In 1919 twenty-two suffragists were arrested in front of the State House for trying to picket President Woodrow Wilson during his visit there.

“On this day…

Boston, February 24, 1919

On this day…

“It is a most extraordinary thing to arrest women who are making use of their right to petition under... the Constitution.”

Agnes H. Morey of Brookline, Massachusetts State Chairman of the National Woman’s Party

President Wilson and Suffrage

Although responding slowly to the issue, Woodrow Wilson had endorsed a federal woman’s suffrage amendment by 1919. On his return to the United States, after three months in Europe, only eight days were left before Congress adjourned. At that point only one vote was needed in the Senate to pass the amendment and send it to the states for ratification. With a sense of urgency suffragists unsuccessfully pressured Wilson to secure that last vote.

State House Protest

From their headquarters at Number 9 Park Street members of the National Woman’s Party planned to greet the President with a demonstration. Before his arrival twenty-two suffragists were arrested in front of the State House for violating a city ordinance limiting gatherings to seven minutes. Only one resisted arrest. Betty Gram of Portland Oregon was lifted into a wagon by policemen as she waved to women on the balcony of the Woman’s Party headquarters.

Landfall

Returning from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, President Wilson’s ship anchored in Boston Harbor. Enthusiastic crowds cheered his motorcade as it passed South Station, inched along Summer Street to “Filene’s Corner” (today’s Downtown Crossing) and climbed Park Street to the State House. Suffragists hoped to get his attention by picketing as well as burning his speeches on Boston Common.

Picketing the White House

During the administration of Woodrow Wilson suffragists adopted a more militant strategy. For the first time in American history a group of citizens picketed the White House. They endured attacks by angry mobs, and repeated arrests in Washington D.C. The events in Boston on February 24, 1919 would be the only time suffragists picketed and were jailed outside D.C.

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