

# Female speaker sowed seeds of suffrage in 1912

*"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." —U.S. Constitution, Aug. 26, 1920.*

For American females the right to vote seemed a long time in coming. Bloomington women who resented the fact that they couldn't participate in elections got a boost in their spirits from the visit to town of Dr. Amelia Keller on April 19, 1912.

In advance of her speech, the *Bloomington Evening World* of April 18 commented, "There is no suggestion of the militant, suffragette about Dr. Keller. The same quiet and gentleness, which mark her ministrations to a patient, characterize her as a someone of public affairs."

"Connected" with the IU Medical School in Indianapolis, Keller was also president of the Indiana Franchise League. The *Evening*



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

*World* did not reveal who sponsored her speech in the auditorium of the Student Building.

It is unlikely that IU President William Lowe Bryan personally sponsored her visit, but he did introduce Keller to the audience. Perhaps it was the members of the IU Women's League who brought her to the campus.

There were no particularly bitter or anti-male words included in her speech, but Dr. Keller firmly stated what was slowly becoming

obvious to American women. She was generously quoted on page 4 of the April 20 edition of the *Evening World*.

"There are two principal obstacles to the present suffrage movement. The old theory of government and the old theory of women's natural place," Keller began.

She tactfully said that "People object to women being put into positions of authority. The new idea of government is service. People never object to women being servants."

Keller stressed that the current interpretation of democracy included only half of the people and added that the men in legislatures "do not believe in democracy at all." She suggested that those legislators "doubt the intelligence of the common people." Others, she said, believe they should be the only ones privileged to vote.

One of the arguments is that men repre-

sent the views of women at the polls, but continued, "A man cannot give five votes for a wife and four daughters."

Keller pointed out the obvious, that five million women were working in factories to "keep their homes." She reminded her audience that "Women are told not to meddle in politics and that the home is our sphere," but stressed that the role of women was to make the world a decent place for children.

In conclusion, Keller said, "We are meddling with politics; politics meddle with us. As housekeepers we can do little if the streets are left dirty; the garbage not hauled away; the milk not pure; and the water supply bad. Then, too, politics interferes with the education of our children."

The *Evening World* did not indicate whether Keller recruited any new members of the Indiana Franchise League.

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