

South Dakota

1870s—The Territorial Legislature considered suffrage legislation several times, and rejected the notion of women voting.

1885—The Territorial Legislature granted women voting rights for school board elections. The same year, Marietta Bones established the Dakota Territory Suffrage Club in Yankton, the territory's capital.

1889—Suffragists suffered a major setback when South Dakota became a state, and its new constitution specifically limited voting to men. This limitation meant that the legislature could no longer change the suffrage law on its own; instead, it needed to use the constitutional amendment route—bill passage during two successive legislative sessions and a successful voter referendum.

The same year, suffragists founded the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association (SDESA). Mamie Shields Pyle led SDESA for decades and worked with legislators and other community leaders. Pyle understood that many voters feared the temperance movement and tried to isolate SDESA from its efforts.

1890— After the state legislature passed a suffrage bill, voters soundly defeated the referendum.

1898—The legislature passed another suffrage bill, and SDESA mounted an active campaign with national leaders like Susan B. Anthony traveling to the state. The anti-suffrage forces were also active, particularly the liquor industry, and South Dakota voters again defeated the bill.

1912—Suffragists formed the South Dakota Universal Franchise League (SDUFL) and published the *South Dakota Messenger* to expand their support. Under the leadership of Alma Storm, the *Messenger* advocated a more confrontational approach to suffrage—acknowledging that suffrage was a right, not a privilege.

1918—Much like national suffrage groups, SDESA and SDUFL worked separately and each filled vital roles. SDESA provided the essential organizational, strategic, and mobilization work, while SDUFL and the *Messenger* offered fiery rhetoric in support of the suffrage referendum. Suffrage finally became South Dakota law, with 64% of South Dakota's voters approving the referendum.

December 4, 1919—South Dakota ratified the 19th Amendment.

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