

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"A Battle of the Sexes in 1895"

Carroll County Times article for 2 July 1995

By Jay A. Graybeal

Throughout the mid to late nineteenth century, local newspapers followed a traditional four-page format. The front page carried a selection of literature, advice and poetry, the majority of which was taken from other newspapers and magazines. Page two contained national and state political and economic news, much of it of a partisan nature. Local news, obituaries, marriages and similar columns were found on page three. The back page was reserved for advertising.

The July 6, 1895 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel followed this long accepted format and carried a number of literary pieces on the first page including the following unsigned one under the headline of "A Desperate Struggle":

"When within a few feet of where I stood, the stalwart savage, his eyes gleaming with hatred, lifted his knife and sprang toward me. I leaped forward to meet him and succeeded in grasping the hand which held the weapon, and with a grip like a vise held to it. He clinched with me, and a terrible struggle ensued. We fell to the ground and rolled over and over in a desperate struggle for the supremacy, yet I clung to his wrist, for my life depended on preventing him from using the knife. In our struggle I noted that we were nearing the brink of the precipice, and I hoped we would go over, for death in that manner was preferable to being slaughtered by a savage hand, and there was keen satisfaction in the thought that my enemy would die with me. Nearer and nearer we rolled in our fearful struggle for the mastery, I endeavoring to roll over the brink, he to prevent it, until at last, to my great satisfaction, I felt the edge of the cliff begin to crumble beneath me, and down we went.

We struck the bottom heavily, and to my astonishment neither of us seemed to be greatly injured. I fell almost underneath him, and in a moment he succeeded in getting me on my back and sat astride of my prostrate form. He had dropped his knife in our fall, and seized me by the long hair neath each ear and began to beat my head against the ground in an endeavor to stun me into insensibility.

Thump! thump! thump! my head was beaten against the ground, and an angry voice greeted my ears.

"I'll teach you to grab me that way and choke me half to death (thump! thump!) and then roll out of bed with me. (Thump! thump!) "What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

It was my wife. She sat astride of me, and at almost every word gave my head a thump against the carpeted floor of the bedroom.

It was all a hideous dream. In my desperation I had seized her and we had a terrible struggle, finally falling out of bed upon the floor."

If this piece was written by editor William L. W. Seabrook, perhaps his wife's rough treatment of him was in some way related to the following article that appeared in the same issue under the headline of "Love, Honor and Obey":

"On the whole, married women, that is, real women, prefer being ruled to ruling. It is natural to a woman to seek advice. It is scarcely in her nature to go speechlessly on doing what she has to do

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without aid or counsel. Almost any one of our own sex is happier if she can "talk things over" with some man upon who's discretion she relies; and in married life most wives do, even in the smallest things, what "he" likes, and fancy that they like it themselves. Since independence has become the fashion, and strong-minded women have sneered at their more gentle sisters, there is a great affectation of despising the opinion of the men, but it is all sheer pretense. Almost every wife chooses her gloves and her ribbons of the tint that her husband admires, and the man she loves almost inevitably gives her political opinions, and biases even her religious views. Her speech, her dress, her manners change under his influence. What he desires her to do she does, in nine cases out ten. The tenth case we find in the divorce courts. You may rule your wife as you please, good married reader, if you only love and pet her enough. Haughtiness and fault-finding alone will make her restive. And you, dear girl, remember that it will be well to choose a husband good and noble and upright, so that you may obey him to your heart's content without losing your own self-respect; for you will obey him if you love him; and, if he be low and mean, you will sink to his level slowly but surely in the course of years."

While the above column may appear to have been the product of a male-dominated press, it may be of interest to learn that the American Sentinel was owned by a woman. Mrs. Emily Jane (Wampler) Rippard had purchased the paper on Christmas Day, 1873 and was the proprietress until her death on February 10, 1905. If her portrait photograph reveals anything about her character, she certainly appears to have been a woman who did not suffer domination. Mrs. Rippard's conservative views probably reflect her Pennsylvania German upbringing in the 1840s and perhaps her experience of having been married three times.

Photo caption: Mrs. Emily Jane (Wampler) Rippard, c. 1890, proprietress of the Westminster American Sentinel from 1873 until her death in 1905. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Henry Koller, 1993.