

Elections of 1882 provided colorful commentary

People in the Victorian era may have looked at life through a filter of rigid and sometime hypocritical standards, but there was an exception — politics. The history of Monroe County reveals that some of the local elections were “wild and woolly.”

The *Bloomington Republican Progress* of April 5, 1882, contained a case in point.

There is a description of a Democratic Party caucus (called a “convention” in the article) in Indian Creek Township.

Apparently the residents were having a hard time reaching some kind of consensus. “An adjourned meeting was held on Saturday, and the bickering was resumed,” explained the newspaper.

Suddenly, while there was considerable disorder at the meeting, Mrs. James Tarkington, wife of a candidate, appeared on horseback. Continued the *Republican Progress*, “After hitching the animal, she walked into the house and straight to the stand, and without a word politely addressed the chair, who immediately recognized her.”

And what had she to say to the delegates? It seems that she had received a message from



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

God, which she felt compelled to deliver.

As the newspaper put it, “She told the convention that the Almighty had inspired her to restore it to peace and harmony; that a break in the convention would be the omen of the dissolution of the Democratic party, and that, with this, would cause the downfall of the nation.”

Whether the bickering of the Democrats in Indian Creek Township was jeopardizing the nation could have been debated at great length by the delegates, but Mrs. Tarkington had some even more startling revelations for them.

She also said “the spirit of Garfield had been transformed into that of a Democrat (a change that would have caused the assassinated president to roll over in his grave) and

that it was his desire that the career of the Republican Party should end, and that if the convention adjourned in harmony the significance was that 1884 would bring a Democratic President.”

It is possible that the message from God may have gotten somewhat garbled in transmission, but that possibility didn’t faze Mrs. Tarkington.

According to the newspaper, “she said that whatever might be the result of the ballots cast, her husband must and would abide by the result.”

Perhaps her departure from the caucus was as dramatic as her sudden appearance. Her husband, unfortunately, did not profit from her impassioned revelations.

On April 12 the *Republican Progress* reported the election results, and Mr. Tarkington was not among the winners, who were all Democrats: G.L. Burch, justice of the peace; James Tague, trustee; George Walker, assessor; Wes Kirk, constable; and Thad Sparks, road superintendent.

One of the issues that confused voters in that particular election surrounded the office

of road superintendent.

The newspaper remarked “The fool decision of Attorney General Baldwin with reference to voting for Road Superintendent, was that people inside an incorporated town or city were not entitled to a vote for that office, but as the ballot was secret it was a matter of honor with the voter.

“In looking over the tickets deposited in Bloomington township it was found that Road Superintendent had been scratched off of 17 Republican tickets, while every Democratic ticket had that officer’s name on it! How is that as a test of honor?” continued the newspaper.

Apparently that was no accident. The same edition of the *Republican Progress* reported, “In Bloomington township a couple of Democrats stationed themselves at the polls and warned every Republican as he came up that he was not permitted to vote for Road Superintendent.

Their little game was ‘drooped on’ however, by Postmaster McPheeters, who gave them an intimation of what the penalty might be for intimidating the voters at the polls.”

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5/15/95