

Henrietta Baldy Lyon: Our own suffragist

Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI



Local women played an important part in winning women the right to vote, and Henrietta Baldy Lyon highlighted that role when she addressed the large celebration held in the Community House in September 1920, after the 19th amendment was ratified. The Gazette and Bulletin reported that she gave an "effective talk in which she spoke on the long struggle and the important part played by the women of Pennsylvania and Lycoming County."

That amendment to the Constitution guarantees that no state can deny the right to vote on the basis of sex.

Baldy Lyon was a central figure in the movement; she was chair of the Lycoming County Suffrage Party at its convention in September 1915. One of Williamsport's elite, she lived on Millionaire's Row.

As Barbara Ertel said in discussing Baldy Lyon's home at 219 W. Fourth St. in "The West Fourth Street Story" (1975), Baldy Lyon had "courage and tenacity" when she joined the battle for the vote.

Suffrage was not the only cause that Baldy Lyon worked for. When the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, the suffragists, who were by then very well organized in Lycoming County, turned their attention also to supporting the war effort. Baldy Lyon became the Lycoming County chair of the Women's Liberty Loan Committee. She was an organizer of the Lycoming County Red Cross Society, the Lycoming County Food Committee and the Lycoming County Speakers Bureau.

Adopted daughter

Born on April 14, 1865 in Danville, she was the youngest of the five children of Henry Hurley Baldy, a prominent lawyer, and Henrietta Cooper Montgomery Baldy. Her mother died shortly after she was

born, and she was raised in Williamsport by her great-aunt, Caroline, and her husband, Edward Lyon, a lumberman. She took the name Lyon out of respect for her adopted parents.

On both sides of her family, Baldy Lyon could trace her roots back to Colonial times, and she was a member of the Pennsylvania Society of the Colonial Dames of America.

At 16, she went to Elmira College for one year. When she was 31 she attended Bryn Mawr College. In the College catalog, she is listed as a "Hearer in Latin, English, German, and French, 1896-98, 1899-1900, 1901." (A "hearer" was someone who audited courses but was not enrolled in a degree program). Bryn Mawr records indicate that she had lived "prepared at Miss Anable's School in Philadelphia." According to her obituary, she also attended Barnard College in New York and Washington University in St. Louis, Mo.

We have one photograph of Henrietta, taken when she must have been in her late 50s and published along with a profile in Col. Thomas H. Lloyd's History of Lycoming County (1929). There also is a physical description of her at age 24, written when she applied for a passport. She is described as being five feet tall and having brown hair, blue eyes, a fair complexion, a high forehead, a Roman nose, a well-formed chin and a moderately full face.

As an unmarried woman, she had the time and the freedom to dedicate her talent and energy to civic and charitable affairs. The Gazette and Bulletin reported that in April 1905 she held a fundraising bridge party at the Country Club to benefit the Home for the Friendless; she held many such fundraisers. We know that she was one of the very few women in the city who drove an automobile. In



BALDY LYON



At left is the home of Henrietta Baldy Lyon, courtesy of the Lycoming County Historical Society. Above is a clipping from the Williamsport Gazette and Bulletin on Feb. 2, 1918 from the Lycoming County Women's History collection.

1905, the Gazette and Bulletin reported that she was involved in an automobile accident; she allegedly had been driving at a high rate of speed up West Fourth Street.

Winning suffrage

In Lycoming County, the suffragists' goal was to organize every ward and precinct in the city for the cause. While Baldy Lyon was traveling all over the state and bringing state and national leaders to Williamsport, the opposition also was active.

In 1915, the anti-suffragists in Lycoming County elected as chair Mrs. H. D. McCormick. Rebecca Foresman was vice chair; Katherine Reardon, secretary. According to a speaker at a county meeting, the anti-suffragists considered themselves the real progressives, believing that they were more in line with constitutional principles. Reporting on an address by an out-of-state speaker, Mrs. O. D. Oliphant, of Trenton, N. J., at one of the first anti-suffrage gatherings in the city, the Sept. 8, 1915, The Williamsport Sun said that many women were fearful of the push for votes for women and that "the majority of her sex does not want to see woman brought down to the level of man."

