

Oklahoma

1895—National American Woman Suffrage Association organizer Laura Gregg visited Oklahoma, where she and local suffragists established the Oklahoma Territory Equal Suffrage Association (OTESA).

1897 and 1899—OTESA submitted suffrage petitions and held meetings and lectures to urge the Territorial Legislature to consider suffrage legislation. Although the House passed the bills, the Committee on Elections of the Council (similar to a senate) delayed the bills to prevent passage.

1907— During the statehood process, OTESA unsuccessfully lobbied congressional delegates to include suffrage in Oklahoma's constitution. OTESA's organizational structure dissolved shortly after, and the Oklahoma Woman Suffrage Association (OWSA) assumed the leading suffrage role. One of OWSA's early presidents, Oklahoma City resident Kate Biggers, lobbied legislators and revitalized suffrage clubs across the state.

1910— Led by Biggers, suffragists gathered enough signatures (38,500) to add suffrage to the ballot, but opponents challenged the signatures, arguing that 5,000 of the signatures were fraudulent. The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled in favor of suffragists and the amendment appeared on the ballot. After the liquor industry claimed that women voters would be quick to support Prohibition and other moral restrictions, anti-suffragists soundly defeated the measure by a vote of 128,928 to 88,808.

1918—During the next suffrage ballot measure, the Oklahoma Anti-Suffrage Association used teas, luncheons, and literature to argue that equal suffrage would not solve women's issues and would undermine traditional feminine values.

Suffragists canvassed and published appeals to connect with supporters, and legislators understood the value of appealing to women voters. Although the governor did not endorse suffrage, he agreed that the voters should be permitted to consider the issue via referendum.

On November 5, 1918, Oklahoma voters supported suffrage with 106,909 votes in favor, and 81,481 votes opposed, making Oklahoma the 21st state to grant women the right to vote.

February 28, 1920—Oklahoma ratified the 19th Amendment.*

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

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