

THE YELLOW ROSE – A SYMBOL OF VICTORY FOR SUFFRAGISTS

The yellow rose represents VICTORY for the Suffragists, who, for almost a century, struggled to gain the vote for women. The yellow rose appears in the center of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad commemorative logo for their year-long celebration of the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, securing the vote for women. Additionally, it is the focal point of a garden of illuminating yellow solar roses that will be moved across the area throughout 2020.

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were in Kansas in 1867, at which time the state was considering passage of a state suffrage referendum, the women adopted the Kansas state flower, the sunflower, as a symbol of the suffrage cause. Soon, gold pins, yellow ribbons and sashes, as well as the yellow rose, replacing the sunflower as it was more attainable and smaller, were worn by suffragists.

The largest group, the National American Woman Suffrage Association had no official colors, but gold was the most commonly used and later, when parades were utilized, white. The tricolor flag (gold, white and purple) was used exclusively by the National Woman's Party.

After the 19th amendment was passed by Congress in 1919, it had to be ratified by 36 (three-fourths) of the states. Thirty-five states had voted by August, 1920; only one, Tennessee, had not yet voted; the last opportunity for ratification was at hand. Both the suffragists and anti-suffragists descended upon Nashville in the hot summer of 1920 for the called session of the Tennessee General Assembly when the vote was to be considered. The yellow rose was in vogue in Nashville, but so was the red rose. The suffragists wore the yellow and the anti's wore the red. Members of the general assembly did likewise.

The Tennessee Senate passed the resolution of support overwhelmingly, but the House was divided. When the House members entered the chamber for the first vote on the suffrage amendment, from the count of the yellow and red roses, it appeared the suffragists had lost 49 – 47, but when the first vote was taken the count was 48 – 48. After the second reading, the vote remained at 48 – 48. At the beginning of the third and final session on August 18, 1920, a brown envelope had been delivered to the youngest member of the House, Harry Burn, who represented McMinn County, located between Knoxville and Chattanooga. He read the letter and placed it in the breast pocket of his suit coat. Before the third reading of the bill, Representative Burn, patted the pocket which contained the letter from his mother, a widow. He thought back on her words: "Hurrah and vote for Suffrage and don't keep them in doubt. I noticed some of the speeches against. They are bitter. I've been waiting to see how you stood but have not seen anything yet...don't forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Cat put the 'rat' in ratification. Love, Mama."

With the third reading and final vote, Harry Burn, still wearing a red rose, changed his vote and the amendment passed 49 – 47. Thus the yellow rose became the VICTORY symbol for the suffragists. The Governor of Tennessee signed the bill on August 24, and the US Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby, signed it into law on August 26, 1920.

August 26 has now become National Women's Equality Day in America.