In Nov. 1916, the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association's 48th annual convention took place in Williamsport. The Lycoming County Historical Society holds a copy of the official convention program, and a digitized copy is part of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection at www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc.

Readers are invited to take a look at the program and see if their great-great-grandmothers might have attended. Among the women mentioned are Mrs. R. Fleming Allen, who chaired the Local Arrangements Committee, and Mrs. Lucius C. Sweeley, who chaired the Automobile Committee.

Most of the convention sessions were held at the YMCA and in the community rooms of Trinity Episcopal Church on West Fourth Street. Some entertaining of delegates was done at the Country Club. At the YMCA, attendees could buy literature and "novelties" such as "Votes for Women" pins, flags and dinner plates.

After suffrage

After the 19th amendment granted women the right to vote, Baldy was an organizer and officer of the local League of Women Voters, whose purpose was to educate women to participate in the political life of the county. She also held statewide positions in the League. Club member-

ship and club actions were an important way for women to gain political power during that time period, and Lyon was a member of many clubs, including the Philadelphia College Club, the Women's Club, the Clio Club and the Garden Club.

Noted for her philanthropy, she established a scholarship at Bryn Mawr College. She was a board member of and donor to the Williamsport YWCA. In addition to serving on a statewide committee of the Children's Aid Society, she was vice president of the Lycoming County chapter.

Also on the executive committee were fellow Williamsporters Helen Johnson, Mrs. George Crocker, Mrs. J. Wesley Little and Dr. Max Miller.

Baldy Lyon died at her home, 870 Hollywood Circle, on Jan. 11, 1950, at the age of 85 following a short illness. Page Funeral Home made the arrangements for her funeral, and the Rev. Francis P. Davis, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, of which she was a member, officiated.

Miss Lyon is Elected Chairman of Lycoming County Suffragists

Enthusiastic Meeting Held At Y. W. C. A. Saturday Afternoon—Patriotic Program Presented At Annual Convention.

Miss Henrietta N. Lyon was elected chairman of the Lycoming County Suffrage party at its annual convention held at the Y. W. C. A. Saturday afternoon. The meeting was largely attended. The other officers elected are as follows: Mrs. J. P. Allen, vice chairman; Mrs. F. W. Robbins, Mrs. R. J. Macomber, Mrs. M. T. Bess, vice chairman; Miss Margaret L. Smith, secretary, and Mrs. Garrett Cochran, treasurer.

At noon a box luncheon was served and at 1.30 o'clock the first session was called to order by the county chairman, Miss Henrietta N. Lyon. The Rev. Charles Meyer Tyndall was present and offered the invocation. The music, in charge of Mrs. John McCormick and Mrs. Helen Johnson, was patriotic in character. The songs by W. Clyde Harter were well rendered and received most heartily by the audience.

considered. Mrs. John G. Robinson, chairman of the finance committee, presented the budget of \$400 for the year. Over half of that amount was subscribed in a few minutes.

An important bit of information was given out concerning a hospital unit, which is already at work in France. The suffragists of the United States are assisting and sending this hospital for women and children who have been neglected, as all hospitals in France are being used for the soldiers.

At 2 p. m. Mrs. Walter King Sharpe, of Chambersburg, and Mrs. Thomas Hobbs, of Philadelphia, addressed the convention. Mrs. Sharpe is head of the state registration work of the women's committee of the Council of National Defense. In her address she pointed out the essential and non-essentials and the human element in war work. The war has been stripping and will continue to strip our country of everything except the very essentials of life, and an essential plan was made for the women to do the necessary duties that the war brings to us. The registration of the women who have been trained to do these necessary things is most important in order that the government

PHOTOS PROVIDED

Read more about the fight for (and against) suffrage in Lycoming County, the 19th-century visits of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the activities of our own local suffragettes in next month's "Williamsport Women."

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