

Councilwoman O'Connor's Woodbury History Lesson

# Voting While *Here!*



November is a time for giving thanks. We can be joyful for so many parts of our personal lives and our communities. One area that I want to focus on for this month's article is the precious gift of voting which is an essential component of a true democracy. It is a right for all American adult citizens that came at a very high price. One that our forbearers paid on our behalf. A price that we should honor and appreciate.

Why is voting so important in a democracy? Democracy is a form of government in which the people have the authority to deliberate and decide legislation, or to choose governing officials to do so. We have the ability to share our various perspectives and to respectfully agree to disagree in a public forum.



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Taft arrived in the morning and is shown above (arrow) in front of Daniel Steelman's home on Cooper Street, the present Catholic Rectory. Roosevelt came later in the day and eventually won the nomination from Taft, but lost the Presidency to Woodrow Wilson, who was also in Woodbury just eight months earlier. (See page 87).



## WOODBURY'S CAMPAIGN HISTORY

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## NEW JERSEY’S UNIQUE VOTING

While we are familiar with the fact that the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote, I was surprised to learn that some New Jersey females could vote much earlier. New Jersey’s first constitution in 1776 gave voting rights to “all inhabitants of this colony, of full age, who are worth fifty pounds ... and have resided within the county ... for twelve months.” In 1790 the legislature reworded the law to say “he or she,” clarifying that both men and women had voting rights. But only single women could vote because married women could not own property. Still, many unmarried women voted in New Jersey in the 1790s and the very early 1800s.

If they met the residency and property requirements, African Americans could also vote. In 1797, the New Jersey government required voters to be free inhabitants. We do not know if enslaved African Americans voted before this law was passed -- the property requirements made that unlikely, but no law specifically prohibited them from doing so.

While this is an amazing act, New Jersey like other states granted and then retracted the vote from women and African Americans during the late 1800s. The 15th Amendment to the Constitution stated that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Because it excluded women and those considered non-citizens at the time, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1920 with new language. It stated “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on *account of sex*,” which solidified voting rights for women. Despite these Amendments, many decades passed with laws and social customs preventing African Americans from voting until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965.





## THE INDIGENOUS IMPACT ON VOTING



Indigenous suffragist Zitkala-Sa also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin

Indigenous women such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy greatly impacted the struggle for women's voting rights. *'White suffragists, fascinated by Native matriarchal power, invited Native women to speak at conferences, join parades and write for their publications. Native suffragists took advantage of these opportunities to speak about pressing issues in their communities — Native voting, land loss and treaty rights. But their stories have largely been forgotten.'*

*After the 19th Amendment was ratified on Aug. 18, 1920, and celebrated by millions of women across the country, the Indigenous suffragist Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, also known as Zitkala-Sa, a citizen of the Yankton Sioux Tribe, reminded newly enfranchised white women that the fight was far from over. "The Indian woman rejoices with you," she proclaimed to members of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, but she urged them to remember their Native sisters, many of whom lacked the right to vote.'* —excerpt from article by Cathleen D. Cahill and Sarah Deer Published July 31, 2020 Updated Aug. 19, 2020

The Snyder Act of 1924 admitted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship. Though the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn't until the Snyder Act that Native Americans could enjoy the rights granted by this amendment.

We can see that voting was a right that required the contribution of many people with steadfast endurance! Today, not only can we vote, but we can also become leaders...



Voting is a great joy...time to pass the baton to the next generation following us!

Resources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/>

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/voting-rights-in-nj-before-the-15th-and-19th.htm>

<https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/>