

## Opening Remarks for Alice Paul Day and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries Celebration

Good morning, I'm Marilyn Carroll, President of the Ridgefield League and I'd like to thank you all for coming out this morning to help us celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the founding of the League of Women Voters, the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment giving woman the right to vote, and the 135<sup>th</sup> Birthday of our own Ridgefield Radical, Suffragette Alice Paul. Thank you to our hosts, Hildi Grob and the Keeler Tavern for allowing us to use this beautiful facility.

You know, the League celebrates Alice's birthday every year because, she lived in Ridgefield for over 30 years and she was one of the most influential and consequential leaders in the women's movement. But to be honest, Carrie Chapman Catt, the founder of the League of Women Voters who would have celebrated her 161<sup>st</sup> on January 9<sup>th</sup>, would be most displeased to hear that we have an Alice Paul Day instead of a Carrie Chapman Catt day. You see despite their mutual goal to achieve the vote for women, Carrie and Alice were real rivals, and I'll tell you a little bit more about that later!

But before I discuss the Paul/Catt feud and tell you why we think Alice was so special, I'd like to take a minute to bring your attention to the beautiful replica of our 1911 Votes for Women banner hanging on the wall. It was created by the Reverend Maria Pia Seirup who is with us today. The original banner was used by Ridgefield suffragists in the Ridgefield Equal Franchise League early in the 1900's and was in the custody of Mrs. Laura Allee Shields, a prominent Ridgefield suffragist who became a charter member of the Ridgefield League of Woman Voters when the Franchise League became the Ridgefield the League of Women voters. The banner is too delicate to use now, so we are delighted that we have the replica to display and march with. So thank you Maria Pia for the extraordinary work you did to ensure that every detail of the banner was authentically recreated. And thank you to the Lewis Fund and Fairfield County Bank for giving us a grant to have the original banner cleaned and stored and a replica made.

You'll notice that the colors of the banner are green, white and purple - green for strength, white for purity and purple for justice. These are the colors that the British suffragists used in their movement and were the colors that Alice was associated with, having participated in the suffrage movement in England while she was studying there.

But let's start at the beginning and talk a little bit about Alice and her early years!

Alice Paul was born on January 11, 1885 in Moorestown, NJ into a Quaker family where her parents embraced gender equality, education for women, and working to improve society. Paul's mother was a suffragist and brought Alice with her to many women's suffrage meetings.

Alice's education was extraordinary. She attended Swarthmore College, a Quaker school cofounded by her grandfather, graduating with a biology degree in 1905. She attended the New York School of Philanthropy (now Columbia University) and received a Master of Arts degree in sociology in 1907. She then went to England to study social work, and after returning, earned a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 1910. Alice later received her law degree (LL.B) from the Washington College of Law at American University in 1922, and In 1927, she earned a master of laws degree, and finally in 1928, a doctorate in civil law from American University.

She first began her political activism at Swathmore, but it was while she was studying in England and joined Mrs. Pankhurst's women's suffrage efforts there, that she learned militant protest tactics, including picketing, hunger strikes and civil disobedience.

Alice brought these tactics back to the United States, and in 1912, along with her fellow suffragist Lucy Burns, joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), with Paul leading

the Congressional Committee in Washington, DC , where she organized the hugely successful 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession a day before President Wilson's inauguration.

Now this is where her "disagreement" and eventual feud with Carrie Chapman Catt came into play. NAWSA which was lead by Catt, primarily focused on methodical, state-by-state campaigns to win the vote; Paul preferred to aggressively lobby Congress and President Wilson for a federal constitutional amendment. She also thought that the state by state strategy to pass the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was going too slowly and would not be effective, and her more aggressive tactics including marches and picketing made more of an impact. Needless to say, this was a great affront to Catt who had been working in the Suffrage movement for decades. She thought that Alice and the younger suffragists were trying to steal power away from the NAWSA leadership and that Alice basically didn't know her place.

Carrie Catt summed up her objection to what she saw as the militant tactics of younger suffragists like Paul and Burns in a letter to Burns saying : *"You may think we are all a set of old fogies and perhaps we are, but I, for one, thank heaven that I am as much of an old fogy as I am... It requires a good deal more courage to work steadily and steadfastly for 40 or 50 years to gain an end than it does to do an impulsively rash thing and lose it."*

As you can imagine, Paul's participation in NAWSA was just not going to work out and her differences with Catt and NAWSA led her and others to split with NAWSA and continue on with a separate Congressional Union which eventually became the National Woman's Party in 1916. As head of the NWP, she led numerous protests and marches and organized events like the *Silent Sentinels*, suffragists who picketed the White House from January 1917 until June 4, 1919 when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed both by the House of Representatives and the Senate. During this time, many of the nearly 2,000 women who picketed (including Paul) were harassed, arrested, and unjustly treated by local and US authorities, some were even force fed while in jail after participating in hunger strikes.

Despite the rivalry and strategic and tactical approaches between the two suffragists and their organizations, (Paul's National Woman's Party of 50,000 boasted far fewer members than Catt's National American Woman Suffrage Association of 2 million), their disparate campaigns to win the vote were finally successful and in August of 1920 the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment giving women the right to vote was ratified.

