PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Women’s Right to Vote in Stamford: Early Records on Display at the Stamford History Center

Thanks to collaboration between the City and Town Clerk of the City of Stamford, Lyda Ruijter, and the Stamford History Center, visitors can now see the physical records of the first women in Stamford registered to vote in a Federal election. The documents feature in the Center’s current exhibition, “Fabric of Stamford: Women, Costumes, and Textiles – 1860-1960”.

Ms. Ruijter personally delivered the voter registration books to Ron Marcus, Librarian at the History Center, for the exhibit’s opening this month. “The voter records are fascinating,” Marcus noted, “for the first years of women’s national suffrage, records of voters were kept by gender, in separate volumes. While this practice of separating the names ended around the beginning of World War II, the early volumes are a powerful reminder of our local history.”

The records lent to the Center also include separate caucus lists for Democratic and Republican women voters. These ledgers are also part of the display alongside an early suffragette banner from 1909 used by a Long Ridge women’s group in their demonstrations.

Ms. Ruijter spent some time with the Center staff examining the volumes and selecting those which would initially be shown. “We were very happy to assist the History Center in lending these records. Alongside the banner and other objects from the period, they are a timely reminder that the right to vote is precious.” The City and Town Clerk took time from a busy day preparing absentee ballots and other materials for the election on November 6. She will also be delivering remarks at a reception at the Center on November 8 for delegates from the New England Museum Association’s conference in Stamford after the election.

“We are thrilled that the City and Town Clerk were able to share these records, especially as they were lodged in the city’s archives at the former Haig Avenue police station,” added Marshall Millsap, Chairman of the Stamford History Center. “When Lyda invited us to join her earlier this year to tour the facility, we were immediately struck by the books. There is strong resonance in the material objects that tell the story of women’s leadership in Stamford just a century ago.”

Ron Marcus added, “Some of the other volumes record women registered to vote in Stamford on state and local issues before the Federal constitutional amendment was ratified in 1920. The Library team at the Center will be doing additional research on these items to further elaborate the early days
of women voting in Connecticut. We may have something quite unique in these documents so graciously shared for our current exhibit on women’s lives in Stamford.”

Jennifer Hawthorne, Curator of Costumes and Textiles for the History Center, stated, “We are thrilled to be showcasing a large number of unique dresses, items of clothing, quilts, and other special artifacts telling the story of Stamford women’s lives. Several larger items from the Center’s furniture collection have been brought down to the gallery as well, some being exhibited for the first time. It’s no surprise that we have had a number of visitors make a second visit to take it all in or show their friends.”

The exhibit is open for viewing at the History Center on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Both Members and non-Members are invited to tour the exhibit, which is open through June next year. Several local groups and schools are also arranging for private tours on other days. The Center would be delighted to hear from other organizations planning to visit.