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## Meyersdale Public Library

It all started with a roll of microfilm....

In 2018, Meyersdale Public Library staff and volunteers undertook a historical newspaper preservation project. They had no idea at the time of the story that would unfold before them.

As volunteer Linda Marker sat down to review the resulting *Meyersdale Commercial* newspaper images preserved on film, she spotted a small “Suffrage Meeting” article on page five of the very first issue, dated March 20, 1913. Time spent combing through the library’s archives and its collections, including those newly preserved newspapers, revealed that Somerset County had been home to an



Somerset County suffragist leader Alice Paisley  
Flack Kiernan, c. 1900.

Historical & Genealogical Society of Somerset County, P989.450.1.

## SUFFRAGE MEETING.

The first Woman Suffrage meeting ever held in Meyersdale took place last Friday in the Kendall building on Centre street, when about 25 women were addressed by Mrs. Alice Kiernan, of Somerset. After the meeting an Equal Suffrage club was formed by the election of the following officers: Mrs. Frank B. Black, president; Mrs. Frank Hoffman, vice president; Mrs. F. B. Thomas, Secretary-Treasurer. Quite a number joined the club, and much activity is promised.

Suffrage meeting news in the *Meyersdale Commercial*, March 20, 1913, page 5.

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ambitious suffrage movement. Women such as county suffragist leader Alice Kiernan and Meyersdale activist Flora Snyder Black led frequent meetings, welcomed the Justice Bell to their county as part of a statewide effort to garner support for a 1915 Pennsylvania suffrage referendum, and organized a 1916 gathering of some 700 women for the dedication of the state’s suffrage flag at Alice’s home outside of Somerset.

As the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment granting American

women the right to vote approached, the library dedicated itself to sharing the story of those local women who had once worked to ensure a voice at the ballot box for themselves and the generations to come. With the help of Meyersdale Area School District art students and community volunteers, their efforts culminated in the creation of the library’s own Justice Bell replica and “Salute to Somerset County Suffragists” march in the 74th annual Pennsylvania Maple Festival Grand Feature Parade during spring 2021.

Today, images of those brittle century-old *Meyersdale Commercial* newspapers are not only preserved on film, but also publicly available online inside the Pennsylvania Newspaper Archive. The story of “Alice, Flora,




and Their Friends” discovered within their pages continues to be shared by the library.

The frustration and disappointment that Alice Kiernan and countless others experienced in their unceasing struggle to give everyone a voice on Election Day provides historical evidence that life is often difficult and unjust. We may find ourselves still struggling; yet we are reminded that hope and courage for a more equitable world must always endure. Alice, Flora, and friends worked hard to enact change. Now, a century later, we can both honor their struggle and give voice to justice by voting.

The Meyersdale Public Library is one of 15 History Center Affiliates Program members that are participating in the “Civic Empathy through History” project funded by The Grable Foundation. This project will feature the story of Somerset County’s suffrage movement and many others. Please be sure to visit the History Center’s website in 2023 for more information.

The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and regional historical societies, museums, educational institutions, libraries, and history-minded organizations access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Affiliates Program Manager Robert O. Stakeley at [rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org](mailto:rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org) or (412) 454-6359. 



**Flora Snyder Black and grandchildren, July 4, 1948.**

Courtesy of Flora Snyder Black's grandson, Frank Snyder Black Jr., and wife Barbara Black.



**Meyersdale Public Library's Justice Bell Float in the Pennsylvania Maple Festival Grand Feature Parade, May 1, 2021.**

Photo by Mike Petenbrink.