Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy
Centennial Corner---August 24

The Rest of the Story

Last week we ended with the Tennessee House of Representatives voting, at last, to ratify the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. After the final vote, Speaker of the House Seth Walker, a fervent anti-suffrage man, immediately requested to change his vote to “Aye.” This was a clever move, because with his “Aye” vote, he became a member of the majority and thus had the right to move for reconsideration of the Amendment. Reconsideration gave him three more days to bring the amendment back for another vote. The amendment could still be rejected.

The lobbying of the members of the Tennessee Legislature was intense before the last vote, but after that vote it became almost lethal. The House erupted in pandemonium. Harry Burn was a prime target of the anti-suffrage faction’s threats and insults. He escaped the House chamber by slipping into an office, going out a window, edging along a narrow ledge, then climbing through another window into the state legislative library, startling the librarian as he did so. From there he was able to exit the Capitol.

But that didn’t mean Harry Burn was home free. By evening of that day, the anti-suffrage group had devised an elaborate scheme to explain Burn’s sudden vote switch. He had been bribed. “Witnesses” were found who had seen Joe Hanover, the leader of the pro-suffrage legislators, drag Burn into a side room off the house chamber, rough him up, and promise him $10,000 to change his vote. Affidavits were signed attesting to the truth of the accusation. The anti-suffrage members confronted Burn with the “evidence,” threatening to ruin his career if he did not change his vote.

In the meantime, the suffragists knew they had to keep the pro-suffrage members of the House in Nashville for the next few days. It was hot and many of them were tired and wanted to go home to their families. The anti-suffrage people were encouraging them, in not so subtle ways, to do the opposite and leave town. Fake telegrams indicating family emergencies were delivered. Threats of all kinds were made. But the suffragists
stubbornly refused to allow any pro-suffrage members to leave.

The halls and lobbies of the hotels and boardinghouses were patrolled by suffragists. The train station and taxi stands were monitored. Any pro-suffrage member found walking with a suitcase was intercepted and returned to his room. Harassment continued in the form of repeated phone calls throughout the night. Kidnappings were rumored and some might really have happened.

Joe Hanover was confronted with the “evidence” of his bribery that purportedly caused Harry Burn to change his mind and his vote. But that whole scheme fell apart the next morning. The local newspaper had printed the fake affidavits on the front page and exposed them as fraudulent. Strong denials by Harry Burn and Joe Hanover were also printed. The stenographer to whom the fake affidavits had been dictated was a suffragist who, recognizing the affidavits as fraudulent, gave copies to the newspaper. That was the morning the House was convened for the reconsideration. Seth Walker realized nobody’s mind had been changed and did not call for a vote. The Legislature’s ratification of the Amendment was sent on to Governor Roberts for his certification.

But the anti-suffragists were not ready to admit defeat. They went to court and obtained an injunction preventing Governor Roberts from signing the ratification for a few more days. They organized “indignation rallies” in the home districts of the pro-suffrage legislators, attempting to foment rebellion against woman suffrage and anyone who supported it. Many of the rallies were overtly racist as the anti-suffrage people appealed to the newly rejuvenated Tennessee KKK. Some of the rallies came dangerously close to mob action.

The Tennessee Attorney General finally found a judge to dissolve the injunction against the Governor. Governor Roberts signed the documents, they were placed in an envelope marked “special delivery” and immediately sent to US Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby on August 24th. Carrie Catt and a few other suffragists hoped to get to Colby’s office in time to witness the signing and boarded a train as soon as they could. Alice Paul, the master of suffragist spectacles, had arranged for photographers and movie cameras to be present for the event. These two women were the heads of two rival pro-suffrage organizations and had disagreed on tactics throughout the very long campaign. Neither wanted to share the moment with the other. Colby was aware of the feud and did not want to be caught in the middle of it. When the Tennessee ratification papers arrived at his house in the early morning hours of August 26th, he signed them right there in the comfort of his own home. It was then the 19th Amendment was enshrined in the US Constitution and became the law of the land, 100 years ago this Wednesday.

Linda Davis
(Adapted from The Woman’s Hour by Elaine Weiss)

Make Your Voice Heard!

Vote T-Shirts

In the midst of a catastrophic pandemic, our country is also consumed with a painful struggle for fairness, equality, and justice. Many of you are exercising your right to protest, and working for changes to ensure the human rights fundamental to our democracy apply to everyone.

Remember: Your vote has the power of a demonstration. Your vote is a protest against
injustice. Your vote is a voice raised against wrongdoing.

The League of Women Voters of Tallahassee has created t-shirts to underscore the power of the vote in this time of struggle. These shirts, pictured below, can be purchased on the League’s website at: lwvtallahassee.org. Price, size and delivery information is posted on the website. Tell the world the power of your vote!

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**VOTE411 Yard Signs**

Yes, we still have some VOTE411 yard signs left and want them to be displayed, no matter what area you live in.

If you want a sign, please send an e-mail to the coordinator, Peggy Allen (margaretallen97@gmail.com), with your name, email address, phone number and the quadrant (NW, SW, NE, SE) where the sign will be placed. Peggy will send an email to you, letting you know where you can pick up the sign(s).

There will be a sign-up sheet on a clipboard. Please add your name, quadrant, date, and signature.

Please keep in mind the following regulations from the Leon County Land Development Code:

- Signs must be placed 15 feet from the nearest curb or edge of the roadway.
- Signs shall not be placed on any public properties or public rights-of-way.
- Signs must comply with regulations concerning sight distance triangles.
- All signs must be removed within 30 days of the election.
You will be keeping the sign through the general election and will be responsible for picking it up after the election.

If you have any questions, please contact Margaret Boeth at voterserviceslwvt@gmail.com or 508-4800 (C) or text.

Thanks,

*Margaret Boeth, Chair*
*Voter Services*

New Members

Linda Hall
Robert Watkins

**What's Happening this Week**

N.B.: Even if not so noted, many of these may be virtual meetings. Always check.


3:00 p.m. [Leon County School Board, Agenda Review/Workshops](#). Aquilina Howell Center. 3955 W. Pensacola Street.

**Tuesday**, August 25.

1:00 p.m. [City of Tallahassee and the Big Bend Chapter Florida Police Benevolent Association Negotiations Session](#). Virtual Meeting.

6:00 p.m. [Leon County School Board Business Meeting](#). Aquilina Howell Center. 3955 W. Pensacola Street.

**Thursday**, August 27.

9:30 a.m. [Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Board Meeting](#). City Commission Chambers. City Hall. 300 South Adams Street.
Or contact us at lwvtallahassee@gmail.com
850-309-3005