

Celebrating 100 years of having the right to vote

Much of history of women's suffrage occurred in Ashtabula County



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Esther Blevins, 91, of Jefferson, remains active in the Ashtabula County League of Women Voters.

91-year-old Esther Blevins — an activist for women's rights and lifelong member of the Ashtabula County League of Women Voters

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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JEFFERSON — Jefferson area resident Esther Blevins is celebrating more than 50 years as a founding member of the Ashtabula County League of Women Voters.

The 91-year-old said the league's mission has evolved since the early 20th century and women's suffrage, when the first league was founded to ensure women would have an equal voice in the democratic process.

"I didn't have much input in 'getting the vote,'" she said. "But I have been given a lifetime membership in the League of Women Voters of the United States."

Blevins joined the Geauga County league after moving to the area with her husband.

In October 1968, she moved to Ashtabula County, and she and three other women formed the Ashtabula County chapter affiliate, said Mary Howe, the league's current president.

"She's been very active in the local organization and at one time, was on the state League of Women Voters Board," Howe said. "Until early this year, she forwarded all emails to local members that I, as president, received and thought it should be passed on to membership."

After Blevins helped start the league, one of the first issues it focused on was the youth detention center, which at the time was a residential home. After years of work and appealing to county leaders, the existing Donahoe Center was established.

The league also helped improve the conditions of the Ashtabula County jail in Jefferson.

Blevins was instrumental in getting the first recycling program in Jefferson Village, Howe said. Though it was eventually disbanded, recycling remains in the village today. She was also a founding member of the Jefferson Co-Op Preschool, a daycare.

"She's always been a huge proponent of voting and the process of government, while remaining non-partisan, as the League of Women Voters is," Howe said.

She also had a seat on the state's emergency board. It was her idea to start printing common emergency procedures at the front of the state's phone books, she said.

Nowadays, Blevins keeps up with league activities as much as she can, Howe said.

"She stays up-to-date by getting our minutes," she said. "She signed on to one of our Zoom meetings this spring [because of the coronavirus] but it was hard for her hear."

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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Women's suffrage is the right of women to vote in elections. Beginning in the mid-1800s, women sought to change voting laws to allow them to vote, garnering a right already given to men.

Their activism spans more than 70 years, from the mid-1800s to 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was adopted into law. In Ashtabula County, the suffrage movement took form even before the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in New York, according to the Committee to Preserve the Women's Suffrage History of Ashtabula County.

Five years ago, when Richard Dana's wife, Marianne Sezon, was elected Ashtabula County Common Pleas judge, the first woman in Ashtabula County elected to this particular seat, the couple decided to pay homage to those who won women the vote, and paved the trail for Sezon's election.

"We made a pilgrimage to New York State and the location of the First Women's Suffrage Convention at Seneca Falls," Dana said. "We enjoyed the museum and the surrounding area thoroughly, as a tour of Seneca Falls has several impressive historical locations."

They visited the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the main organizer of the 1848 Convention. A short distance away from the Stanton home stands the M'Clintock House where the convention was planned, and the Declaration of Sentiments were drafted, a document largely credited to Lucretia Mott.

"The highlight of the tour was the Wesleyan Chapel," Dana said. "In need of repairs at the time of our visit, this chapel was the location of the 1848 Convention at Seneca Falls where the Declaration of Sentiments was signed by more than 100 people," he said.

"A reading of this document, conveniently written on a large wall in a park between the



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

A plaque commemorating an 1859 women's suffrage convention is bolted to a rock outside the Jefferson Congregational Church.

Historians research potential first meeting

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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There may have been a women's suffrage conference in Ashtabula County, years before the Seneca Falls, N.Y., convention that is widely accepted as the first women's suffrage event.

A marker at the First Congregational Church in Jefferson states that a suffrage

'There's no question that Ashtabula County was in the mix here with respect to women's suffrage.'

Richard Dana

Professor at Kent State Ashtabula and local historian

convention was held in 1844, said Richard Dana, a professor at Kent State Ashtabula and local historian.

"There's no question that Ashtabula County was in the mix here with respect to women's suffrage," Dana said.

Betsy Mix Cowles led a suffrage convention in Salem, Dana said.

