



Name _____

Date _____ Class _____



BACKGROUND: 1920 Fight for Women's Suffrage



L. Exum Clement with other legislators on the State Capitol grounds, Raleigh, 1921. Lillian Exum Clement Stafford Papers, PC.2084. State Archives of N.C.

The women's suffrage movement in North Carolina began in 1894 with the formation of the Equal Suffrage Association in Asheville, led by Helen Morris Lewis, who advocated for a constitutional amendment to grant women the right to vote. In 1897, a state senator introduced a women's suffrage bill, but it moved to the Committee on Psychiatric Hospitals and was ignored.

The movement revived in 1913 with the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League meeting in Charlotte. Many believed women's contributions during World War I would sway President Wilson and congress to support suffrage. In 1919, U.S. congress approved the 19th Amendment for the state ratification process.

In response, an anti-suffrage movement grew to oppose North Carolina's ratification. Textile mill owners, who relied on child labor, were among those who feared women's voting power. Concerns about race influenced both sides of the debate. In August 1920, Governor Thomas W. Bickett called a special session to consider the amendment, but the state senate voted by a narrow margin to delay voting. Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify, changing federal law. Despite not being able to vote herself, Lillian Exum Clement, a lawyer from Asheville, was elected as a Buncombe County representative in 1920, and became the South's first woman legislator. The legislature revised laws that year to allow women to vote.

North Carolina Suffrage Leaders

Gertrude Weil was a leader of the N.C. Equal Suffrage League and worked tirelessly on a grassroots campaign to persuade the legislature to ratify the 19th Amendment. Lillian Exum Clement was an attorney in Asheville and elected as a state representative in 1920 before she herself could vote. Charlotte Hawkins Brown founded a boarding school for African American students near Greensboro, founded the N.C. Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, and organized voter registration drives 1920s-1940s to register African Americans.



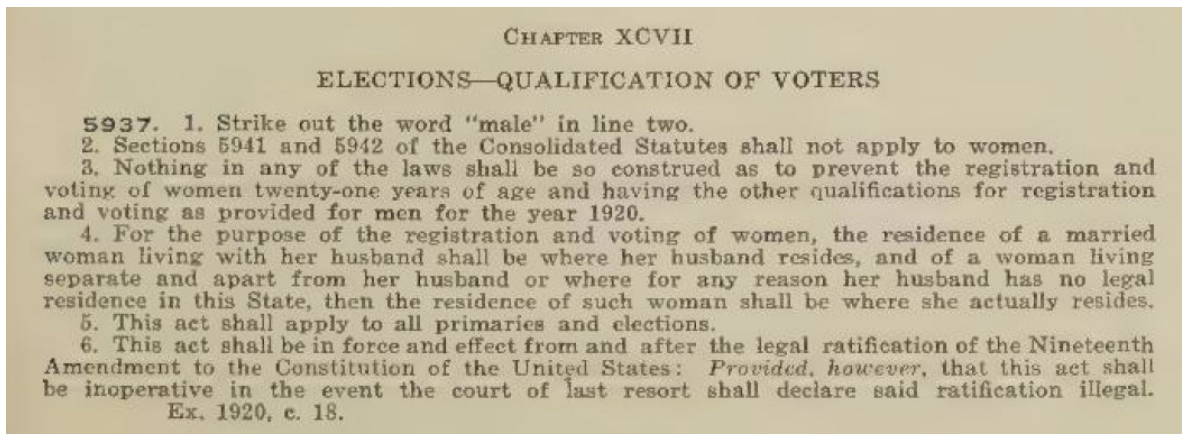
Gertrude Weil. Gertrude Weil Papers, PC.1488.50. State Archives of N.C.



Lillian Exum Clement. Lillian Exum Clement Stafford Papers, PC.2084. State Archives of N.C.



Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Palmer Institute, Sedalia, N.C. N.83.12.9. State Archives of N.C.



Amendments to the Consolidated Statutes enacted by the General Assembly of North Carolina, Extra Session 1920 and Regular Session 1921, p. 16, state publications collection, State Library of N.C.

Quick Fact Check

1. When did North Carolina first elect a woman to office?
2. Name a pro-suffrage organization in the 1910s.
3. What happened when a state senator introduced a woman's suffrage bill in 1897?
4. Why were some against woman's suffrage?