

IOWA HISTORY

A Real Western Suffragette

In August 1910 the *St. Louis Dispatch* newspaper devoted a full page to a “Real Western Suffragette.” The reporter was writing about Carrie Vaughn Anderson, a former school teacher who was running for county recorder in Wright County, Iowa.

Carrie was a 31-year-old widow who was supporting her four children on her teacher’s salary when she decided to run for the county position. Her opponent in the Republican primary, F.F. Johnson, was an “old campaigner” and the incumbent, who most people thought was “far in the lead.”

Carrie, armed with a sharp sense of humor and “a good pair of lungs,” set out to visit every town and farm in Wright County in February soon after announcing her candidacy. Sometimes she traveled by automobile, other times by horse. While school was in session she limited her campaigning to Saturday. But in April when school ended for the summer, Carrie hit the campaign trail full time.

“The men told me I better keep out of it, that politics was no place for a woman,” Carrie said. “But I decided to stick to it just the same.”

At first crowds greeted her with skepticism, but Carrie kept “edging into the public eye and mind” every chance she could get. Some critics complained that she took payment for speeches on occasion. Other didn’t like that she was known to pay for the privilege of giving a speech. And there were those who criticized her when she climbed onto a stage and begged the audience to remain after the men candidates had given their speeches.

She spoke at Decoration Day (Memorial Day) parades, farmers’ cooperative gatherings and school picnics. Before long Carrie was known all over the county. She was welcomed in places where the voters were “tired of listening” to the “buncombe of the old-time politicians.” And that ended up being a majority of voters in the June primary race, making her the Republican nominee for county recorder.

Carrie said occasionally she ran into “ignorant men voters” who she said were not opposed to women in office, rather they “had no principles” when it came to voting. She compared them to the famous writer George Bernard Shaw who once said, “I have no principles; I make them up as I go along.”

In the general election in the fall, Carrie found herself running against F.F. Johnson again. When he failed to win the Republican primary, somehow he became the Democrat candidate. Carrie believed he expected a split in the Republican party, taking votes from her in the general election.

Although F.F. “put up a very hard fight,” he wasn’t able to pull in enough votes to win the general election. It looked as though Carrie would take office in January 1911.

However, late in November something happened that jeopardized the outcome of the election. A secret about Carrie Vaughn Anderson was revealed. She actually was Carrie Vaughn Anderson-Lucas. Sometime between putting her name on the primary ballot and the general election, Carrie had fallen in love with a traveling salesman named W.W. Lucas. They had married in October in Omaha and kept it secret. Carrie planned to live in Clarion and fill one term of office before announcing her marriage.

F.F. Johnson learned about the deception and exposed Carrie's secret. She admitted to the secret marriage but insisted there was "no law compelling a woman to take her husband's name."

"I was accused of going into politics to get a man," Carrie said. "Well, I have the man; but I expect to stay in politics. I am the same person they voted for on November 8."

Because there was no precedent for the unusual situation, officials were unsure how to handle the case. Finally it was concluded that the county board of supervisors would make a decision. But before that could happen, F.F. chose not to contest the election. And on January 1, 1911, Carrie became the Wright County recorder.

Carrie summed up her milestone election, "Men, as well as women, are beginning to realize that the great matters of today are to be solved not by sex, but by a general fitness of persons concerned in the furtherance of a good cause. It isn't so much a case of 'women's rights' as a case of the rights of the people."

©www.CherylMullenbachInk.com

Sources

"Farmers Elevator Picnic at Newburg, Iowa—Carrie Vaughn Anderson Speaker of the Day," p 16, *American Co-Operative Journal*. Sept, 1910.

"Johnson Not To Contest," *Des Moines Register*, Jan 1, 1911.

"Matters of Opinion," *Register and Leader*, Dec 2, 1909.

"Campaigning with a Real Western Suffragette," *St. Louis Dispatch*, Aug 14, 1910.

"Running For Recorder," *Register and Leader*, Sept 25, 1910.

"Secret Marriage," *Nevada Daily Mail*, Dec 1, 1910.

"Thousands at Picnic," *Des Moines Register*, Aug 16, 1911.

"Will the Woman Win?" *Times-Republican*, Dec 16, 1910.

"Woman For Recordership," *Appeal*, Aug 6, 1910.

"Women in the News," *Reading Eagle*, Dec 29, 1910.