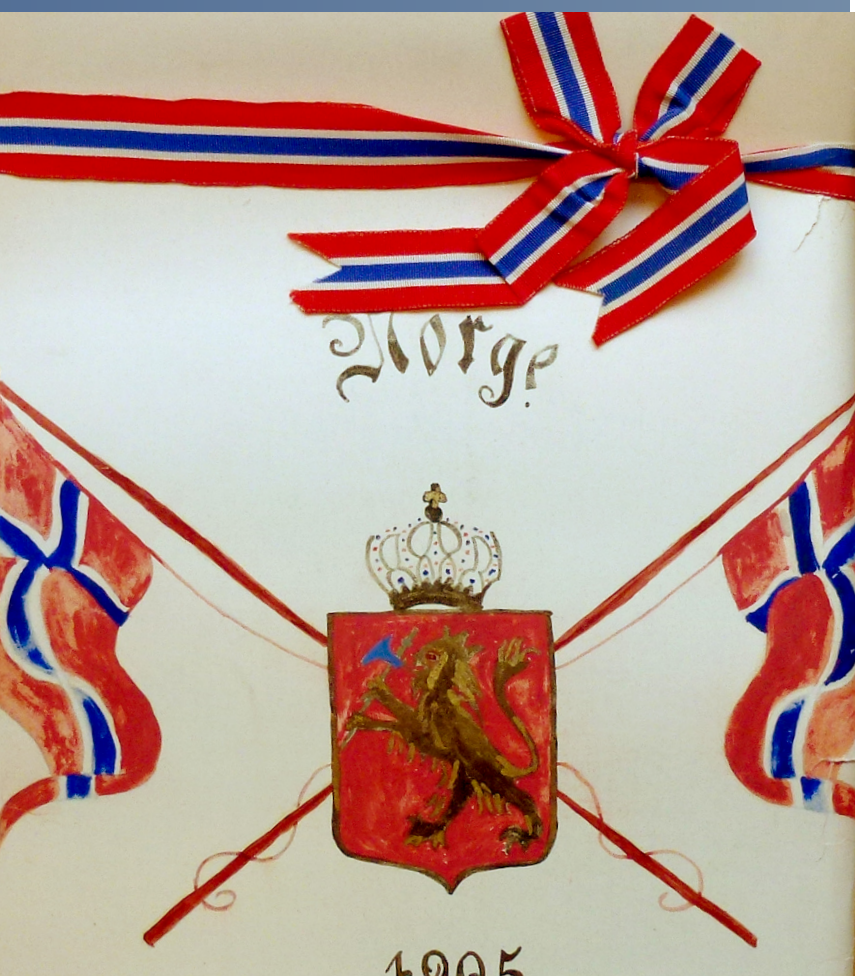


§ Enfranchised are the Norwegian Citizens

11th June 2013 marks the hundred year anniversary of Norwegian women being granted the vote on equal terms with men. To celebrate this milestone, the Storting is staging an exhibition in the Historical Hall. The exhibition displays documents from the Archives of the Storting and photographs about the battle for the vote.

§ 50

Documentarkollegiet, som ligger til vægges i Stortingets, som jo.
no. fjerd 25. Aar, som naar hos den i Landet i 5 Aar, og
enten a. som alle som naar Landet,
b. som Landet som alle som naar Landet i 5 Aar
som siges i Landet i 5 Aar,



1814-1886

NORWEGIAN CITIZENS OF THE MALE SEX

The Constitution of 17th May 1814 gave Norwegian citizens the right to vote on certain conditions. In practice, the vote was limited to a small section of the population. For one thing, the term «Norwegian citizens» did not include women. In 1818 the Storting debated whether the Article on the Right to Vote should be clarified by the words «Norwegian Citizens of the Male Sex». However, it was concluded that the meaning of the term was unequivocal.

It was not until the end of the 1880s that the demand for women's suffrage really gathered pace. Changes in the law had paved the way for greater freedom and independence for women, the women's movement grew, and several women's associations were established.

The Women's Suffrage Association was established in 1885, and the first women's suffrage proposal was put forward in the Storting the following year.

*The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway of 17th May 1814.
Photo: Stortingsarkivet*



1886-1890

THE FIRST DEBATE

The first draft constitutional amendment on women's suffrage was put forward in 1886 by, among others, Viggo Ullmann, a Member of Parliament from the Liberal Party. The proposal was considered in depth by the Constitution Committee in 1890.

The Committee expressed its sympathy for the demands of the growing women's movement for social and economic rights. However, a majority of the members of the Committee concluded that the participation of women in public life was not to be advised, and recommended the Storting to reject the draft amendment.

At the time the Storting was to consider the question of women's suffrage for the first time, the Women's Suffrage Association (KSF) sent in a petition and 4533 signatures in support of the issue.

5th and 6th June 1890 bore witness to a heated debate in the Storting, during which the fundamental differences in the view of women and their role in society came to the fore. The proposal was defeated by 70 to 44 votes.

This audacious self-portrait of Marie Høeg (1866-1949), photographer and champion of the women's liberation movement, would have shocked many of her contemporaries, not least Bishop Heuch, an active opponent of women's suffrage during the debate in 1890. Photo: Berg & Høeg, Untitled, c. 1896-1903. Preus Museum



1898-1904

A STEP-BY-STEP DEVELOPMENT

In April 1898 the Storting considered a series of proposals on the right to vote. The result of these negotiations was that the vote was extended to include all men over the age of 25, while women were once again overlooked. It became obvious during the debate that many would have voted for limited female suffrage had this been an alternative.

