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Discovering Chestnut Hill: Women's Equality Day observed

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This photograph from the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's Archives appears to show women heading to the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession held in Washington, D.C., in protest of the lack of voting rights for women. (Photo: Chestnut Hill Conservancy)

By Alex Bartlett, Archivist, Chestnut Hill Conservancy

In this year of tumult, it has perhaps been overlooked that Women's Equality Day, August 26, marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. This Day was first celebrated in 1973, in honor of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States

Constitution, which prohibits governments on state and federal levels from denying citizens the right to vote based on sex.

The Amendment needed 36 of the 48 states for ratification, with Tennessee ratifying as the 36th state, on August 18, 1920. In the years preceding the ratification of the 19th Amendment, women's suffrage groups were organized and protests were held, including those in Washington D. C. One such protest – the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession – was organized by Alice Paul and the National Woman Suffrage Association. During the procession, over 5,000 suffragettes headed up Pennsylvania Avenue from the United States Capitol to the Treasury Building. Floats, bands and a mounted police brigade were included in the procession.

One of the photographs in the collections of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's archives may document the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession. Shown here, the view shows women riding an open bus, labeled "touring Washington." Seventeen signatures including those of Caroline Lounsbury Steele, Elizabeth Hills Lyman, Edyth Pyle, Gladys Sherman, Edna B. Welsh and Alice Stratton, among others, were signed in the photograph's border.

While the exact event for which this photograph was taken is unknown, it may likely have been taken during or in association with the procession. A cursory search online reveals that many of the women who signed their names in the photograph's border were quite accomplished and were associated with progressive schools and universities; for example, Elizabeth Hills Lyman was a teacher of Latin at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia (long before it moved to East Falls), and eventually opened her own private school for girls.

Caroline Lounsbury Steele, a Germantowner, graduated from Smith College in 1892 and was the president of the Smith College Club of Philadelphia. If you know information about any of the women shown in the photograph or can provide more context in terms of the event at which it was taken, please let us know by contacting us using the information below.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Archives and Library of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy are closed. However, if you would like to donate any items documenting the history of Chestnut Hill, please let us know about them! Please get in touch with Conservancy Archivist Alex Bartlett to let him know about anything you might like to donate to our collections BEFORE sending it along or dropping it off, by emailing him at Alex@chconservancy.org (about:blank). He will get back to you as soon as he can. Direct all other inquiries to info@chconservancy.org (about:blank).

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