

Turner

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47 against tabling. This was the “carpe diem” moment.

People in the gallery leaned forward, members on the floor gave their full attention to Turner – all eyes and ears were on him. Before the clerk recorded the final tally, Turner uttered these historic words – “I wish to be recorded as against the motion to table.” It took a few moments to register and then pandemonium broke out as everyone realized that Turner’s vote had created a tie. There was yelling and screaming and chaos on the floor. There were demands for a recount. The



Harry Burn

Anti-suffragists were stunned. Turner had kept hope alive for the Suffragists.

Once order was restored, the recount was conducted. Burn again voted in support of tabling the resolution. Turner was under great pressure from his good friend, Speaker Walker, to change his vote to support tabling. Walker had his arm on Turner’s shoulder and pleaded with him. Neither ever mentioned what was said, what was offered, or promised, if anything, but, finally, Turner stood up and threw Walker’s arm off and voted “No.”

A frustrated and angry Walker then decided to force a vote on the original motion to concur with the Senate resolution to ratify the Amendment. He called for a vote on the motion and this time just like with the two earlier votes, Burn voted seventh and this time he voted “Aye.” This caught everyone’s attention because if the rest of the representatives voted as they had against tabling, then there would be enough votes to ratify the Amendment. However, there were 89 votes to go.

The clerk continued the roll call. When Turner’s name was called, he passed. What was going on? This became the second “carpe diem” moment. After all votes had been recorded, Turner in a dramatic flourish rose and it is easy to imagine the silence in the legislature with everyone leaning forward straining to hear what his decision was. Within the span of a couple of hours he was about to make history twice – first by keeping hope alive and now – “I wish to be recorded as Aye,” he said in a conversational tone.

With that vote, he ratified the 19th Amendment. Speaker Walker quickly changed his “No” vote to “Yes” so he could bring the legislation back up for a vote within three days in the hopes of changing a legislator’s mind – he failed and on August 26, 1920, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby officially made it part of the U.S. Constitution.

As we celebrate this significant event in our history, it is important to remember that there were 25 state Senators, Democrats and Republicans, who voted for suffrage. There were 49 representatives, Democrats and Republicans, including Harry Burn, a Republican from McMinn County; Banks Turner, a Democrat from Gibson County; and Independent Joe Hanover from Memphis who voted for the Amendment. All of their votes were equally important, and they all deserve our appreciation and gratitude for their votes, but it was Banks Turner whose unexpected three votes carried the day and put it over the top.



Joe Hanover





19th

Amendment

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