

"Just Government League Formed in 1913"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The question of extending the vote to women came to the forefront in Carroll County with the formation of the Just Government League in 1913. A report from the organization's first president, Miss Mary B. Shellman appeared in the February 28, 1913 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"The Just Government League of Carroll county met at the Opera House on Saturday afternoon, February 22nd, at 3 o'clock. The president, Miss Mary B. Shellman presided. Miss Whitmore, secretary of the league, read the minutes of the last meeting, and reported several new members. The League was organized January 10th at a meeting held in Boyle's Hall, by Mrs. R. T. Foster, field secretary of the Just Government League of Maryland. At that meeting eleven ladies signed the membership cards, eight active and three enrolled members. The league now numbers twenty-five active and fifteen enrolled members, making a membership of forty. The officers of the league are: Miss Mary B. Shellman, president; Mrs. Charles Billingslea, vice president; Miss Annette Whitmore, secretary, and Mrs. Carroll Albaugh, treasurer.

Mrs. D. L. Farrar is chairman of a committee to secure signers to a petition to the Legislature, the signers to be registered voters of Maryland, asking that the question of suffrage for women be submitted to a vote of the people. Already nearly a hundred names have been signed in Westminster, and the petitions are in the hands of the members of the league who will call on all voters asking for signers. Mrs. O. D. Gilbert was made chairman of the committee to obtain and entertain speakers.

The first public meeting of the league was held at the Opera House on February 13th, when Dr. F. O. Janney and Rev. J. G. Mythen, of Baltimore, spoke on the 'White Slave Traffic' to a large audience. Other meetings will be held during the spring and summer, and it is planned to have another public meeting in the near future with prominent suffrage workers as speakers.

The league feels much encouraged by the increase in membership and the interest manifested by the members. Meetings will be held the third Saturday in each month, at the Opera House, and all ladies interested in the work, are invited to be present and enroll as members. Branch leagues will be organized in every district in the county and any one wishing to have Mrs. Foster visit her district and explain the work of the league, can do so by writing to the Secretary, Miss Whitmore, or to the president, Miss Shellman, who will gladly co-operate with them in organizing.

Carroll county should not be behind her sister counties, in many of which there are large and flourishing leagues, numbering amongst their membership some of the brightest and best women of the State. Let us fall in line, and make our Carroll County League, strong and active and vigorous."

Local suffragists adopted the national slogan "Votes For Women" and very actively pursued their cause until the outbreak of World War I. During the war, local women donated thousands of hours to a variety of civilian war work agencies. Immediately following the war, local state and national reformers sought to improve American society. The ratification of 18th Amendment created Prohibition in 1919 and the 19th Amendment gave women the vote in 1920.

Photo caption: Mary B. Shellman of Westminster was the founding president of the Just Government League of Carroll County. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, Gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.