

Mississippi

1897—Nellie Nugent Somerville served as the first president of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA), and was active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. MWSA members gave speeches, wrote letters, and marched in parades and fairs to promote suffrage. Like many suffragist groups, MWSA was divided between those who thought a federal amendment was the best way to secure suffrage, and others who believed that Mississippi should enact state suffrage laws. MWSA members advocated for occupational safety, as well as public health measures and child protection measures.

1899—MWSA and the suffrage movement gained steam when the MWSA elected Belle Kearney as president. Like Somerville, Kearney was born into a wealthy Mississippi family and was active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. As MWSA president, Kearney advocated for the enfranchisement of literate White women. MWSA limited its suffrage advocacy to participation in parades and fairs, which it viewed as a more polite path to change.

1908—Suffragists held a convention at the Governor's Mansion.

1920—Mississippi's Legislature rejected the 19th Amendment in February 1920. But when the legislature heard that Delaware, a Republican state, could take the amendment over the finish line, Mississippi Democrats convinced the legislature to reconsider the 19th Amendment.

This time, the Senate vote was tied, and the Lieutenant Governor broke the tie in favor of passage. The Mississippi House was unconvinced and rejected the amendment.

1922—Nellie Nugent Somerville became Mississippi's first female state legislator.

March 22, 1984—Mississippi ratified the 19th Amendment.*

* Jim Crow laws were enforced in Mississippi until passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and Black women were not able to vote post-1920.

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