

Today in History - April 4

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Today's Stories: [Carrie S. Burnham](#)

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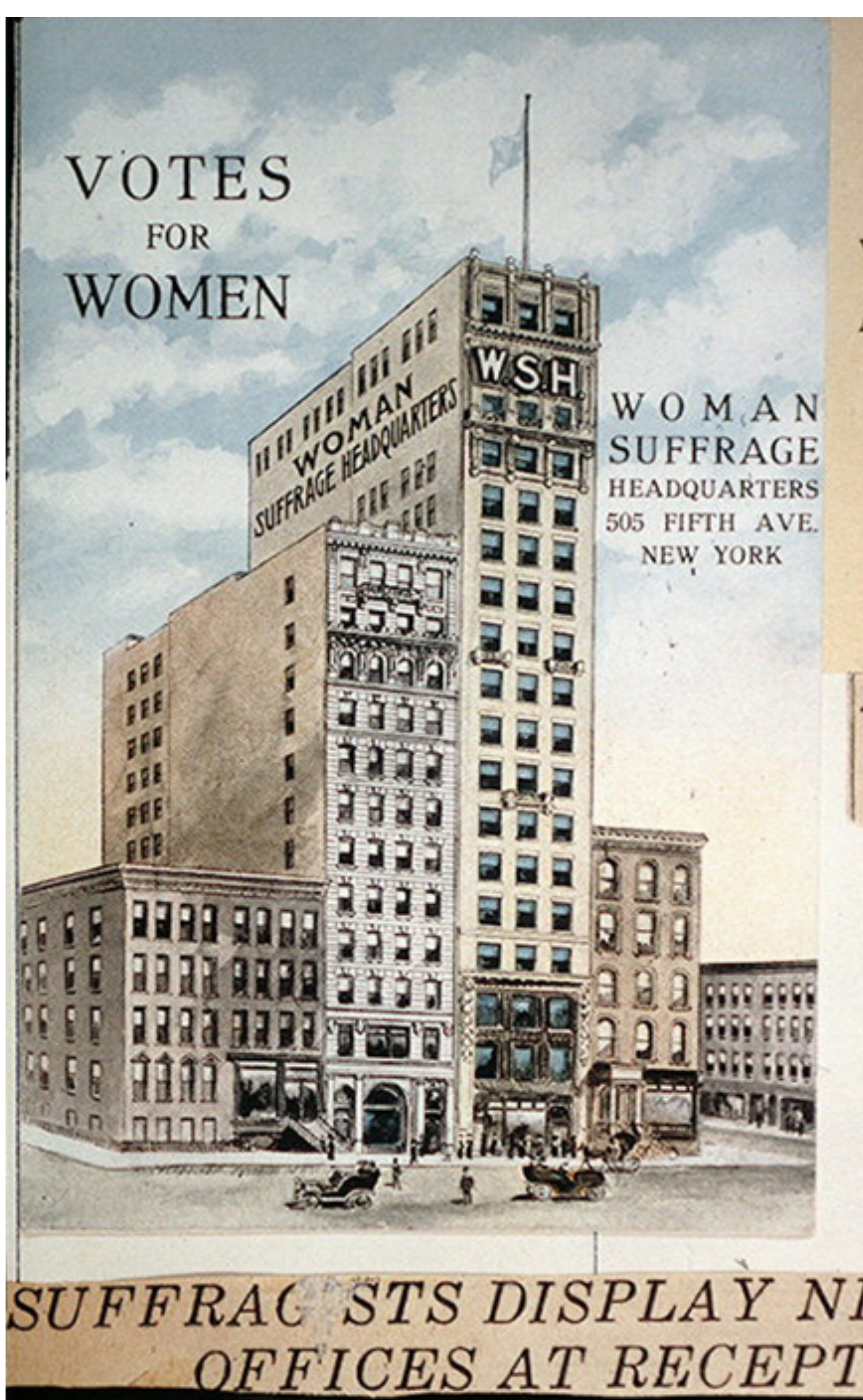
Carrie S. Burnham

With the simple question quoted below, Carrie S. Burnham began her argument, made before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania on April 3 and **April 4**, 1873, for her right to vote. "It is not simply," Burhnam reasoned, "whether I shall be protected in the exercise of my inalienable right and duty of self-government, but whether a government, the mere agent of the people, ...can deny to any portion of its intelligent, adult citizens participation therein and still hold them amenable to its laws..."

Have women citizens the right of suffrage under the Constitution of the United States and of this particular State of Pennsylvania?

Carrie S. Burnham, *Woman Suffrage: The Argument of Carrie S. Burnham...*, Philadelphia: Citizen's Suffrage Association, 1873. [National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection](#). Rare Book & Special Collections Division

Carrie Burnham's protest against the exclusion of women from the electorate began in September 1871, when she took measures to comply with local election laws in the Fourteenth Ward of the City of Philadelphia. She attempted to vote on October 10, 1871.



[Votes for Women Postcard](#); Color Illustration of Woman Suffrage Headquarters Building, Fifth Avenue, New York City. New York, [November 1909]. In the [Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911](#). Scrapbook 8 (1909-1910). Part of the [National American Women Suffrage Association Collection](#). Rare Book & Special Collections Division

When polling officials rejected her ballot, Burnham petitioned the Court of Common Pleas for the right to vote on the grounds that she met the legal definition of a "freeman" and a citizen of the United States. The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania disagreed. [Woman Suffrage: The Argument of Carrie S. Burnham...](#) includes the full text of Burnham's argument as well as a history of the case (beginning on page 88), and the text of the opinion of the Honorable George Sharswood(beginning on page 94). Sharswood's opinion, delivered on December 30, 1871, was upheld by the Supreme Court on April 5, 1873.

Learn More

- Explore [Shall Not Be Denied: Women Fight for the Vote](#), an exhibition celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment granting women the right to vote.
- View [One Hundred Years Toward Suffrage: An Overview](#) particularly the section on the years 1851-1899, to learn about the historical context of Burnham's legal battle. This timeline accompanies the Prints and Photographs Division research guide, [Women's Suffrage: Pictures of Suffragists and Their Activities](#).
- Among the digital collections documenting women's struggle to gain the vote are the [National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection](#), [Women of Protest: Photographs from the Records of the National Woman's Party](#) and [Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911](#), part of the NAWSA Collection. Explore the many digital collections devoted to [Women's History](#).
- [Today in History](#) features on woman's suffrage include: the 1854 Ohio Woman's Rights Convention, the 1869 decision by the Wyoming Territory to grant women the right to vote, the 1884 address by Susan B. Anthony to the House Judiciary Committee, the 1885 birth of Alice Paul, and the 1917 arrest of suffragists in front of the White House. Also search the [Today in History collection](#) using the keywords *Seneca Falls*.
- [American Women: A Guide to Women's History Resources at the Library of Congress](#) is an essential tool for exploring women's history resources available throughout the Library.
- In Carrie S. Burnham's day, the U.S. Supreme Court looked quite different from today's [Supreme Court](#). To see the [Supreme Court](#) as it looked in 1873, when it shared space with the U.S. Congress in the Capitol, see [To Throw the Labor of the Artist Upon the Shoulders of the President of the United States: The House and Senate Wings](#), part of the online exhibition [Temple of Liberty: Building the Capitol for a New Nation](#).

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