"That would have been the second women's suffrage convention after Seneca Falls," he said. "And it was our own Betsy Mix Cowles from Austinburg, Ohio that led that convention in Salem, Ohio."

Dana said there is growing evidence that the meeting mentioned on the marker at the First Congregational Church happened, though not necessarily in 1844.

"This is something I've been spending quite a bit of time here researching," Dana said. "I think we have an argument from which to say that Betsy Mix Cowles did hold a women's suffrage convention in 1846, which would be two years before Seneca Falls."

Letters from a woman named Abby Kelley Foster cited Cowles as the leader of the suffrage movement, Dana said. An abolitionist newspaper, dated in 1847 and credited

SEE **POTENTIAL**, C4

Wesleyan Chapel and an adjacent visitor's center, provided a poignant end to your visit with a chance to reflect upon why our nation's ideals upon our founding were limited only to white males of privilege."

Many of the first county suffragists, including Betsey Mix Cowles, were women who were active abolitionists. Later suffragists, including Judge Florence Allen and Mayor Amy Kaukonen,

successfully ran for political office as soon as the 19th Amendment was adopted.

"Having the right to vote meant women had input into laws that affected their lives," said Meghan Davis, chair of the Committee to Preserve the Women's Suffrage History in Ashtabula County.

"Without the right to vote, laws favored the husband in divorces and gave custody of children to their fathers," she said. "When women married, their assets transferred to their husbands. Women had to pay taxes without the right to vote on tax laws."

Several of the suffragists from Ashtabula County moved to other parts of the nation and were influential in Washington D.C., Michigan and California, Davis said.

Locally, women established the Woman's Club and Zonta, and were members of national organizations, all of which promoted women's rights. The county's esteemed schools, the New Lyme Institute and Grand River Institute, opened their doors to women who earned an educational foundation.

"The Ashtabula County suffragists were smart, strong-willed, dedicated and accomplished," Davis said. "They endured the hardships of traveling throughout the state and nation to communicate about women's issues and voting. They were faced with backlash at speaking engagements and laws that prohibited gatherings to discuss political issues. But through their perseverance, they were integral to the women's right-to-vote movement."

Allowing women to cast a ballot was not an entirely new idea. Some Native American women voted in their tribes before the Europeans arrived on this continent.

Some western states granted women the right to vote in the 1800's. For example, Utah allowed women to vote until it became

SEE **COUNTY**, C4

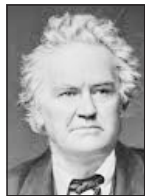
Several local leaders took part in Women's Suffrage Movement

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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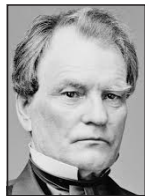
Throughout Ashtabula County's history, community leaders from different professions fought for equal rights and participated in the women's suffrage movement, according to the Northeast Ohio Suffrage and the Committee to Preserve the Women's Suffrage History of Ashtabula County.

Here is a sample of just a few:

· Florence Ellinwood Allen (1884-1966) who graduated from the New Lyme Institute



Giddings



Wade

in Ashtabula County, and Jefferson attorneys Joshua R. Giddings and Benjamin Wade, sought equality by practicing law. Allen became the first woman to sit on Ohio Supreme Court. Giddings served in the U.S. House of Representatives, and was an ardent abolitionist. Wade served in the U.S. Senate and fought strongly

for African-Americans' rights, as well as the women's right to vote.

· An Ohio native, Carolyn Ransom (1826-1910) was a 19th Century pioneer by breaking out of the artist limitations imposed on women. Her works included many historical portraits. Her portrait of Alexander Hamilton was used on the \$10 bill.

The Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum in Ashtabula displays her portraits of Katherine H. and William Hubbard. The oil paintings are hung in the main hallway.

· Mary Howell Miller Battels (1860-1927) was a physician who advocated for women's rights, suffrage and community health.

Her family moved to Ashtabula County where she graduated from the Grand River Institute in Austinburg. She entered one of the few schools that would train women in medicine, the University of Michigan, where she earned her medical degree in 1888.

In 1890, she moved to Detroit where she worked with Dr. Lucy M.