The KSF resolved to drop its stated principle of equal rights, and removed the words «on the same conditions as for men» from its objects clause. This led to the founding of a new women's suffrage association, the National Women's Suffrage Association (LKSF).

The introduction of universal suffrage for men ensured that there was a massive mobilization for women's suffrage. The Storting received a number of proposals for both limited and universal women's suffrage as well as calls for their support.

In May 1901, a tug of war between the Storting's two chambers, the Odelsting and the Lagting, finally led to a resolution being passed that allowed women of a certain means or income to vote in local government elections. This was achieved by amending the voting rules in the Local Government Act.

During subsequent Stortings, both the introduction of a similar amendment to the voting rules for general elections and the extension of the right to vote in local government elections were debated. Yet the proposals were rejected on the grounds that lessons should first be learned from the changes made to the Local Government Act in 1901.

It was not until 1889 that girls were allowed to take part in the official children's parade on 17th May. The first girls to do so were pupils from Ragna Nielsen's School. The photo shows the school in a children's parade around the turn of the century. Norway's national day was also used to mark the suffrage movement with different parades around the country. Unknown photographer, about 1900. Oslo Museum.



1905 TURNING POINT

When the Storting's decision to dissolve the Union with Sweden on 7th June 1905 gave rise to a referendum on 13th August, the LKSF requested that women should also be able to take part. The request was rejected. The Association countered by arranging a large-scale collection of signatures.

A little over a week after the referendum, the Storting received a petition from the LKSF containing over 250 000 signatures supporting the dissolution of the Union. Many more signatures were sent during the autumn.

In total, almost 300 000 women gave their support to the decision of 7th June. To put this into perspective, 368 208 men voted in favour of the dissolution (and 184 against).

The petition campaign in 1905 was an inspiration to the women's battle for the vote and proof of women's social engagement. Women's capacity to mobilize and carry out such a large-scale action in such a short space of time caused a stir, and was hugely influential on the result of the next debate on female suffrage in the Storting.



The female workers at the Christiania Sailcloth Factory contributed a total of three pages with 162 signatures to the petition campaign in 1905. (See one of the lists above.) Photo: Anders Beer Wilse, 1904. Norsk Folkemuseum.



1907-1911

THE RIGHT TO VOTE GAVE THE RIGHT TO STAND FOR ELECTION

The next debate on women's suffrage took place in June 1907, and the women's action in 1905 was given great attention. By this time, the Storting had received yet another huge petition orchestrated by the LKSF.

The question the Constitution Committee asked was whether women had the requirements to exercise their right to vote «in a well-chosen way». In the view of the majority in the committee, the answer to this question was yes.

On 14th June 1907, the motion to introduce limited suffrage for women received a constitutional majority. After nearly 20 years of debate in the Storting, women's suffrage had finally become a constitutional right.

The right to vote gave the right to stand for election, and in 1909 Anna Rogstad was elected as the first female Substitute Member of Parliament, for Gamle Aker constituency in Kristiania. On 17th March 1911, she became the first woman to meet in the Storting.

The year before Anna Rogstad made her first appearance in the Storting, women had gained universal suffrage in local government elections. Consequently, the Storting's consideration of a corresponding amendment to the Constitution in 1911 was greatly anticipated. Yet the motion failed to gain a constitutional majority. The next general election was, however, to remove the remaining opposition.

Anna Rogstad represented the Liberal Left Party, which ran a joint list with the Conservative Party at the 1909 election. When Jens Bratlie, himself an opponent of women's suffrage, was granted leave from the Storting in 1911, Rogstad was summoned. She met in the Storting from February 1912 until the end of the term. Rogstad was an able speaker and displayed great versatility during her time in the Storting. Photo: Anders Beer Wilse, 1911. Norsk Folkemuseum.



1913

«NORWEGIAN CITIZENS, MEN AND WOMEN»

By the time the Storting was to consider the question of women's suffrage for the 15th time since 1890, all the political parties had committed themselves to universal women's suffrage. It therefore came as no surprise when, on 11th June 1913, a unanimous Storting resolved to give women the same right to vote as men.

Article 50 of the Constitution was amended to read:

*“Those Entitled to Vote are the
Norwegian Citizens, Men and Women,
who have reached 25 Years of Age, and
who have been settled in the Country for 5
Years and resided there.”*

With the constitutional amendment of 1913 ended a 23-year battle for the vote. The Norwegian Constitution, which in 1814 was considered the most democratic of its kind, was almost 100 years old before women gained full political rights

The NKN board, from left to right, Fredrikke Marie Qvam, Betzy Kjeldsberg, Cläre Mjoen, Gina Krog, Thea Holst, Ellen Schiotz and Elise Heyerdahl.

Unknown photographer, 1913. National Library of Norway.



“Gentlemen Members:

I am certain that we all appreciate the lively interest, the warm love of country, of which these statements by Norwegian women are an expression... For this reason, they deserve our thanks, which I would hereby like to declare“

(President of the Storting Berner about the petition campaign in 1905.)

The exhibition has been made by the Archives of the Storting.

Exhibition design: Lars Nerli.

Graphic design: Harald Trollsaaas.

Printing: Printing Services of the Storting.

English translation: Chris Unwin

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Suffrage march in New York 1911. The Norwegian group marched under the slogan «Voters from Norway». Norwegian women had had limited civil suffrage since 1907. The head of New York's Norwegian Suffrage League was Gudrun Løchen Drewsen (front right). Photo: Underwood and Underwood, 1911. National Library of Norway.

