

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Carroll County Women and the Election of 1920"

Carroll County Times article for 19 November 1995

by Jay A. Graybeal

Three quarters of a century ago, American women voted for the first time in a national election. The 1920 election pitted Democrat James M. Cox against Republican Warren G. Harding. The extension of women's suffrage provided local women with the opportunity to become involved in politics. The October 29, 1920 issue of this newspaper carried several articles about women and the election.

THE REPUBLICAN MEET, A REMARKABLE GATHERING

On Tuesday evening the Armory in this city was filled both to its seating and standing capacity with men and women voters of the county to hear the issues of the campaign discussed.

The meeting was called to order by Walter R. Rudy, chairman of the State Central Committee and Senator R. Smith Snader was named a presiding officer.

The first speaker was Mrs. S. K. Herr, of this city. Mrs. Herr received an ovation as she rose to speak and was frequently interrupted by outbursts of applause. She urged the women not only to vote but to study the issues and candidates that they may vote intelligently. She told of her long and intimate acquaintance with O. E. Weller, the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, and said she knew him as an honest, capable, Christian man entitled to the support of every Republican woman and every Democratic woman who will study impartially the political associations and record of his Democratic opponent.

The next speaker was Mrs. Hoyt Chamberlain, of Kansas City. Mrs. Chamberlain asked the women to study the history of the two parties in reaching a decision as to which to affiliate with and urged the women to vote for Mr. Harding because of his record in the Senate and by his promises if elected President the women could be content that he would advocate and support the measures in which the women are so vitally interested.

The Republican women also organized instruction rooms, including one in the Shellman House at 210 E. Main St., now a house museum operated by the Historical Society.

INSTRUCTION ROOMS

The Republican women of Westminster district have arranged for a room near the polling place in each precinct, where there will be on election day sample ballots and some one to instruct all who may desire information.

The voting place in precinct No. 1 will be the old Farmers and Mechanics Bank building. The instruction room will be at Miss Mary B. Shellman's residence. Voting place in No. 2 is Herr & Babylon's shop and instruction room directly opposite at Mrs. H. Scott Roop's residence. Voting place in No. 3 is Firemen's Building and if no better place can be found The Times office will be used as instruction room. In precinct No. 4 the voting place is on Liberty street and the instruction room will be at the Sentinel office. The Republican committees in every district should arrange for an instruction room near the polling places with plenty of sample ballots and some one to instruct all who may desire information about marking the ballot.

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Following the election, local women received high marks from H. P. Gorsuch, editor of The Times, for their work.

REPUBLICAN WOMEN RENDER FINE SERVICE

The Republican women of Carroll county had no small part in the result on Tuesday. The members of the committees and others in the districts were active both on registration days and on election day. They did intelligent and effective work and at headquarters in this city they rendered valuable service in sending out sample ballots and literature to the voters. Without their help the men could not have done the work.

On election day the women served as challengers in many voting places and performed the task most satisfactorily and remained at the work like veterans.

The election of 1920 produced a Republican landslide and led, Edward O. Diffendal editor of the Democratic Advocate newspaper, to comment on the local campaign.

THE CAMPAIGN IN CARROLL COUNTY

The republican campaign in our county was energetically and intelligently conducted; thou showing some life in the last two weeks the Democratic campaign was absolutely devoid of organization or machine work, without which the vote cannot be polled. This is demonstrated by the fact, that there are registered in the county 5957 Democratic men and women, and apparently only 4279 of them voted.

Success cannot be achieved without work, no reward is given the sluggard. The vote here was what is naturally to be expected from the present methods of running things.

The county is made up of men and women whose views of life are normally those represented by the Democratic party, and its vote should be so recorded. But for five years it has radiated these views. Why?

This is a question all Democrats should seriously consider, and decide what is wrong with the party? Before the Harrington campaign in 1915, though occasionally electing a Republican on personal grounds, it was practically always Democratic. Since then it has been without dissent Republican.

This condition should not be allowed to continue; the lowest tax rate, the best administration of public office was held under the Democratic rule.

Editor Gorsuch summed up the participation by women in the 1920 election in the November 5th issue of the American Sentinel.

WOMEN DISAPPOINTED THEM

The men and women who were so bitterly opposed to giving women the ballot must have been keenly disappointed on Tuesday. None of the distressing scenes, turbulent conditions, verbal or physical combats predicted have been reported from any voting place in Carroll county, the State of Maryland or anywhere in the country. The women did not lose their womanly dignity or sacrifice the respect of the men and we have not heard of any babies neglected or husbands compelled to cook their own meals while their wives were electioneering around the polls.

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Perhaps a few women said and did some things that would have been better left unsaid and undone, but there are legions of men who do this on every election day.

The women of the United States who cast ballots this week for the first time justified by the levelheadedness of their conduct the policy which enfranchised them.

The fears of some citizens that in political contests women would fall below the plane of disinterestedness attained by men have been shown to be without foundation. The assertion frequently heard that at the polls women would fail in vision and in comprehension when called upon to exercise the right of suffrage has been proven to be baseless. By their steadfastness to sound doctrines, by their intelligent treatment of national problems, the women of the United States have abundantly vindicated the judgment that put the ballot into their hands.

Photo Caption: Mrs. Samuel K. (Emily Gorsuch Buckingham) Herr and her son Emory Gorsuch Buckingham, c. 1900. Mrs. Herr delivered a speech at a Republican "Meet" urging women to vote in the Election of 1920. Her home at 210 E. Main St. is now the administrative office and library of the Historical Society of Carroll County. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Henry Kimmey, 1985.