

Laity Minute August 2020

It was a sweltering hot August day. You could almost cut the humidity with a butter knife and not one leaf on a tree was blowing as there was no breeze. But, a storm had been brewing. This storm was like no other before it. It was unique. Some feared it. Some saw it as the end of time. But others couldn't wait for it to get here.

The storm had been brewing for years and it was about to erupt over the State of Tennessee, specifically Nashville. And, finally, on August 18, 1920, the storm ended with a whack of the gavel in the Tennessee State House with a single vote by Representative Harry T. Burn of McMinn County. With that single vote from Rep. Burn, women of the United States won the right to vote. (Let's not forget, however, that his mother was the one who told him how to vote! "Hurray and vote for Suffrage and don't keep them in doubt," she urged.) Tennessee was the state that allowed the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Thousands of women marched, protested, and even endured physical harm for the cause. It was a hard-fought battle from women of all races, ages, and income levels.

Who else was on the front lines fighting for the right to vote? Methodists.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was an itinerant Methodist preacher who had a passion for equality. Even before the 1920 vote, Truth advocated for the rights of all people. Frances Willard (1839-1898) worked her whole life to improve the lives of women and girls including the vote. Rev. Anna Howard Shaw (1847 – 1919), one of the first women granted a license to preach by the Methodist Episcopal Church, was the president of the National American Suffrage Association for 11 years. Today, at her United Methodist alma mater, her namesake center continues to promote women's empowerment. Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) championed the rights of African-American voters just after the 19th Amendment was passed. She founded a school, Bethune-Cookman University, which receives support from the United Methodist Church's Black College Fund. Jessie Daniel Ames (1883-1972) played a key role in getting Texas to become the first state to ratify the women's vote. She also was a graduate of Southwestern University, a United Methodist related school. Dorothy Height (1912-2010) was on the stage when Dr. Martin Luther King gave his historic "I Have a Dream" speech. Height considered Mary McLeod Bethune a mentor and exemplified the Wesleyan Way.

John Wesley encouraged women to preach even though it was an unpopular sentiment in society. But, he pushed the boundary anyway, knowing women had so much to contribute to the work Methodists set out to do. Even though the vote for women came long after Wesley was gone, the sense of justice carried on.

I have to admit I have read many books on the Suffragette Movement (both in the U.S. and internationally). I am truly in awe of the unshakable courage they had. I am continually inspired by their unyielding and unwavering sense of justice which propelled them to do whatever it took to reach their goal. Because of their efforts, my great grandmother (who was Methodist) was able to vote for the first time in her mid-20s. This voting right started with her and continues to this day as my 7-year-old niece Scarlett watches her mother vote.

That hot August day in Nashville changed the course of history. It gave women economic and social freedom they had not had before. And the United Methodist Women were right there in the thick of the storm.

Enterprise.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 1920.

The Weather
Fair tonight and Thursday;
moderate temperature; moderate
north and northeast winds.

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BIG FIRE

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TENNESSEE RATIFIES THE SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT

Is the Necessary 36th State Placing Women Upon Equal Voting Terms With the Men

NASHVILLE, Tenn., Aug. 18, (2.30 this afternoon).—Ratification of the federal suffrage amendment was completed with favorable action by the Tennessee House. The vote in the House was 50 to 46. The Senate ratified the amendment last Friday by a vote of 25 to 4.

Speaker Walker in an attempt to have the action reconsidered changed his vote to aye, moved that such action be taken. Mr. Walker is re-

HERO'S BODY COMING HOME

Raffaele Villano Is To Be Brought from French Soil

HIS BROTHER ANTONIO IS OFFICIALLY NOTIFIED

Word has been received by Antonio Villano, 27 Laurel street, a real estate agent here, by the war department

Peace!

Kelly