

# Women's perseverance on display in 'Beyond the Vote'

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Council on Culture & Arts

On Aug. 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution, granting women the right to vote.

To celebrate the bicentennial of this milestone event, the Museum of Florida History spent months planning out the "Beyond the Vote: Florida Women's Activism" exhibit. Right before it was set to open in 2020, the museum closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, one year later, museum director Lisa Barton is proud of the work her team put into presenting this historic legacy despite the challenges of the past year. Barton notes that the museum will stay open for extended hours on Thursday, Aug. 26, to give the public additional time to see the exhibit, which will stay on display through Jan. 23.

"These women, whether they were fighting for suffrage, civil rights or envi-

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Visitors explore a display of woman voter at the "Beyond the Vote" exhibit at the Museum of Florida History. LISA DUNBAR

## If you go

**What:** Beyond the Vote: Florida Women's Activism Exhibit

**When:** 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Saturdays, noon-4:30 p.m. Sundays through Jan. 23

**Where:** Museum of Florida History, 500 S Bronough St.

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, visit [museumoffloridahistory.com/](http://museumoffloridahistory.com/)

# Voting

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ronmental causes, stood firm in the face of opposition and challenges and persevered," says Barton. "They worked for what they believed was right and I find that very inspiring."

## Role models and love of history

Barton looks to her mother as an inspirational woman and educator as well as a constant source of support. As far as other her childhood female role models go, she always ranked Harriet Tubman at the top. Barton checked out a biography on Tubman from her elementary school library and was in awe of her courage, bravery and determination.

In elementary school, Barton presented historical research in social studies fairs, including a project on another woman activist, Susan B. Anthony.

Her presentation brought her to the state competition in Montgomery, Alabama, where she recalls being overwhelmed by the sheer size and variety of history museums. Barton went on to pursue a history degree at the University of Alabama and her master's degree in public history from Florida State University.

"One of my professors in Alabama introduced me to the area of public history which has to do with how history professionals interpret history for the public through archives, museums and historical preservation," says Barton. "Preservation is another passion of mine. We not only create exhibits, but we preserve history and keep artifacts in perpetuity for the public interest."

## Volunteering opens doors

Barton began volunteering for the Museum of Florida History and the Knott House Museum in 1999. As she began her



**Lisa Barton spent months preparing the Museum of Florida History for the "Beyond the Vote: Florida Women's Activism" exhibit, which will have extended hours on Thursday.** FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

career in museums, Barton aspired to step into the shoes of former museum director Dr. Jeana Brunson, always admiring her leadership and high standards of excellence. Barton took on the role of senior curator at the museum for many years, developing exhibitions and working with more than 46,000 historical objects and artifacts.

She was the exhibits manager at the Florida Historic Capitol Museum for a few years before returning to the Museum of Florida History as director. Barton says her favorite part of the job is collaborating with her colleagues.

"They're some of the most creative, smart, energetic, problem-solving people that I've ever met," says Barton. "It's really great to be involved with people who really want to make the museum shine for the public. Everyone feels passionate about bringing history alive, and

it's rewarding to see visitors come in and really appreciate and learn more about Florida history."

## All hands on deck for exhibits

When it comes to curating and creating exhibits, it's an all hands on deck affair. Barton says the head curator oversees researching the topic and finding related artifacts, photos, and other visual and audio aids to enhance the text.

From there, exhibit designers, fabricators and registrars all pitch in to decide colors and presentation of information. It can take anywhere from six to nine months to complete a single exhibit.

For "Beyond the Vote," Barton says curator Lisa Dunbar was able to find a plethora of film and photographs to bring these women to life.

She particularly enjoys the section on

Mary McLeod Bethune, one of the foremost black educators, civil and women's rights leaders and government officials of the twentieth century. Bethune set the education standards for colleges across the country and is recognized for her role as an advisor to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Barton notes that one of the prominent artifacts in the exhibit is Bethune's cane, which was once Roosevelt's, and gifted to her by his wife Eleanor.

## Putting votes into action

"Beyond the Vote is about what has been made possible for women after getting the vote in 1920," says Barton. "Women were able to advocate for so many different causes. They were able to be engaged in the political process and run for office. More laws passed that gave them more equal rights."

Barton hopes visitors will walk away from the exhibit with a renewed appreciation for how far the women's rights movements have come in one hundred years.

The exhibit can be viewed for free at the museum seven days a week. Additionally, a preview on the museum's website has a taste of these stories and artifacts under the "Exhibits Now On View" page. Barton encourages visitors to visit both online and in person.

"Knowing history makes people better and more informed citizens," says Barton.

"It's important to understand the past to make decisions about the present day and the future. These women never gave up and kept on lobbying and doing what they needed to do to raise awareness and make positive changes for their community. Despite obstacles and challenges, they never gave up."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*