.14

