

VOTES FOR WOMEN



2020

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## The YMCA Building and Votes for Women

One hundred years ago, many women received the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Until then, most women in the United States could not vote. The 19th amendment was big step forward in equal rights and opportunities for women.

When our country was founded in 1789, most men and women did not believe that women should be involved in politics and governing. Over time, these ideas changed.

Women began to form groups and organize for suffrage, or the right to vote, in the 1840s. Women wanted their voices heard in government. To have government reflect their ideas, they needed to vote. Women who fought for the right to vote were called suffragists.

Huntsville's suffrage movement began in 1895, when a group of women and men created the Huntsville Equal Suffrage Association. The YMCA Building on Greene Street is one of the places where Huntsville suffragists held their meetings.

Huntsville suffragists wanted to improve their city, state and nation. They wanted good schools and good teachers for all children. And they wanted to serve in elected office, so they could help make the decisions that affected their community.

Alice Baldrige, a Huntsville suffragist, was the first woman elected to public office in Madison County. Alice won a seat on the Madison County School Board in 1916. This was four years before women had the right to vote! Men voted for Alice Baldrige because they believed she would do the best job. Alice also studied law and became Huntsville's first female attorney in 1918.

Alice later wrote she was surprised men voted for her in the 1916 election. She said she expected to lose, but she could not let potential failure stop her from trying. She said her effort, even if she failed, would make it easier for the next woman.

Because of women like Alice Baldrige, women can now be anything they want to be.

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*About the YMCA: The Young Men Christian's Association (the YMCA) is an organization created in the 1900's to support and strengthen young men, women, children and families through social activities and recreation. Huntsville's first YMCA was in the building on Greene Street, which was built in 1910. This building is no longer owned by the YMCA. There are three YMCA organizations in the greater Huntsville area.*