SEE **LOCAL**, C4



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In a photo from 1912, Florence Allen can be seen holding a flag in front of the Euclid Avenue Woman Suffrage Headquarters in Cleveland. Allen, who became the first female judge on the Ohio Supreme Court, went to school at the New Lyme Institute in Ashtabula County.

Richard Dana, in conjunction with the Ashtabula County Women's Suffrage Preservation Society and others, honors the women from Northeast Ohio who played pivotal roles in the ratification of the 19th Amendment.



Celebrating
100 YEARS of
WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Photo Credit: Library of Congress "Women Suffrage Headquarters " / Kent State University Libraries / the Committee to Preserve the History of Suffrage in Ashtabula County.

ELECT

RICHARD

DANA

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Paid for by Committee to Elect Richard Dana. Nancy Patterson, Treasurer

One of country's first female judges attended school in Ashtabula County

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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One of the first female judges in the United States, Florence E. Allen was the first woman to serve as a Ohio Supreme Court justice and she went to school at the New Lyme Institute in Ashtabula County.

Allen was born March 23, 1884, in Salt Lake City, Utah — 36 years before the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote.

According to the Committee to Preserve the Women's Suffrage History of Ashtabula County, Allen's family were early settlers and educators in Ashtabula County. By age 7, Allen's father had taught her Greek and Latin, and she was educated in the classics and music.

Allen took a liking to music in her early childhood, and attended New Lyme Institute (later known as Deming High School), where her maternal grandfather was president. She then continued her education at Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

After graduating with honors from Western Reserve, Allen went to Germany to advance her music studies, but a nerve injury cut short her plans, and she returned to the United States in 1906.

She found an outlet for her music background as a critic for the Cleveland Plain Dealer while pursuing a graduate degree in political science and constitutional law at West-



PHOTO COURTESY OF KENT STATE ASHTABULA LIBRARY AND OPEN ACCESS KENT STATE
Florence Allen participates in a march for women's right to vote.

ern Reserve, according to the Western Reserve Historical Society.

After receiving her degree in 1908, Allen was heavily involved in the women's suffrage movement. She participated in the Ohio and New York women's suffrage groups and attended many meetings and rallies.

Allen then moved to New York, where she worked for the New York League for the Protection of Immigrants. She earned a law degree from the New York University School of Law in 1913.

With law degree in hand, Allen returned to Ohio, was admitted to the bar and set up a private law practice that focused on challenging

discrimination against women.

In 1919 she was appointed assistant prosecutor of Cuyahoga County and when it became evident the women's suffrage amendment would pass in 1920, her friends urged her to run for judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Cuyahoga County. She won the most votes in a field of 10 candidates, becoming the first woman to sit on a court of general jurisdiction, legal and equitable, civil and criminal, according to the Western Reserve Historical Society.

Her win was hailed as a victory for women's suffrage.

Two years later, when Allen won a seat

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SUSAN HAGAN
DEMOCRAT FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER

PLEASE VOTE!

So many worked so hard to give us this right.

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Florence E. Allen, the first woman to serve as a Ohio Supreme Court justice, was a graduate of the New Lyme Institute in Ashtabula County. In 1919, she was appointed assistant prosecutor of Cuyahoga County and elected a common pleas judge in November 1920. Her win was hailed as a victory for women's suffrage; the election came less than three months after the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified.

STAR BEACON FILE PHOTO

New Lyme Institute boasts several successful alumni

ROME TOWNSHIP — Judge William S. Deming, a prominent New Lyme Township resident, donated the land and \$3,000 in matching funds to start the New Lyme Institute in 1878.

When the Northern Ohio Collegiate and Business Institute was dedicated on Aug. 21, 1879, more students than it had dormitory space to accommodate enrolled, and residents opened their homes to the scholars.

It was the pride of New Lyme.

In 1910, the New Lyme Institute almost became Kent State University's main campus in Ashtabula County.

The institute was a candidate for the Ohio State Normal College, a preparatory school for teachers.

The institute lost out to Kent, where the normal college later became a university, according to KSU historical archives.

