

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of March 22 - 28, 2020

It's still Women's History Month, and we are having some luck finding the names of local people who helped women get the vote 100 years ago. In her 1976 autobiography, Elizabeth Luella (Harris) (Stoda) Yarrington of Viroqua remembered the work of several local women who were part of the suffrage movement. Today I'd like to look at one of them, Amy Gott.

In Amy's life experiences we see the same traits as in many other suffragists – she got a good education, and she travelled widely. Amy was born in 1885 in Viroqua to Dr. William Gott and Lydia (Ruggles) Peck Gott. Their home still stands on the northwest corner of Center and Terhune. You can see a photo of it at our website – click on Viroqua Walking Tours, and look at the picture under Heritage Hike.

Amy graduated from Viroqua High School in 1903, and then began several years of higher education in a variety of places. First she studied at Milwaukee-Downer College for Women (later incorporated into Lawrence University at Appleton). Then she went to the Stout Institute in Menomonie (now UW Stout), which taught “practical skills for young men and women, including woodworking, mechanical drawing, dressmaking, and cooking”. And finally she attended the Teachers' College of Columbia University at New York (which has the same name today).

After this formal education, Amy became a teacher of Domestic Science, working in schools across the country including in Escanaba, Michigan; Milledgeville, Georgia; Geneva, New York; and Rockford, Illinois. When the U.S. entered World War I, she broadened her horizons again, travelling to France in 1918 to work for the YMCA, helping the soldiers and the refugees.

Amy is known to have campaigned for women's suffrage when she lived in Vernon County, and she most likely kept up that work when she lived elsewhere. Her mother Lydia was active in the temperance movement, and also in education and politics. No doubt Amy learned leadership skills from her mother, and from her own circle of suffragist friends.

In 1920, women at last won the right to vote, and I'm sure that Amy celebrated, and then went to cast a ballot. Also that year, she began work as a stenographer at the Bank of Viroqua. Five years later, she married local farmer Gabriel Roisland, and became a stepmother to his daughter Darlene. When Gabriel died in 1957, Amy went to live with Darlene in California. Amy died there in 1972, and is buried in Coon Prairie Cemetery.



In this photo we see Amy Gott on the right, second down from the top, surrounded by her friends Genevieve Harris, Ethel Nuzum, Ida Dinsdale, Myrtle Adlington, Helen Munson, Sadie Rogers, and Mary Coffland, most of whom graduated from Viroqua High School in 1902 or 1903.