

[If a response is **bolded**, it means that the answer is not directly in the oral history, or it may be correcting the interviewee's information.]

Artist Phyllis Pease's mural in the Kansas Capitol celebrates the women of the Kansas Woman Suffrage Movement, which spanned 1859 to 1912. These women persisted until their goal women's suffrage was accomplished. The painting was dedicated on January 29, 2025. The Kansas Suffragist Memorial Committee was founded in collaboration between the League of Women Voters of Kansas and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Kansas.

Define these terms: Suffrage, Disenfranchisement, Amendment

1. Why were the women suffragists protesting? What did they want?
They wanted the right to vote in all national and state elections same as men.
2. What Constitutional Amendment passed due to their work?
The 19th Amendment reads, "The rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."
3. Were all women allowed to vote after this law passed?
No, women of color were still denied the right based on racially discriminatory policies, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and felony disenfranchisement laws. Native Americans were not eligible for citizenship until the Snyder Act of 1924, which allowed some to have access. However, they were still disenfranchised for decades due to racially discriminatory tactics, including claims that living on a reservation meant that a person was not a resident of a state. Asian women were excluded by racist laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prevented Asian immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens.
4. What law passed in 1965 that allowed most women of color to finally vote?
Voting Rights Act of 1965

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5. What program did Phyllis Garibay Coons credit for fostering her creativity in her youth?

4-H

6. In what other high school activities did she participate that fostered her creativity?

She was in journalism: high school newspaper and yearbook.

7. What was her degree at Kansas State University and how did she think that helped her?

She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design. She believes that the wide variety of classes she took in the field of fine arts made her more flexible, resourceful and made her a better designer because she had to look at different things

8. Phyllis Garibay Coons also produced a large mural for the Sunset Zoo in Manhattan. What did she want to emphasize in that project?

The history of the zoo and that the zoo was part of a WPA (Works Progress Administration) project. The WPA was a New Deal agency established by President Roosevelt to provide work-relief for the unemployed during the Great Depression.

9. What organization created and financially supported the Kansas Suffragist Memorial, and what were they hoping to accomplish?

*The League of Women Voters **wanted to commemorate the 19th Amendment and 100 years of women getting the vote in 2020.***

10. Do you know the goals of this organization?

The League of Women Voters believes that the freedom to vote is a nonpartisan issue. The League works to empower voters and defend democracy, and it encourages everyone to take part in our democracy.

11. Why was January 29th a good day to reveal the mural? ***It is Kansas Day, which means it is the day of our State's admission into the Union in 1861!***

12. After researching the women for the mural, what did Phyllis Garibay Coons discover about them?

All these women worked and had children. They often had moved to Kansas because they knew they could have some freedoms here. Most were of the progressive Republican party at the time, and they understood the power of the pen and used the papers wisely. They started small businesses, published newspapers and magazines, taught school, and worked as attorneys at a time there were very few women attorneys.

13. What was a common concern for these women?

*Taking care of their children and their families at a time when people did not always live very long, **and women often did not have any property rights, and there were no social safety nets.***

14. The committee wanted the mural to recognize the women suffragettes who worked for decades to get the vote. Name at least three of these women and what they contributed to the cause.

15. What big event started the movement in Kansas?

*The **1859** Wyandotte Constitutional Convention*

16. Why did the artist use a lot of yellow, white and purple in the painting, and what did each color symbolize?

Members of the Suffragist Movement would wear all white at their protests and parades. Purple is for loyalty, yellow is for hope and light, and white symbolized the purity of their cause, moral virtue, and dignity in their fight for the right to vote. White made a powerful visual tool for unity and created a dignified appearance at parades and protests and countered suffragette stereotypes of being disorderly or radical.

17. What does the banner at the top of the mural say and who wrote it?

"The rights of the citizens of the state of Kansas to vote and hold offices shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex" written by Lizzie Sheldon.

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18. What is different on the left side of the mural from the right side?

