

WOMEN'S HISTORY

MONTH/MARCH



CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT (1859-1947)

A skilled political strategist, **Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt** was a suffragist and peace activist who helped secure for American women the right to vote. She directed the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and founded the League of Women Voters (1920) to bring women into the political mainstream.

HISTORY AND MEANING

The date was August 18, 1920, and the man was Harry Burn, a 24-year-old representative from East Tennessee who two years earlier had become the youngest member of the state legislature. The red rose signified his opposition to the proposed 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which 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 sex." By the summer of 1920, 35 states had ratified the measure, bringing it one vote short of the required 36. In Tennessee, it had sailed through the Senate but stalled in the House of Representatives, prompting thousands of pro- and anti-suffrage activists to descend upon Nashville. Tennessee was the last state and Mr. Burn's was the last Vote. Harry's mother (Phoebe Ensminger Burn) wrote a note to her son that changed everything. I have been watching to see how you stood, but have not noticed anything yet." She ended the missive with a rousing endorsement of the great suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt, imploring her son to "be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the 'rat' in ratification."

Still sporting his red boutonniere but clutching his mother's letter, Burn said "aye" so quickly that it took his fellow legislators a few moments to register his unexpected response. With that single syllable he extended the vote to the women of America and ended half a century of tireless campaigning by generations of suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul, Lucy Burns and, of course, Mrs. Catt.

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