Of course their work did not end in 1920. Unlike many activists who left public life after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, Dr. Paul went on to author the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. It finally passed in Congress in 1972, but to her great disappointment, the amendment fell short of ratification by three states. As Alice said in 1975: *"The great victory was getting the vote," . But "it's unthinkable that we can't complete it with economic equality."*

Alice was also an advocate for social justice around the world. She founded the World Woman's Party headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland in 1938 which worked closely with the League of Nations for the inclusion of gender equality into the United Nations Charter and the establishment of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

As many of you know, Alice was a resident of Ridgefield from the 1940's to 1970's, living in a cottage on Branchville Road. How did she end up in Ridgefield you ask? It all had to do with her sister Helen who according to Alice, bought the small cottage in 1930 from her mentor/teacher in the Christian Science Church to become a camp for Christian Science children and she eventually bought all the property around the cottage. Alice frequently visited her sister there, and after selling her "get away cottage in Vermont" because it was too far from her work with the UN in NYC, Alice eventually moved

to Ridgefield part time in the 40's . Alice stayed in Ridgefield through the mid 70's and after a stroke in 1974 was sent to stay in a Ridgefield convalescent home, (Altna Craig). Unfortunately, the last few years of her life were very difficult because of her nephew Donald who under the guise of taking care of Alice, plundered her estate. She was kept isolated from friends and the outside world, but fortunately her plight was recognized by a few friends, and guardians from Ridgefield were appointed to look after her and her estate. In 1976 she was moved to a Quaker nursing home in Moorestown NJ where she lived until her death on July 9, 1977.

Carrie Chapman Catt, like Paul continued her activism after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment and oversaw the transition of NAWSA into a new organization, called the League of Women Voters. Their mission, like it is today, was to educate women about the electoral process and show them how to shape policy and use their vote to advocate for women's and social justice issues. She served as the organization's honorary president until her death in 1947. She also gave her attention to other issues such as child labor and world peace, organizing the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War in 1925, and worked on behalf of German Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 40s.

So as you can, see although their approach and strategies (and ages!) were "poles apart", both Alice's and Carrie's lives demonstrate that one person can make a difference, and their legacies live on, inspiring others who struggle for political and social justice.

The yellow rose lapel pins which many of you have generously donated towards, are a symbol of support for the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment which suffragists and legislators wore to be identified as pro suffrage advocates. The color of the rose (yellow for pro suffrage and red for anti-suffrage) was particularly important during the final vote for ratification in TN which was deadlocked 48-48. Young Harry Burns who despite wearing a red rose at the time, broke the tie and wisely listened to his mother who sent him a telegram and told him to do the right thing and support the amendment. This caused so much anger with the antis that poor Harry had to climb out one of the third-floor windows of the Capitol and hide in the Capitol attic to save himself until things calmed down. Quite an end to gaining the vote for women!

And now before I introduce our very special guest speaker I'd like to invite you all to our upcoming winter and spring events which also include events co-sponsored by the town-wide Votes For Women Committee consisting of members from the League, Ridgefield Library, Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center, Ridgefield Historical Society and Drum Hill Chapter of the DAR, many of whom are here today!

If you go to the Library website and type in Votes for Women you will find the complete list of events. But let me just give you some of the highlights of the series:

There will be three different historical interpreters representing three prominent suffragists, including Lucy Stone at Keeler on February 16, Alice Paul at the Scott House on February 22 and Carrie Chapman Catt at the Library on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

There will be an 11 panel " exhibit titled *Votes for Women: The Road to Victory* that blends original artwork with an overview of Women's Suffrage. It will be on view at various locations around town during 2020, including at the Library beginning on March 1 for a month and Keeler Tavern during the month of August.

There will be several more book discussions taking place around Town of Elaine Wiess's book about the passage of the 19th Amendment, *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*, and the author will be at the Library on Sunday, April 19 at 2 p.m

On Saturday, May 16, at 4 p.m., Professor Gloria Browne-Marshall of John Jay College of Criminal Justice will give a lecture on race and the suffrage movement.

.The League will also have its annual Meet Your Legislators meeting on Saturday February 22 at the library; two more Get to Know Your Town Meetings (the one on February 11 will feature the Town Tax Collector , Treasurer and Controller) and we will kick off our Annual Art Raffle Fundraiser and Guest Bartender event which will be held on May 12 at our March 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting with a newly created painting by renowned Ridgefield artist Tina Sturgess.

Last but not least, we will be marching in the Memorial Day parade with our new Votes for Women banner to commemorate the 19th amendment.

We hope to see you all at many or all of these very special events, and hope you'll consider joining the League to be part of the fun! And don't forget that the primaries in CT are on April 28 so if you are not registered to vote you can do that today but you will have to be affiliated with a party to vote in a specific primary and if you wish to change parties you must do so by January 28<sup>th</sup> in order to vote in the April 28<sup>th</sup> primaries.

And now it is my pleasure and honor to introduce our very special and patient guest speaker, First Selectman Rudy Marconi who will tell us about the State of Alice's adopted Town and answer questions at the end of his presentation.