In addition to Florence E. Allen, New Lyme Institute boasts several successful

alumni including Dr. Leroy Waterman, a scholar who worked on the Revised Standard Version of the Bible; E.C. Lampson, dean of northeast Ohio newspaper editors; Benjamin S. Chapin, author of "The Son of Democracy" and a Lincoln impersonator; Louis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, and Delo C. Grover, president emeritus, Baldwin Wallace, according to the Ashtabula County Historical Society.

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on the Ohio Supreme Court, making her the first woman ever elected to a state supreme court. She served as a justice until 1934, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her to the Sixth Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals — another first for a female.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, "If a president of the United States should decide to nominate a woman for the Supreme Court, it should be judge Allen."

Allen went on to become chief judge of the court and remained there until her retirement in 1959, at the age of 75.

Allen is a member of the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame. She died Sept. 12, 1966 at home.

The Kent State database, which holds photographs and information about Allen, was a source for this story, as well as the photographs. For more information, go to www.oaks.kent.edu.



In the year of the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, we owe it to the suffragettes to vote.

Request your absentee ballot. Vote early at the Board of Elections. Go to the polls on election day. However you decide is best for you, VOTE!

Make an informed decision. Learn why each candidate decided to run for office. Find out what experience they have that qualifies them for the position. Read about their ties to Ashtabula County. You can learn more about me on my Facebook page Cecilia Cooper for Ashtabula County Prosecutor. I humbly ask for your vote.



Paid for by Committee to Elect Cecilia Cooper.

Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote

Angel McVoy: for County Commissioner



Angel is serving her second term as Council-at-Large on City of Conneaut council. Angel has been the chair of Economic Development, as well as the city's liaison for the Health Department and Conneaut Convention & Visitor Bureau. Angel McVoy has recently announced her candidacy for Ashtabula County Commissioner. Angel is currently the treasurer for the Conneaut Lions Club, Vice President for the Ashtabula Kiwanis Club, Sergeant - at - Arms for the American Legion Unit 151, board member of the Ashtabula County YMCA, co-creator of the local podcast What's Happening Ashtabula County, and the founder of #bebetterhumans2020. Angel is married to Sean and has three step-daughters.

Tammy Ledord: Newly Elected to City of Conneaut Council At Large

Newly elected to City of Conneaut as Council-at-Large. Tammy chairs the Utilities committee, as well as liaison to the Conneaut Area City Schools for the City of Conneaut. Tammy recently was appointed to the Executive Committee for the Ashtabula County Dems. Tammy has been the Director of the Right Track program at the Conneaut Human Resource Center for 9 years. Tammy has previously served as President of the Ashtabula County Womens Dems, as well as past board member of the Conneaut Arts Center. Tammy has been married to her husband Scott for 30 years and they have two children.



Paid for by Committe to Elect Angel McVoy

COUNTY: Much of history of women’s suffrage occurred locally

FROM PAGE C1

a state and then they were no longer allowed to vote, said Mary Howe, president of the Ashtabula County League of Women Voters.

“Jeannette Rankin of Montana was a member of Congress when the U.S. decided to enter World War I and she voted ‘no’— this was before women were granted the right to vote in the entire country,” she said. “Some European countries allowed women to vote before the U.S. and some states allowed women to vote for local races like school boards.”

In the mid-1800s,

when women began to really push for their rights, there was activity in Ashtabula County, although Seneca Falls, N.Y. is recognized as hosting the first women’s rights meeting, according to Howe.

“Unfortunately, African-American women were not allowed the voice they should have had in the suffrage movement,” she said. “I understand that some of this was from strictly prejudice, but some of it was because people in the southern states said they would only vote for women’s suffrage if African-American women were excluded.”

Ashtabula County was home to many

abolitionists, who didn’t agree with excluding African-Americans, including:

- Betsey Mix Cowles, (1810-1876), served as the first dean of women at Grand River Institute. She dedicated her life to fighting slavery and improving the status of women.
- Benjamin Wade, (1800-1878), an attorney from Jefferson, served in the U.S. Senate from 1851 to 1869. A fervent abolitionist, Wade fought against slavery and publicly for both African-Americans and women to gain the right to vote.
- Joshua Giddings, (1795-1864), also an attorney from Jefferson,

served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1838-1859, and was an ardent abolitionist. Giddings believed all persons should have the right to vote, which resulted in some threats on his life. He later supported women’s suffrage.

