



Passing the Torch

Honoring Women's Suffrage 1920 — 2020

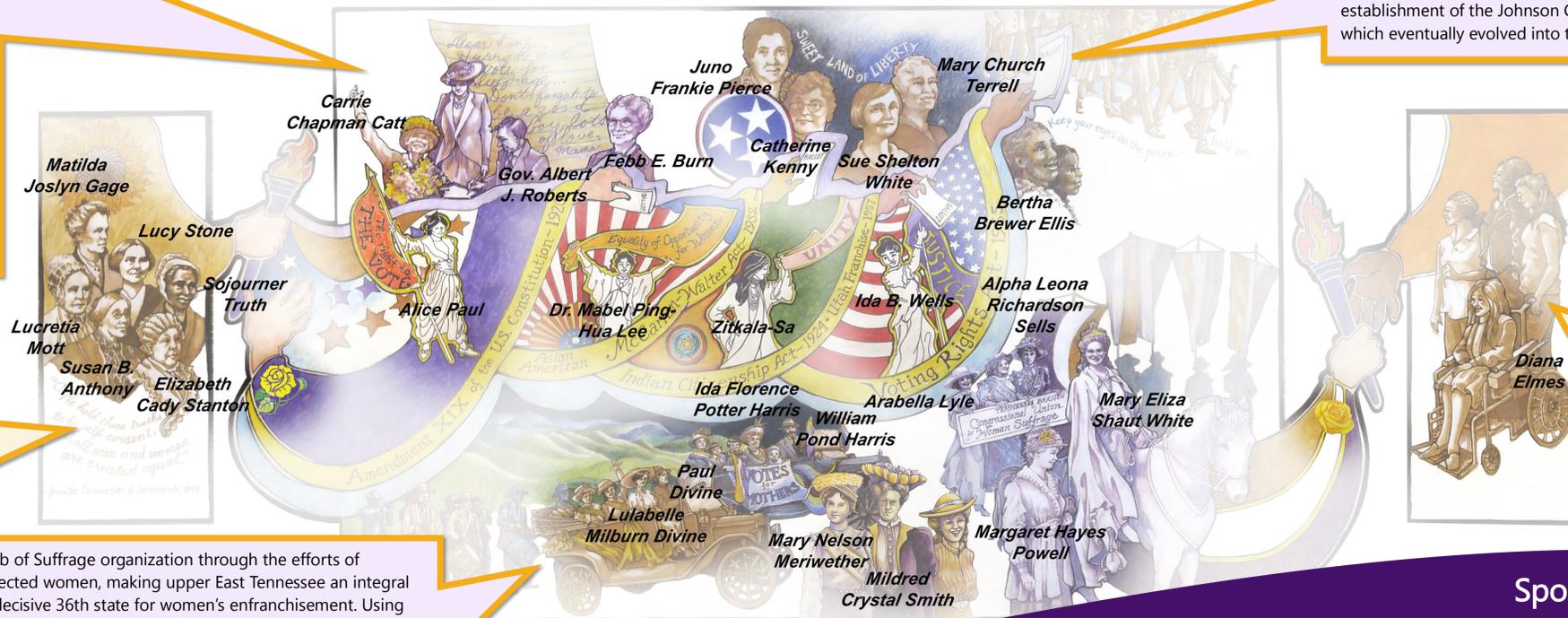
Tennessee became the "Perfect 36" on August 18, 1920, when the state legislature voted to ratify the 19th Amendment, which guarantees that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex." Suffragists adopted the yellow rose as a symbol of support; red roses were the choice of anti-suffragists. This mural reflects on 172 years of women's suffrage beginning with the Mothers of the Movement, who organized the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. These trailblazers subsequently passed the torch to future generations who continue to organize and fight for equality today.

Carrie Chapman Catt celebrated the final victory for women's suffrage upon her return to NYC from Nashville, where Gov. Albert Roberts signed the state's ratification on August 24. After five days of repeated tied votes, the legislation passed by one vote cast by Sen. Harry Burn, who received a letter from his mother urging him to vote for suffrage. A portion of the letter in Febb Burn's handwriting is seen on her left. Also featured here is Alice Paul, who formed the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU) and later, the more militant National Woman's Party in 1916.

Backed by banners associated with each movement, the middle section recognizes that the 19th Amendment did not grant all women the right to vote. Beginning with the legislation passed in 1920, the mural illustrates the Snyder Act of 1924, which gave citizenship to First Nations people; the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which allowed people of Asian descent to immigrate and become citizens; and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which made it illegal to impose voting restrictions on African Americans.

From the early involvement of Sojourner Truth, women of color have led the way to achieve equality and voting rights. This segment of the mural honors the efforts of several Tennesseans including African Americans Frankie Pierce, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell. Johnson City's Bertha Brewer Ellis is depicted here with a young child to honor her establishment of the Johnson City Girls Club in the mid-20th century, which eventually evolved into the Girls Inc. of today.

Following their meeting at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Conference, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott conceptualized the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. The women shown here, all participants at the Convention, were early leaders of the movement.



Accepting the torch from previous generations, contemporary women continue to build on the legacy of suffragists whose determined activism over many years transformed social hierarchies and produced the largest one-time increase in voters in American history with a woman's right to vote. Three of the figures are meant to be symbolic of youth, proud of their female and cultural heritage, and are not portraits of particular individuals. The young woman using a wheelchair represents Diana Elmes, the artist's sister-in-law, who helped develop the first disability legislation passed by Congress in the 1970s.

Johnson City became a central hub of Suffrage organization through the efforts of politically savvy and socially connected women, making upper East Tennessee an integral part of Tennessee becoming the decisive 36th state for women's enfranchisement. Using the 1913 Washington, D.C. parade and the 1915 Nashville parade as inspiration, Mary Eliza Shaut White, on horseback, led the Johnson City suffrage parade on October 7, 1916. Mrs. White was chair of the Tennessee branch of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage and a leader in the Johnson City Suffrage Club. She and the other Johnson City women and men were joined by suffragists from Knoxville and Jonesborough. The parade included beautifully decorated vehicles and the fife and drum corps from Mountain Home. Beginning at the corner of Boone Street and Watauga Avenue, the parade ended with a pro-suffrage rally and keynote address by Mary Nelson Williams Meriwether, vice chair of the Tennessee Congressional Union.

Artist: Ellen Elmes
www.ellenelmes.com

Sponsored by:

- Centennial Suffrage Celebration Coalition of Johnson City
- Bravissima! Women Sponsoring the Arts!
- Johnson City Public Art
- ETSU Leadership and Civic Engagement
- ETSU Reece Museum



More info:

<https://jcpublicart.com/passing-the-torch/>

