

March 1: Alice Paul

Alice Paul was born in 1885 to Quaker parents and a Quaker community. Her mother, Tacie Paul, was a member of the National Woman Suffrage Association, so Alice grew up with an understanding of this important issue. After graduating from Swarthmore College, Alice went to London to study social work and to work in a settlement house.

However, she soon became involved in the British suffrage movement and was mentored by the famous Pankhursts who were the leaders of the British movement. British suffragists were seriously militant and Alice, along with many others, was arrested and imprisoned many times. Women arrested for their protests in the suffrage movement often went on hunger strikes. It was in the English jails that the practice of forcing feeding tubes down the throats of the militant women was first used. (Today, it is used against prisoners at Guantanamo.)

On her return to the United States, Alice became active in the American suffrage movement, and suffered some of the same treatment as the English suffragists. The public uproar about the treatment of the women led President Wilson to reverse his position and support woman suffrage. The 19th Amendment, providing for women to have the right to vote, passed in August of 1920.

Alice didn't miss a step. She drafted the Equal Rights Amendment (see below) and began the work that would occupy her for the rest of her life. The ERA was introduced in Congress every year from 1923 until 1972 when the Senate and the House passed the amendment and included a seven year deadline for ratification. In order to become an amendment to the constitution, two thirds of states (38) had to vote to ratify. By 1977, 35 states had ratified and in that year, after working tirelessly for its ratification, Alice Paul died.

The Equal Rights Amendment reads:

Section 1: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2: The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3: This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

For more information: Google The Alice Paul Institute and/or the Equal Rights Amendment