“There were at least two main arms of the suffrage movement; one was a bit more militant than the other,” Howe said. “Alice Paul was one of those women. She trained in England where they were called suffragettes. I prefer suffragists — less militant and not a diminutive form.”

In England, they tried to bomb Parliament and

in the U.S. they picketed the White House during World War 1, she said.

“President Wilson was opposed to women having the vote until the end of the movement,” Howe said. “Yes, some women, and Alice Paul was one, were jailed and force-fed when they went on a hunger strike.”

Howe suggests anyone interested in the history of women’s suffrage, watch the movie “Iron-jawed Angels.” The film details instances when women were beaten by crowds for their stances.

Not all women were in favor of voting and the liquor establishments were opposed because

there were some temperance factions to the suffrage movement. Of the two branches of the movement, one main difference was that one group wanted to get the vote state by state and the other group wanted it passed as a U.S. Amendment for the entire country.

“Unfortunately, most of the history of the Women’s Suffrage Movement is not really taught in our schools,” Howe said. “I learned most of this reading several books.”

The League of Women Voters came directly out of the suffrage movement, she said.

POTENTIAL: Historians research first meeting

FROM PAGE C1

to Cowles and Foster called for universal suffrage, he said.

During a tour of the area, Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison met

suffrage movement that were also present in Seneca Falls, Dana said.

“The key kind of document that I found here is from 1846,” Dana said.

Cowles wrote a newspaper article in 1846,

calling for people to come to Jefferson and see what was going on, he said. In the article, Cowles called for an abolitionist and suffrage convention, Dana said.

The newspaper article is marked as volume

three, Dana said.

“Somewhere out there, there’s additional papers, here, that were written [in this newspaper],” Dana said. “So probably in someone’s attic. They probably have some old documents

where we could prove this beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Dana is one of a number of people studying the history of suffrage in northeast Ohio.

“This has been a collaborative effort

in here the past year, from which to find out additional information,” Dana said. “It’s a matter here now of connecting the dots and just finding some additional work. It’s like, you find a letter and you learn more.”

LOCAL: Several leaders took part in Women’s Suffrage Movement

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Arnold, one of the first female doctors in Michigan. Both of these early doctors became outspoken voices in favor of Women’s Suffrage Rights.

- Betsey Mix Cowles (1810-1876) promoted higher education for women and was an abolitionist who wrote for the Anti-Slavery Bugle. Her desire for higher education led her to Oberlin College, where she studied for two years. Cowles served as

president of the first women’s rights convention in Salem and the following year wrote a treatise on equal pay for working urban women.

She served as the first dean of women at Grand River Institute in Austinburg and later became one of the first women public school superintendents in Painesville.

- Amy Kaukonen Walsh (1891-1984) was the first woman mayor elected and one of the first in the country.

Born in Elyria, the Kaukonen family moved to Conneaut, where Walsh finished first in her high school class. She entered the Women’s Medical College of Philadelphia, Pa., where she graduated with high honors in 1915. She was the youngest student to graduate from the college.

In 1920, she opened a medical practice in Fairport Harbor and became an outspoken opponent of alcohol and corrupt government.

Immediately after the

19th Amendment was adopted, she was asked to run for mayor on the reform ticket. At age 22, she beat her opponent by 75 votes, thanks to women exercising their right to vote.

Walsh is buried in Edgewood Cemetery in Ashtabula Township.

- Edith Root Morrison (1878 - 1959) was born in Kinsman and graduated with a bachelor’s of science degree from New Lyme Institute in Ashtabula County.

Morrison was the

corresponding secretary for the Ohio chapter of the National American Woman Suffrage Association for many years, beginning at age 15.

Susan B. Anthony wrote to her, addressing the letter to “Dear Little Miss Root” as Morrison stood less than five feet tall.

