

## FROM YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# Women's Suffrage in Medina County

## A Story of Controversy and Perseverance

By: State Representative, STEVE HAMBLEY



This year and next, the nation celebrates 100 years since women won the right to vote. The events that led up to the historic ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was part of the Suffrage Movement. In 1919, Congress submitted it to the state legislatures and it was ratified by three-fourths of the states a year later. While the Ohio General Assembly was one of the earliest to ratify, it took until Tennessee's ratification in August of 1920 to add the amendment to the U.S. Constitution and effectively give women a full franchise nationwide.

In April of 1894, Ohio women were given the limited right to

vote for and serve on school boards. Many in favor of the law argued that women would help reform the education system. As Ohio State School Commissioner Carson stated, "It is hoped that the women of Ohio will take advantage of the power granted them under the new law, and aid in removing from the management of the public schools that narrow partisanship which, in some localities, is their greatest curse." (*Wellington Enterprise*, March 13, 1895)

On several occasions, even this limited franchise was threatened to be repealed by action of the General Assembly ostensibly because it was not being exercised

frequently throughout the state. In fact, Hamilton County officials stated in 1920, out of approximately 50,000 women eligible to vote, only 2,000 registered under the school franchise and only half regularly voted. (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 19, 1920). Sadly, Medina women suffered similarly lackluster involvement at the polls. One male observer in the *Medina Sentinel* wrote in a November 1919 election that only 21 women voted in contrast to the 231 men in Ward A of Medina Village. He commented that it was not a very good showing for those asking that the franchise be expanded.



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Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts to broaden the franchise to all elected positions and issues of the state, women's suffrage in Ohio was not successful until 1920. The political divisiveness was evident throughout the state, as well as Medina County. Despite general support of business and community leaders in a few communities, a bare majority of Medina County males voted to give the full franchise to women in 1912 (51.1 percent) – the measure failed statewide with only 42.5 percent. Medina County men again defeated it in 1914 and 1919, with only 47.7 percent and 48.3 percent voting "Yes." The unremembered discord provides one of the main reasons why the next two years of celebration by state and local historical societies needs widespread attention.

Currently working through the Ohio General Assembly is Senate Bill 30 by Senators Kunze and Williams, which establishes the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission. Once adopted the Commission will plan and carry out educational events in 2019 and 2020. Locally, Suffrage History will be the



theme of 2019 for the Medina County Historical Society, which is open on Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and on the first Sunday of the month from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the John Smart House Museum, 206 N. Elmwood, Medina. ([www.medinahistorical.com](http://www.medinahistorical.com))

If you get the opportunity, learn about what was truly a cultural and political struggle for gender equality at the ballot box over a century ago. All too often, in this age of expected fast paced changes, we forget the true nature of historical movements. Their outcomes take time, are not unifying in nature or temperament, and are not pre-determined. There is sometimes a belief that the universal franchise was inevitable and widely supported. The history and the data say otherwise.