

The Naturalness of the Vote: an account from a typical Kansan, Emily Jane (Page) Craig

Mother brought us to Kansas in 1885. We came on the train with mother and Mr. Blankenship, my three brothers and I. I was the baby, just 4 years old. Mr. Blankenship was my mother's second husband. She married him after my father, a Union veteran of the civil war, died in our home state of Kentucky. Our neighbors and kin didn't like that my daddy fought in Abe Lincoln's army. Mother found herself widowed and alone, so she set out to seek a fresh start. She met Mr. Blankenship, also a Union veteran, in Indiana, married him, and we all came to Kansas. Wichita was a union veteran's town in the 1880s....if you were a confederate, you kept your mouth shut. Mother and her new husband had an easy time. He found plenty of work in the booming economy.

Their relationship was not so easy. Mr. Blankenship spend mother's money too freely and enjoyed the vices of the day. One evening, mother had Charlie, my big brother, talk with Mr. Blankenship. Accompanied by his shotgun, Charlie convinced Blankenship to leave town. I'm happy to say I never saw him again. Not too much later, mother married William Miller, a Union veteran from Michigan, and they lived happily until he passed.

Mother got us through the downturn of the 1890s by giving piano lessons to the rich folks' children. We always had music in our house: good hymns and tunes to raise our spirits. Mother sent me to college at Friends' University. I was the only girl in our family, but that didn't mean a thing. My brother Thomas told me I could do anything a man could do, and he believed mother and I should be voting, just like the men. I knew he was right.



Ms. Emily Jane (Page) Craig at age 18 in Wichita, Kansas.



"Mrs. Lewis Allison Salter ...was elected mayor of Argonia on April 4, 1887. She was the first woman to be so honored in the United States." Source: Kansas Historical Quarterlies.'

The push for women's vote in Kansas began long before I was born. By 1861, Kansas women were part of a nationwide universal suffrage movement, aimed at enfranchisement of blacks and women². Why, even in 1887 before women had the state vote, we won the right to vote in municipal elections and a woman became mayor of Argonia, Kansas. Kansas women were not

¹ http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1954/54_3_billington.htm

² Women of the West Museum http://theautry.org/explore/exhibits/suffrage/suffrage_ks.html

shrinking violets. We worked as hard as the men; we held our families together, and we deserved a voice in the affairs of state. I walked with my sisters in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, an alliance of more than 25,000 women across the nation, united for suffrage.³ We paraded in downtown Wichita, more in celebration than in agitation, because we knew the vote would pass for women...and it did, in 1912, a full eight years before congress ratified the 19th amendment, giving all women the right to vote.

As for me, I settled in my home neighborhood in north Wichita. I married Ernest Craig, a hard worker who owned businesses and built commercial properties in the north end. We raised three daughters: Frances, Evelyn, and Ernestine. We sent Frances to Columbia University, where she earned a masters degree. She lived and worked in Chicago tenements as a social worker. It broke our hearts when she took ill and died young. That was in the 1930s.

Those years were hard on me. In the 1920s, my husband, Ernest, was drinking, smoking cigars, and took up with another woman who let him smoke *in her house*. The good lord doesn't condone wickedness in men; why should I? I let him know he could take his vices elsewhere, and he did. I stayed in the old neighborhood, not far from my daughter Ernestine and her family.⁴

My great-great aunt Emily Jane died in 1969, in the same city where she'd raised her family. My family lived in her house during the 1970's when I was a little girl. I played in a backyard surrounded by her honeysuckle covered fences and fell asleep looking at the 1920's wallpaper. I grew up never questioning my enfranchisement, my equality and rights as an American.

—Katie Kingery-Page 2012

Emily Jane was always a member of Women's Christian Temperance Union. She made bandages for the war effort, crocheted clothes for babies, read her Bible daily. She was good for a joke! She always wore a corset and nylon drawers, purchased at Sears and Roebuck. She wore her hose, with a garter at the knee, dress and slip. Put a little finger of Mentholatum (manufactured in Wichita) in her nose every night before she crawled into her big feather mattress bed. Always wanted to know if I rode "my wheel" to her house. She had a pump on the back porch and we pumped rain water from the cistern, which your mom and dad filled in because they were afraid you all would fall into it.

—A reflection on Emily Jane from her granddaughter, Francene Sharp 2012