

Early Women Voters in Herndon

By Barbara Glakas

On May 21, 1919, the United States House of Representatives passed the 19th Amendment, to grant women the right to vote. Two weeks later the Senate did the same. By August of 1920, the amendment accomplished the final threshold of obtaining the concurrence of three-fourths of the states, causing the constitutional amendment to be officially ratified.

Virginia, however, was stubbornly not one of those states that supported the amendment. In February of 1920 Virginia voted against ratifying the amendment. But by August of that same year, the required 36 states had approved the ratification proposal and it became law all over the country. As a result, the right to vote could not be denied to women, even in Virginia. It was not until 1952 that Virginia finally ratified the 19th Amendment.

In the years just prior to the national ratification, women were picketing the White House for the right to vote. According to SuffragistMemorial.org:

“Beginning in June, 1917 until early 1919, over two hundred women from twenty-six states were arrested on charges such as ‘obstructing traffic.’ Refusing to admit guilt or pay any imposed fines, the women were imprisoned in Occoquan Workhouse in Lorton, Virginia, or the District of Columbia Jail. They demanded to be treated as political prisoners. Instead, they were met with violence, forcibly handled by guards, pushed and thrown into cold unsanitary and rat-infested cells. In response to this treatment, Alice Paul led the women in protest, refusing to eat. Hunger strikes became a normal occurrence as more and more women were imprisoned. Not wanting to allow any woman to become a martyr for the cause, prison officials brutally forced food down their throats. Their harsh treatment was reported widely in the papers, raising the public’s awareness of what women they had admired were willing to endure to win the vote.”

A suffragist memorial is currently being planned in the Occoquan Regional Park in Fairfax County, on part of the historic prison grounds where the infamous Occoquan Workhouse was located, where scores of suffragists were once imprisoned.

After ratification, according to the *Encyclopedia of Virginia*, “Virginia women were only given one month to register to vote before the November 1920 presidential election, and registrars were not prepared for the large number of women voters.” In that election, Virginia (and Fairfax County) voted for the Democratic nominee, Ohio Governor James M. Cox, with 61% of the Virginia vote. However, the election was ultimately won by the Republican nominee, Warren G. Harding, with 60% of the national vote. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* noted, “As the election was the first in which women had the right to vote in all 48 states, the total popular vote increased dramatically, from 18.5 million in 1916 to 26.8 million in 1920.”

Back in Herndon, in the fall of 1920, Raymond Wrenn was Herndon's Mayor and Andrew Hutchison was the Town Clerk. The Town Council minutes were silent on any discussion about the ratified 19th Amendment. During that time period the Town Council was busy passing a new Sanitary Ordinance, increasing the number of street lights in town, and purchasing firefighting equipment.

Andrew Hutchison was a town merchant who operated a general store in downtown Herndon. He and his wife lived in a large stately house at 630 Oak Street, located just yards away from the railroad track. Hutchison and his wife Lucy - along with the assistance of a young house servant - rented rooms within their home to various guests. Hutchison had once served as Herndon's Mayor in 1900 and later served as Town Clerk.

As the town clerk, Hutchison may have, in all likelihood, acted as the town registrar. Former Herndon resident and unofficial town historian, Virginia Greear (b. 1893 - d. 1991), once recalled how she went by the Hutchison house to register to vote. However, according to the voting records collection of the Fairfax County Historic Records Center, women were also being employed as registrars at Fairfax voting precincts beginning in 1920.

Given the short time that women had to register to vote that first year, it is unknown how many Herndon women were able to vote in the 1920 Presidential election. The 1920 voting records for the Fairfax County's Dranesville District and for Herndon are incomplete due to destruction. The qualifications for voting may have also impacted how fast the Herndon women were able to complete their registration.

A 1920 Virginia Senate bill indicated that women were required to be 21 to vote. They had to be a state resident for two years and a resident of the town for one year, preceding the election. It also said, "For the purpose of registering and voting, the residence of a married woman shall not be controlled by the residence or domicile of her husband." There was also a requirement to pay a \$1.50 state poll tax (or capitation tax), equivalent to about \$20 today. Additionally, unless physically unable to do so, women would be required to apply to register in her own handwriting, without aid, in the presence of the registration officer.

Found in the Fairfax County Historic Records Room was a paper entitled, "A list of women who have paid their Capitation taxes for the year 1921 in the Town of Herndon - Fairfax County, Virginia. Prior to December 7th, 1920." Presumably, these poll taxes paid prior to December 1920 would have applied to the 1921 elections, although that cannot be confirmed.

On that list were the names of 127 white women and two black women from Herndon. Based on their respective titles of "Mrs." or "Miss," it appears that 90 of the women were married, and 38 were unmarried. One woman did not have a title. According to the 1920 census, the population of the town of Herndon was 953 people that year, including 289 women who were 21 years old or older. Therefore, the 129 women who paid their poll taxes prior to December of 1920

represented about 14% of Herndon's total population and 45% of the age-eligible women who lived in Herndon.

The last names of the women who were listed on the capitation tax list were: Anderson, Aud, Bates, Blanchard, Bowers, Bradshaw, Brady, Bryan, Buell, Bready, Carr, Carter, Castleman, Chamblin, Cockerille, Cooper, Crippen, Crouch, Crouse, Curtice, Darrell, Dawson, Detwiler, Decker, Ellis, Ellswick, Ennis, Ferguson, Finnell, Florence, Fulton, George, Gilmer, Greear, Groh, Grubb, Hanes, Harrison, Holden, Holtzclaw, Hutchison, Hyatt, Jackson, Jones, Kenfield, Keyes, Lancaster, Leith, Long, Lynn, McMillen, Madison, Martz, Miller, Mitchell, Mooney, Myers, North, Orrison, Parker, Peterson, Poole, Reed, Rider, Robery, Russey, Seamans, Shaw, Shear, Shirley, Shryock, Simonds, Stanton, Steele, Stephens, Summers, Torrence, Van Meter, Walker, White, Wilkins, Williams, Woods, Wrenn, and Yount.

How exciting and what an honor it must have been to be amongst the first Herndon women to vote in a U.S. election after the 19th Amendment was passed!

About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.