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**Jamestown Journey: New Jersey Gives
Women the Vote**

Lead: In its 1776 constitution, almost by accident, the state of New Jersey gave women the right to vote.

Intro.: Dan Roberts and *A Moment in Time with Jamestown - Journey of Democracy*, tracing the global advance of democratic ideals since the founding of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.

Content: The New Jersey Constitution was a hastily assembled affair, put together under the pressure of wartime. It's only requirement for suffrage was a property requirement.

The franchise was extended to all inhabitants who were worth £50 or more. This included women and, for that matter, free blacks who were able to muster the financial assets. This did not mean that women voted in large numbers at first. Few married women owned property independently from their husbands. That left prosperous single women and widows who were not in abundance.

In 1790 the New Jersey Assembly revised the election laws of several counties. The franchise was extended to voters in those counties, who were specifically referred to as "he or she." The reason for such a move is in doubt but the name Joseph Cooper, a highly respected Quaker from West Jersey, is

associated by tradition with this move. Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that the changes passed with only three dissenting votes. This change was later extended to the remaining counties in the state and in theory at least, women in New Jersey could vote.

By 1797 political parties had established themselves in the state and the votes of women though not widespread, were thought crucial in deciding key issues and elections. In their battle to resist the on-rushing and growing Republican tide, the Federalists urged women to support their ticket. The Republicans, political allies of Vice-President Thomas Jefferson, were incensed by this naked attempt to woo women voters but it

would be decade before they could do something about it.

The excuse to remove the franchise for women came in 1807. The towns of Newark and Elizabeth were fighting over which would become the county seat. In addition, the winning location would receive a new and expensive courthouse. Women responding to the campaign rhetoric, voted in hugh numbers, perhaps some of them more than once. Newark won. Its total vote count was nearly three time the number of eligible male voters.

Recoiling from this demonstration of female voting power and also from some fairly obvious voter fraud, Federalists and Republicans joined to

revise state election rules to exclude women and free blacks. Not until 1920 did the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution restore the right of New Jersey women to vote.

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Resources

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