Local women were active even before they could vote

LOOKING BACK
By Rose McIlveen

Young students of American history may be surprised when they encounter the subject of women's suffrage.

The *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* explains that Wyoming males ceded the right to vote to women as early as 1869, but voting did not become a reality for all American women until 1920.

Before that date the idea had been infectious, and females in Bloomington caught the fever.

Instead of merely nagging males across the dinner table (about the way their husbands were conducting the community's business) their wives had started turning up at city council meetings with respectful and well-researched requests.

All of that by way of background.

The Indianapolis Star editors may have believed that suffrage was inevitable when it proposed a special informal poll for women only.

The *Bloomington Evening World* of Feb. 19, 1912, reported that Miss Anna B. Collins, a high school and university English teacher, has responded to the *Star's* poll with a letter of explanation.

Thanking the *Star* for the opportunity, she wrote, "I look upon it (the poll) as a means of education. I believe that the women who are indifferent in regard to their right and duty as voters are, for the most part, uninformed."

Collins believed that the female vote might not fix all of "the evils under which our government is struggling," but women would certainly be "on the right side" of a moral issue.

"Whenever the question is one of betterment of the home and its environment, women will vote for the removal of temptation from brothers, husbands and children."

The latter comment contained the hint that some of the women participating in the poll by the *Star* were definitely prohibitionist in their political motivation. In fact, the *Evening World* of Feb. 17 had explained that two organizations were urging women to respond to the opportunity to express their political preference — the Woman's Franchise League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Another substantial contributor to the effort was the Indiana Federation of Clubs.

The temperance-minded women favored Charles Scanlon of Pennsylvania, who was the general secretary of the temperance board of the Presbyterian Church of America.

But more importantly, wrote one of the state leaders of the get-out-the-poll campaign, "We urge our women to vote for the candidate of their own choice for President, collect ballots from neighbors and news stands. Get men to help! Urge all women to vote, for this is our greatest opportunity to prove that Indiana women want the ballot for the King's business."

Bloomington's Miss Collins preferred a New Jersey Democrat by the name of Woodrow Wilson.

Uncertain about Wilson's attitude toward women's suffrage, she gave the candidate high marks anyway for his approach to "the bosses, the moneyed interest and the political machine."

She referred to Wilson as "a gentleman and a scholar."

Although Collins admired Republican William Howard Taft, she felt that as president he would be "handicapped by a Democratic Congress."

She explained, "I believe that Taft has made a good fight on reciprocity, the tariff, the trusts and for the arbitration treaties, but his administration has been handicapped."

The Bloomington teacher was right on the mark. In 1912, Woodrow Wilson was elected president, defeating Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive Party), Taft (Republican) and Eugene V. Debs (Socialist).

Women were only eight years away from getting the vote.

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