



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Librarian of Virginia

Denied a Voice, They Refused to Be Silent.

***We Demand: Women's Suffrage in Virginia*, an exhibition at the Library of Virginia, tells the story of the campaign for the women's vote in the commonwealth.**

RUNS JANUARY 13–DECEMBER 5, 2020

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Richmond, Virginia – *We Demand: Women's Suffrage in Virginia*, a free exhibition at the Library of Virginia running January 13–December 7, 2020, commemorates the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote.

On November 2, 1920, nearly 80,000 Virginia women, both black and white, eagerly went to the polls to vote in what the nation viewed as a remarkable event—the first time that women in every state exercised the right to vote. *We Demand* presents the full, but little known, story of the campaign for woman suffrage in a key southern state where traditional views about women (and much else) held sway. Despite the challenges they faced, Virginia suffragists created an effective state organization, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, that coordinated the efforts of scores of local chapters located not only in urban areas but, surprisingly, in remote and rural areas of the state as well. Indeed, they succeeded in their original objective of persuading the General Assembly to propose a woman suffrage amendment to the state constitution.

We Demand helps us understand who these women were and how they developed the practical arguments and strategies they believed would work with those they needed to convince. The exhibition also explores the divergent opinions of white Virginian suffragists as they debated whether their goal should be an amendment to the state or to the federal constitution, and whether their tactics should rely on persuasion or militancy. Some Virginia suffragists

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joined the more radical Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (now the National Woman's Party) and actively participated in demonstrations in Washington, D.C., where they were arrested and jailed for their efforts. In a state that had substantially disfranchised its black male citizens, African American women had to work more quietly than their white counterparts did to avoid a backlash that might jeopardize their cause. Their contributions to the suffrage movement in Virginia have often been overlooked. *We Demand* presents their efforts on behalf of social justice and suffrage as an important part of the story.

Among the items displayed will be four banners carried by the Virginia branch of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, pamphlets and postcards distributed by the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, and other documentary evidence of the ability of these dedicated women to organize a highly effective lobbying organization. The exhibition will also use photographs and newsreel clips of events such as the 1913 suffrage march in Washington, D.C., (in which Virginia women participated) and the 1919 promotional tour called the "Prison Special." Women who had been jailed for protesting traveled the country by train. Clad in replicas of their prison attire, they shared stories about their harsh treatment as a means to garner support for the amendment.

We Demand is presented with support by the General Assembly's Task Force to Commemorate the Centennial Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote. A traveling version will be available beginning in March 2020.

Look for information about exhibition-related events and programs on the Library's website calendar (www.lva.virginia.gov/news) and Facebook page in the coming weeks.

Related images are available here (this includes a Word document with caption/credit information):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1u72jb6mfxyb1kh/AACNUYGxYQDIgXRRIk4eC3yca?dl=0>

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December 13, 2019