

Donna Castellano speech  
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Pomeroy NVWT Marker Dedication Ceremony  
YMCA Greene Street  
Huntsville, AL May 19, 2021

The way we recognize our history says something about who we are. On behalf of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, we are proud to have worked with national, state and local organizations to showcase a chapter in our history that demands our attention.

We are here today to dedicate a historic marker honoring Huntsville's suffrage movement, showing our respect for those who fought to give women equal voting rights.

In recognition of the anniversary of the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites partnered to create a National Votes for Women Trail. This trail recognizes sites across all 50 states that celebrate the women, events and places involved in the fight for women's suffrage. The Alabama Women's Suffrage Centennial Committee coordinated Alabama's Pomeroy marker program. Alabama received six Pomeroy Markers, one of which we will reveal today.

At this site in 1912, the Huntsville Equal Suffrage Association met in the YMCA and reaffirmed their commitment to fight for equal voting rights for Alabama women.

And in 1914, representatives from suffrage organizations across the state met in the YMCA building for a convention to develop strategies to push forward their agenda for equal voting rights.

This marker will join a marker on McClung Avenue recognizing Huntsville's suffrage pioneers, installed by the Twickenham Town Chapter of the DAR last year.

Huntsville had one of Alabama's first suffrage organizations in the state, created after a visit by Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt in 1895 at the Huntsville City Hall. (Wash Street Clinton Ave) Although the Alabama legislature refused to endorse women's suffrage, they did pass laws that gave more rights and protections to Alabama women and children.

And Alabama lawmakers occasionally came through with surprising decisions. For example, after the convention here in 1914, legislators passed a law allowing women to run for seats on county school boards. In 1916, Madison County elected its first woman to public office, to the Madison County school board, with all male votes.

When women won the vote, more than 124,000 Alabama women signed up. In fact, more Alabama women registered to vote than any other state in the south.

Our research into Huntsville's suffrage movement showed us that Huntsville needed MORE historic markers recognizing Huntsville women who made history. And we have worked with individuals and community partners to make this happen.

So, later this year, we will dedicate a marker recognizing Alice Boarman Baldrige, whose marker will be at the site of her former home on Adams Street. Alice Boarman Baldrige was the first woman elected to public office, the Madison County School Board. She was also first female admitted to practice law in Madison County. Sue and John Shaver funded this marker, as John wanted to do something to recognize his “Aunt Alice.”

We will also recognize the first Black women who registered to vote in 1920. We will never know how many Black women were denied the right to register due to the racist provisions of Alabama’s 1901 Constitution. But Mary Binford Ellen Brandon, India Herndon, Lou Bertha Johnson, Celia Love and Dora Lowery successfully registered, and their names will be inscribed on a historic marker at Council High Memorial Park. This marker represents a partnership between the Historic Huntsville Foundation and the William Hooper Council Alumni Association.

And we will also recognize Dr. Frances Roberts, the first woman to graduate with a Ph.D. in History from the University of Alabama and the driving force behind Alabama and Huntsville’s historic preservation movement. The Huntsville-Madison County Bicentennial Committee funded this marker, which will be placed at Dr. Roberts’ Randolph Avenue house.

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The longest journeys begin with the first step. I want to introduce you to the women and organizations who set us on this path.

First is Marsha Weinstein, president of the National Collaborative of Women's History Sites. Marsha is a Huntsville native, currently resides in Louisville, KY, and she made a special trip home to be with us today!

Next, is Dr. Valerie Burns, Chairman of the Historic Marker Subcommittee for the Alabama Women's Suffrage Centennial Committee. Dr. Burns is also an associate professor of history at the University of West Alabama, and author of **Visions of the Black Belt: A Cultural Survey of the Heart of Alabama**, and a former president of the Alabama Historical Association. All of us in HSV owe her a debt of gratitude for her work on this project.

Dr. Alex Colvin is the Public Programs Curator at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The Alabama Department of Archives and History coordinated the marker program as well as other state-sponsored suffrage events.

And finally, at the end of any journey is a return back home, the place where we started. The YMCA. Newspaper articles about the 1914 suffrage convention extolled the beauty of the YMCA, with its handsome, spacious gymnasium and the grand hall. If those women visited the YMCA today, thanks to the stewardship of Janet Watson and Rebekah McKinney.