

SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL



SUN-GAZETTE ARCHIVES

The Suffrage Division was one of the largest to march through Williamsport during a preparedness parade on July 2, 1916. At the time, the United States found itself at the edge of participation in World War I, and "preparedness parades" were staged around the nation. It would be another four years before the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving women the right to vote.

Women speak to significance of right to vote

By MALLORIE McILWAIN
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the Sun-Gazette about this issue.

Today marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which then was signed into law on Aug. 26, 1920.

Longstanding women's rights and equal rights activist Sally Lifland Butterfield, secretary of the Williamsport Chapter of the National Organization for Women, had "mixed

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feelings" about the anniversary.

"Of course this is a huge step

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In the 100 years since the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving women the right to vote, women have had a greater voice in their government, according to a number of local women who recently spoke with

Newspapers of 1920 tell local story of 19th Amendment

By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT
Special to the Sun-Gazette

Today marks 100 years since the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which extended the right to vote to female citizens of the United States. What was Williamsport like during this momentous time? There is no better way to

Lycoming County
Women



by JANET HURLBERT

visualize our area 100 years ago than by researching local newspapers.

In 1917, the National Woman's Suffrage Association published a booklet entitled "This Little Book Contains Every Reason Why Women Should Not Vote." The work was filled with blank pages. Not everyone agreed, of course, and the suffrage movement in Pennsylvania went through a long period of marches, speakers, and even

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Newspapers of 1920 tell local story of 19th Amendment

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jail terms, but Lycoming County had its share of citizens who were dedicated to the cause.

Ratification

After Pennsylvania became the seventh state to ratify the amendment on June 24, 1919, the Gazette and Bulletin ran an article on June 25, 1919, describing the scene in Harrisburg.

It was a “remarkable” demonstration when the House of Representatives ratified the amendment at 12:55 p.m. The hundreds of women present waved purple, white, and gold banners and released red and blue balloons. One legislator stated that it was a “practical” thing to do; another said that if anything could stop Bolshevism in America, it would be women’s votes.

However, the Grit ran an opinion piece on July 10 with an ominous warning to Tennessee legislators, who might cast the deciding votes to ratify the Constitutional Amendment. The article’s author was a former supporter of suffrage in California, where women had voted since 1911. He claimed that women in politics were more corrupt than men and that divorce and murder rates were up. Suffrage had turned men into cowards, he said, and an atmosphere of immorality permeated the state. Besides, he claimed, a high percent-

age of women never really wanted the vote anyway and were content to let their fathers, sons, and brothers deal with politics.

An article appearing on the front page of the Gazette and Bulletin on Aug. 19 described the drama surrounding that Tennessee ratification approval. In an adjacent article, the chair of the Republican National Committee welcomed “American womanhood” to the vote. He observed that the upcoming election would be a pivotal one for the country and added, “We want these women in politics.”

Celebration

Williamsport Mayor Archibald Hoagland announced a celebration to formally welcome the women of Williamsport to suffrage and suggested that it be held in Brandon Park at the bandshell. A Repasz Band performance had already been rained out three times so it was a suggestion to combine the rescheduled concert with this welcoming event.

The mayor had been on an excursion with the Rotarians to the penitentiary in Centre County when he first heard the news. In a phone call, he instructed Chief of Police Fred Tepel to sound the fire whistle and ring the fire bell.

Eventually, there would be a different kind of celebration. Both the Grit and the

Gazette and Bulletin covered “a splendid program of addresses” given at Community House on Sept. 3, with 300 people in attendance. The mayor presided, and Judge Collins congratulated and welcomed women voters and gave a history of the suffrage movement, seeing it as a high point in national development: “The promise of today will be fulfilled in the tomorrow.” This may have been lawyer Emerson Collins, noted for his great oratory. Judge Harvey Whitehead then spoke and encouraged women to read the newspapers so that they would be informed about local and national affairs.

Frances Jenkins from the University of Cincinnati was in Tennessee during the suffrage vote and offered a detailed account of the event. There were local speakers who commented that men in public office were often lacking in qualifications, inefficient, and driven by selfish motives. The home, not just business interests, needed to be considered in politics, and having women on school boards and more active in area schools in general would help to make this happen, they said. Music was provided at the festivities, which ended with light refreshments.

Registering to Vote

Newspaper articles assured women that no additional Pennsylvania state legislation was required for them to register

to vote during September and October of 1920, after they had paid the poll tax. In Lycoming County, poll charges, ranging from 35 cents to \$1, were based on occupational category. For example, category one included the disabled; category two, housekeepers and servants; category three, teachers and ministers; category four, doctors, lawyers and trained nurses. If a woman wasn’t sure where she fit in these categories, she should use her own judgment.

The county commissioners estimated that there would be in excess of 26,000 voters on Nov. 2. Additional collapsible voting booths were purchased, and the commissioners and election board anticipated a much heavier than usual work load.

An opinion piece in the Grit on Aug. 29 titled “Some Aspects of Equal Suffrage” observed that men were released from shouldering the complete responsibility for governance now that women could share the burden — gone were the days of a “lord and master” mentality. Women displayed greater wisdom than men anyway, the writer went on to say, and with their emancipation, who knew how far they would go beyond just gaining the right to vote.

This centennial anniversary allows us the opportunity to evaluate the journey and ponder the future.