



National American Woman Suffrage Associations march in Knoxville, Tenn.

Banks Turner

from page 2

Vanderbilt after the holiday break, he received a wire that his father had died on January 2, 1910. The unexpected death of his father probably impacted him more than it did his siblings. His mother remained at her home and received support from her family while she grieved the loss of her husband, and Banks undertook management of the farm after graduating from Vanderbilt as reported in the Legislative Directory, which indicated that he “resided

in Yorkville, where he engaged in farming, 1910-1923.” Although Turner’s plans to attend law school were interrupted by his father’s death, he later completed his law degree at Andrew Jackson Law School.

He was living in his parents’ home when he married Luie McGee (daughter of Robert Lee McGee and Alice Ray) on November 17, 1914. In the 1920 census, Banks Turner appears as head of family, and Mary Melvina is listed as his mother and Luie as his wife. His success at

managing the farm and being part of the community created the path for him to pursue political involvement.

Turner focused on farm operations and management. As his reputation in the community grew, he decided to run for state representative. His wife helped him. Luie Turner was well-educated and had connections; her parents were well-liked in the community.

She graduated from Tennessee College of Murfreesboro with an Associate of Arts degree in 1911. We do not know if she joined any civic clubs or organizations in the Neboville/Yorkville/Trenton area, but women’s clubs were popular during this time. Her education included courses that were like those in her husband’s curriculum at Vanderbilt. This allowed them to engage in meaningful discussions about common interests, especially history and politics. It is reasonable to believe that they would have followed events and reports about women suffrage.

Banks won his election and traveled to Nashville to serve in the General Assembly. He, like his hero, Woodrow Wilson, was slow to support suffrage, but in the end when their decisions counted, they were both there.

Now here is the final part of the story. I am originally from Delaware

and only became connected to Tennessee when I married a young woman who had been born in Humboldt and whose father worked for the Department of Agriculture and was friends with Congressman Ed Jones. In 1995, I asked my supervisor for a couple of hours for lunch so that I could attend the 75th anniversary re-enactment of the Ratification of the 19th Amendment. I sat in the gallery holding a yellow rose. After I attended the event, I read “The Perfect 36” by Carol Lynn Yellin and Dr. Janann Sherman. It was dedicated to Paula Casey, who has worked tirelessly for over 30 years trying to bring awareness to Tennesseans about Tennessee’s role in woman suffrage. She and Jacque Hillman from Jackson partnered in creating a website, <https://tnwomensuffrageheritage.com/>, which provides much helpful and interesting information. As I read the book, I became intrigued by the little reported story of a state representative from Gibson County named Banks Turner.

Like so many people throughout history who rarely receive the credit they are due for the role they played, I decided when I retired I would try to spend time to learn more about him, hopefully tell his story, and maybe remedy the historic oversight of a forgotten Tennessee hero.



DID YOU KNOW?

On Aug. 18, 1920, the Tennessee Legislature passed the 19th Amendment by a 1-vote margin, becoming the 36th state to ratify the proposed amendment, clearing the way for official adoption.

My sincere thanks to the heroic women who fought for suffrage, and the men who recognized the importance of their struggle. We’re better together.



Curtis Halford

Serving District 79 in the Tennessee House of Representatives since 2008

Gibson County Special School District

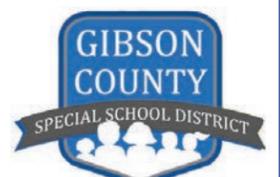
731-692-3803

130 Trenton Hwy., Dyer

Proud to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

—Harriet Tubman



Creating Learning Communities