

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
22 March 1992

H. Peyton Gorsuch 1920 Campaign
By Joe Getty

NOTE – Newspaper article is missing, copied from Joe's draft

In this presidential election year, the media will spend considerable time analyzing the campaign techniques of the candidates. A former *Carroll County Times* editor, H. Peyton Gorsuch, once described local campaign techniques in his weekly "First Page Editorial."

The "First Page Editorial" was one of the most popular features of the newspaper. It provided Gorsuch with the opportunity to comment on local, state, and world events using his wry wit and Carroll County point-of-view. In this column he frequently covered items of local history blending current events with his personal perspective on Carroll County's history.

In fact, Gorsuch was once a candidate for public office. The *Carroll County Times* was originally established as a Republican weekly and while serving as editor he campaigned for the House of Delegates in 1919.

Sixteen years later, his "First Page Editorial" took a humorous, self-deprecating view of his skills as a campaigner:

"In rummaging through a desk drawer this week we found about 450 new, unused campaign cards, which we will be glad to give to a candidate for the House of Delegates, and as the party name does not appear can be used by a candidate of either party.

"Some years ago when we allowed ourselves to be inveigled into becoming a candidate for the House of Delegates we were told the necessary thing to do was to have cards printed to pass out to every voter we came in contact with. The cards should have our name with statement that we were a candidate for the House of Delegates and at the bottom: 'Your vote and support will be appreciated.'

"Being a novice as a candidate for office we did as advised, had 500 cards printed and the 450 found in the desk drawer represent the number we did not pass out. As a card passer we were a flat failure and even a bigger failure as a personal campaigner, and some of our political friends were quite disgusted and urged us to get out and hustle and solicit votes or we would be snowed under. Do not like snow, and did not like the thought of having to stick our head out from under

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a snow drift the morning after the election, so decided to start a personal solicitation for votes, which we were told was the only way to escape defeat and the proper way to conduct a campaign.

"Our first man was a Democrat, a farmer we had known for many years, had had some business dealings with, and was always very friendly.

"We met him on the street and while did not back slapping, we shook hands and asked him about his corn and potato crop, talked about the weather past, present and future, and when the stage seemed properly set, plunged in and told him we were a candidate for the House of Delegates and asked him to vote for us. His friendly attitude changed, he seemed to resent our presumption in asking him to vote for us, and told us frankly that he would not. He said he was a dyed in the wool Democrat and had never voted for a Republican and never expected to. That was a bumper for a starter and about finished our asking voters to personally support us.

"Of course this showed lack of courage and backbone and branded us as a bum campaigner and political candidate, but we just could not carry on as we should, and according to the accepted and perfectly proper rules of the game.

"We could not hatch up any good or convincing argument to present to a voter why he should vote for us.

"While the card we will present to the first applicant have our name on them, a pen mark can be run through the name, and his name written above."

While Gorsuch mocked his skills as a campaigner, the 1919 newspapers reveal that he was quite successful and served one two-year term. He was the highest vote-getter among the eight-man field for Carroll County's four seats in the House of Delegates. The vote totals were: H. Peyton Gorsuch, 3855; Jesse Leatherwood, 3552; John P. Klee, 3489; Albert W. Spencer, 3474; Charles B. Kephart, 3352; George E. Warner, 3282; Henry M. Fitzhugh, 3184; and Robert T. Shriver, 3170.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: The 1919 campaign card of H. Peyton Gorsuch became the subject of a "First Page Editorial" sixteen years after the House of Delegates election. Also shown is the campaign portrait of Gorsuch.