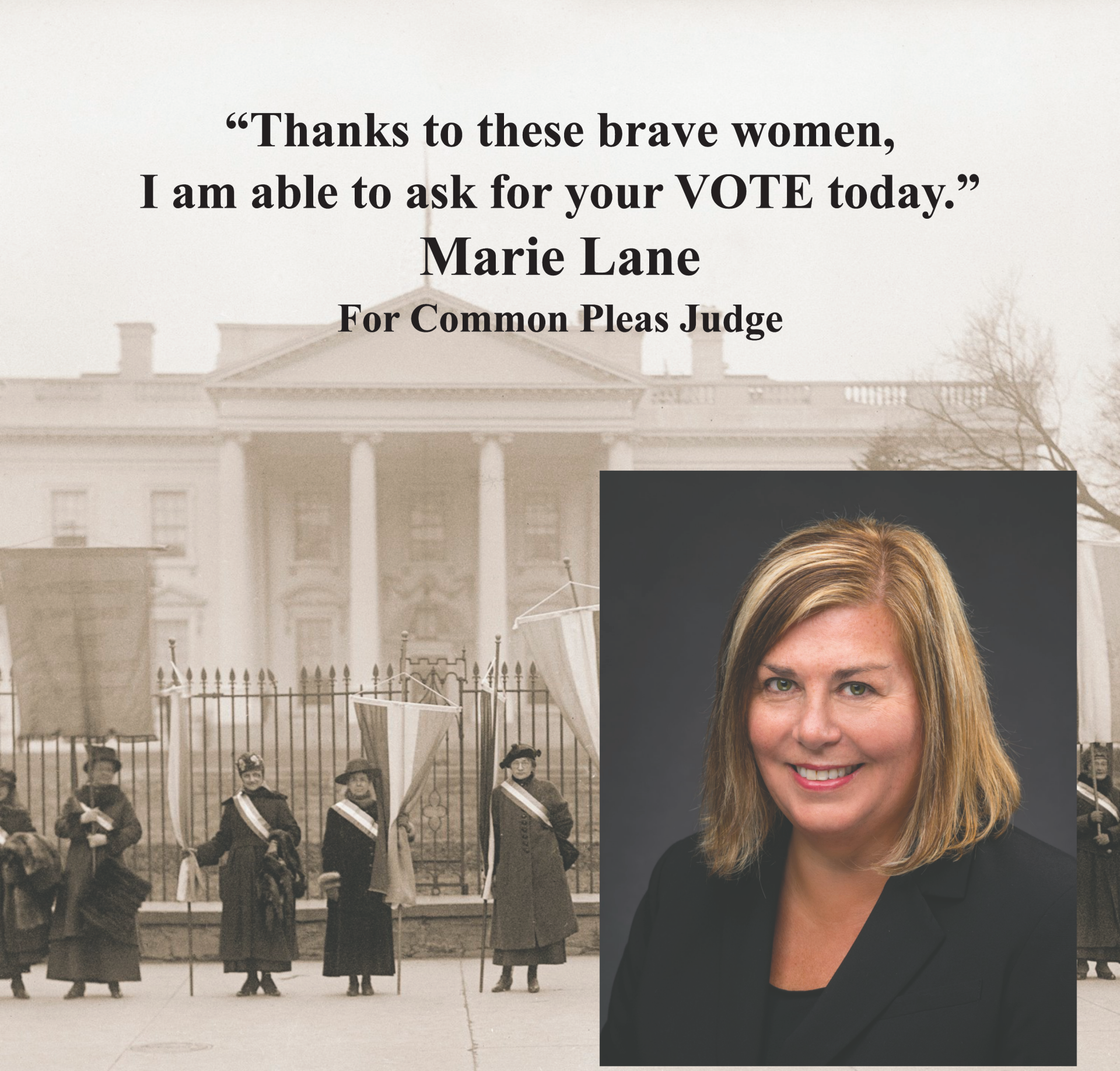
In 1906 she married Frederick Morrison in Ashtabula. Her son, Robert S. Morrison, said his mother “had a mind as sharp as a sword.” She was considered

independent, forward thinking and informed of current events.

Robert S. Morrison went on to become a successful author, economic advisor and manufacturing entrepreneur, founding Molded Fiber Glass in 1948 in Ashtabula.

A plaque honoring Edith Morrison is displayed in the genealogy section of the Ashtabula Public Library.

She is buried in Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Ashtabula.



“Thanks to these brave women,
I am able to ask for your VOTE today.”
Marie Lane
For Common Pleas Judge