

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of March 17 – 23, 2019

Women's History Month continues, and this week we'll look at a local woman who ran for political office in 1924. The majority of women in the U.S. gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1920. Just four years later, Lillian Jussen Proctor ran for the office of Member of Assembly for Vernon County.

1924 was a big election year in Vernon County. The offices of U.S. president, Wisconsin governor, and our district's assembly member were all on the ballot. Other hot topics of the day included Prohibition and the Ku Klux Klan. Prohibition was in its 5th year and was still very controversial. And in the 1920's, the KKK re-branded itself as an organization that stood for morality and community standards, and saw a huge resurgence of popularity and membership.

Against this backdrop, Lillian Proctor ran on the Independent ticket. She had been born Lillian Jussen in 1879 to German immigrants in Wisconsin. As a young teacher, she married Harold Peres Proctor, a Viroqua lawyer, in 1901. They settled in Viroqua and became a part of the community.

In her September 18 candidacy announcement, Lillian stated that she supported WI Senator Robert M. LaFollette for president, and the current Governor Blaine for governor. She supported Prohibition and wanted stricter laws enforcing it. And she was opposed to the KKK and to all organizations founded on racial and religious prejudice, and suggested that the current assemblyman, A.E. Smith of Viroqua, was a member of the KKK. (He was. In late September, 100 Klansmen in white robes paraded up and down Viroqua's Main Street with a burning cross, and no doubt Smith was among them.)

Lillian didn't win the election, and A.E. Smith was re-elected. On November 5, the *Vernon County Censor* printed the election results and, with one precinct missing, there were 3981 votes for Smith and 2563 for Proctor. Smith carried 26 precincts, and Proctor 11. That's a respectable showing for a woman running for office just a few years after the 19th amendment had passed.

So far as I know, Lillian never entered the political arena again. She became a businesswoman, running a knitting and giftware shop on Main St. in Viroqua. When her husband died in 1932, she continued to live and work in Viroqua for a few more years before moving to La Crosse. There she again set up in the "yarn" business, making and selling hand knit children's clothing. Lillian Proctor died in La Crosse in 1953, age 75, and was buried in Viroqua.

Spring is coming, and the museum's hours will soon be changing. Beginning on Monday, April 1 (no fooling!), the museum will be open Monday through Friday, noon to 4PM. These springtime hours will last through the months of April and May.

The museum's next free public program will be held on Tuesday, April 2, at 7PM, in the conference room. Bill Quackenbush, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Ho-Chunk Nation, will speak on the topic of "Ho-Chunk History: Past, Present and Future".