

Winsted Herald Articles – 1870s & 1880s

From an editorial Nov. 23, 1883:

“Men who have been accustomed to attend meetings of deliberate bodies have occasion to be alarmed at the smoothness and order with which women are able to conduct conventions with a little practice. We have been a pretty regular attendant upon the meetings of the Woman’s Temperance convention held in this village this week and are frank to confess that women can do some things as well as other people and the conduct of conventions is one of the things they can do. How long it will be, if things go on, ere men will be compelled to share with them the conduct of town meetings, we cannot tell, but this much is clearly evident to us – if it never was before – that when the time comes when women are clothed with the right of suffrage – and the day fast approaches – [No, they had another 37 years to wait.] they will exercise the privilege with certainty and as much intelligence as those who are now the voting class.”

It seems strange reading such words today, written more than a century and a quarter ago. The struggle for equality between the sexes was a long time coming, in this country as well as elsewhere, notably Western Europe. The crucial contribution of women that helped to bring about the successful conclusion of the First World War was a major factor in their attaining suffrage. In the United States, women’s right to vote came with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment that went into effect on August 18, 1920.

It is interesting to note that Great Britain, in their 2003 coinage, produced a 50 pence coin bearing the image of a woman standing before a sign containing the letters “WSPU”, which stands for Woman’s Social and Political Union, founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst. There is also a banner reading “Give Women The Vote” and the date is 1903.

It is my hope that this special coin will have a better acceptance than did the entry of the United States on the same subject in 1979 with the introduction of the Susan B. Anthony dollar. It was not the subject matter on the coin that brought about its rejection by the American public, but rather a combination of bad choices on the part of the Federal Government. To begin with, the physical size of this “silver dollar” was reduced to approximately that of a quarter. From the birth of our nation until 1979, our dollar, beginning with the coin it was based upon, the Spanish Milled Dollar, or “Piece of Eight”, was basically 1½ inches in diameter, and the .25¢ piece, or “quarter”, has a diameter of about one inch. This size reduction further alienated the public, because the quarter-sized dollar did not seem to be worth one dollar. Initially the Anthony coin had been planned as eleven-sided rather than round (so that confusion with the quarter would not occur, as well as making it easily recognizable to blind people.) Cost factors caused this design to be dropped before production commenced, and a round coin, a fraction of an inch larger than a quarter resulted. Another original plan that would have guaranteed use and acceptance of this smaller dollar coin was to cease printing paper dollars with the advent of the new metal dollars. Public outcry however, caused the government to drop this plan like a hot potato.

The U.S. Mint made nearly 667,000,000 Anthony dollars in 1979, reduced that to less than 90,000,000 in 1980 and 10,000,000 in 1981. For reasons unknown to me, a little over 31 million were made in 1999, whereupon the government then gave up the

attempt, and the coins were put in storage, where most of them remain to this day. Undaunted with the public rejection, the Federal Government came out with the gold-colored Sacagawea dollar in 2000. That first year the sum total of all three mints was approximately 1,290,105,000. Gold colored or not, the public still continued to turn up their noses at the undersized coin and insisted on paper dollars. Officially they were still listed as a current coin in 2008, but with not much more production than to make proof coins for collectors. In 2007, a new series of presidential gold-colored dollars was introduced. These are intended for circulation, but after one full year of production, I have not seen one in change. They are available at the banks, but you have to ask for them. I believe this whole situation will resolve itself shortly when all of us will use only plastic for every transaction, regardless of how large or small it might be.

As an interesting aside, prior to the creation of the Anthony dollar, the government, at a cost that ran into the millions, conducted a survey around the country to determine whether or not the public would accept the newly proposed coin. The results, according to the official tally, indicated that it would be overwhelmingly accepted. Many private citizens however, doubted the results of the “official” poll, and undertook a poll of their own, that was conducted in a few geographically widely scattered states, of sixth grade students. The results of this unofficial poll, which cost nothing, indicated that the rejection rate by the citizens of the United States would run something like 86%. This poll fell on deaf ears in Washington, and the mint forged ahead with their production plans. By the end of 1979, when it was obvious that they had a fiasco on their hands, the government issued a very interesting fact: the American public was rejecting the new coinage at a rate approaching 83%. I may be off by a couple of percentage points, because I am relying on my memory on this, but essentially this is an accurate comparison.

At first, there does not seem to be much of a comparison with women’s rights and some problems with U.S. money, but when the bullheadedness of some official views are taken into account, a parallel can be discerned, and the reason for undue delays are more easily explained. Let’s hope that equal pay for equal work and the so-called “glass ceiling” in the corporate world will not take another hundred years!