

“Are You Wet or are You Dry?”

Carroll County Times Article for 13 May 2001

by Jay A. Graybeal

The passage of the Volstead Act in 1918, and the ensuing era of Prohibition, was not universally popular. Many Marylanders, including Gov. Albert Ritchie and the majority of the General Assembly, were opposed to enforcement of the act. The subject of enforcement became a hotly contested political issue at election time. Every local candidate in the 1926 election was asked, “Are you wet or are you dry?” and local newspaper editors, such as Joseph D. Brooks of the American Sentinel, weighed in on the issue. The May 14th issue of the Sentinel published a front-page story urging Marylanders to support an enforcement law under the headline of “Let’s Fight It Out Maryland, Must Have An Enforcement Law”:

“At every election in Maryland since the passage of the Volstead prohibition law the “wet” and “dry” question bobs up. Like “Banco Ghost” it, apparently, will not stay down. Many important questions of government which should have received the earnest attention of the voters have been allowed to die aborning. Man’s stomach, his appetite, and his so-called “personal liberty,” (of which there is no such thing) have been considered the more important. Every candidate for office in Carroll county has been bombarded with the question: “Are you wet or are you dry?”

Drys Must Register.

That the matter of the enforcement of prohibition laws passed by the United States Congress has not received the support of the Governor and General Assembly of Maryland is not very surprising to many well informed and highly respectable citizens of Maryland who learned long ago that the main political strength of the present administration in Maryland is received in Baltimore where the “wets” outvote the “drys”, simply because the “drys” fail to register, or if registered, fail to vote. But will this condition exist much longer? We think not.

The Aroused Voters.

Mr. James Brice, of England, in his “American Commonwealth” states that the American voter will stand somethings quite a long time before making any effort to correct them, but when once aroused his fury is something to be feared. From many sources of information the Sentinel is led to believe that in this year of grace 1926 the people of Maryland, especially the “dry” ones, intend to force the fighting in the matter of an enforcement law for Maryland. Both sides seem to be itching for a fight in order to settle the question at least temporarily, if not for all times.

In furtherance of the determination to force the fighting the “drys” are casting about for competent candidates and, at present, it looks like they are going to select some pretty strong dry Republicans as candidates for U. S. Senator, Governor, and Members of the General Assembly, especially the latter.

The Women Must Help.

The “drys” are depending to a considerable extent on the women voters, especially in the state outside of Baltimore. In Baltimore they are hoping to get many more of the women voters registered, and also induce the tardy and careless dry men voters to vote.

The Armies Are Forming.

The armies are being drafted and equipped for battle and the Sentinel hopes sincerely that the fight will take place, and that, whatever the result, the people of Maryland will be given a good long rest from agitators whose principal business seems to consist of always and everlastingly wanting to exchange a

certainty for an uncertainty. They forget the old adage that it is better to endure the present ills than to fly to those of which we know nothing.

Let's Fight It Out.

Yes, let's fight it out this year. There are other questions which may arise during the fight, and they will be given some attention, but the leading questions which will not down are: "Are you wet," or "are you dry?" "Be you wet or dry, are you in favor of an enforcement law which will place Maryland back among the loyal states of the Union?"

The Sentinel's Position.

The Sentinel is "dry," and will advocate the passage of an enforcement law. Where, Mr. Reader, do you stand?

A Call to Arms.

Republican and Democratic "drys" of Carroll county, the fight already has begun. Buckle on your shields."

As noted in the article, Maryland's governor did not support enforcement of Prohibition. His position on Prohibition was a major factor in Albert Richie's reelection in 1923, a victory made him the first Maryland governor to win a second term.



Mr. and Mrs. Joseph D. Brooks posed at their summer home in 1904. Brooks was a Westminster attorney, editor of the American Sentinel newspaper, and a staunch Prohibitionist. Historical Society of Carroll county collection, gift of Mrs. Harvey K. Myers, 1958.