The left side represents the historical view when women protesters were arrested, the burning of Lawrence, Anna O. Anthony's home (Susan B. Anthony's sister-in-law) and the original marching suffragettes. The right side represents modern time with people from all backgrounds marching together, the state Capitol, the wheat fields of Kansas and women voting.

19. Why did Clarinda I.H. Nichols have to write under a pseudonym, and why is she pictured holding the hand of a black woman?

Many people were not supportive of articles written by women, and Clarinda's home was part of the Underground Railroad that helped blacks escape from slavery.

20. Who wrote the bill that passed in Kansas in 1912, that gave Kansas women the right to vote?

Lizzie Sheldon, who graduated from KU Law School in 1900.

21. Why did many suffragettes come to Kansas?

They saw the opportunity to push for the amendment from the Western states and have a big impact on getting it passed nationally.

22. Kansas writer, Langston Hughes, has two significant women in his life in the painting. Who are they and how did they influence him?

His mother Carrie Langston Hughes Clark and his teacher, Mary Jane "Mamie" Dillard, are in the picture. Both women were activists. Carrie was a writer. Mamie was his teacher and was a positive influence on his writing.

23. What is the constellation in the top right corner of the mural, and what other similar symbolism is in the painting?

It's the Seven Sisters Constellation. There are seven women leaders of the movement in the center of the painting, and Kansas was the seventh state to give women the right to vote.

24. Why do you think the artist, Phyllis Garibay Coons, name the painting “Rebel Women”?

It's from a quote from one of the suffragists "I saw we are rebels because there is no other way open to us of obtaining redress for the grievances, the grave grievances which women have." Emmeline Pankhurst

The women were involved in protests and were marching for a cause that they strongly supported, which was not considered a traditional role for women at the time. These women found a new way to think about our many abilities.

25. Why does the artist think we should spend money on the arts?

It's innate in humans to want to create whether through literature, music or art. We tell our stories and celebrate our culture and our families. It's just as important as any other kind of social experience.

26. What message does the artist hope is conveyed in the painting?

That these were real people from all communities and backgrounds who came together to make a difference. We have a voice, and we should follow that path. Vote!

If students view both Michael Young and Phyllis Garibay Coons's Kansas Oral Histories, you may want them to compare the artists' backgrounds and how they prepared for the competition.

- Neither of them started as trained painters.
- Both artists share that their families and other individuals encouraged their creativity and interest in art.
- Both mention other experiences that helped to develop their creativity: Michael's was when his teacher shared with him her appreciation of his short story in second grade, and Phyllis mentions the importance of 4-H and her experience on high school newspaper and yearbook staffs.
- Neither was a trained painter: Michael's degree was in commercial art, and Phyllis had a varied background in fine arts.

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- They both shared that the first thing they did when they heard about the mural competitions was to research and try to learn as much as possible about the subject. They both originally came up with several project ideas before settling on one.

Kansas Suffragist History

A Brief History

The struggle for women's suffrage in Kansas has a long and storied history. Beginning with the 1859 Wyandotte Constitutional Convention, Kansas suffragists waged five campaigns to win women's right to vote. After statehood in 1861, women could vote for local school boards. In 1867, Kansas was the first state in the nation to battle for full woman's suffrage. National suffragists campaigned across the state, but white male voters rejected two propositions to remove the words "white" and "male" from the Constitution.

Twenty years later, Kansas became the first state to grant municipal suffrage to women on February 15, 1887, Susan B. Anthony's birthday. Despite a vigorous campaign in 1894, male voters rejected a woman suffrage amendment. Yet Kansas women won universal suffrage in 1912, after Lizzie S. Sheldon wrote this resolution: "The right of citizens of the state of Kansas to vote and hold offices shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex." In 1919, Jane L. Brooks founded the first state chapter of the League of Women Voters in Kansas, before the Nineteenth Amendment of the US Constitution granted voting rights to women in 1920.

Kansas Suffragist Memorial website: www.kssuffragist.org

