

## **The Way We Were In 1935**

**Believe it or not, in 1935 the little Western York County town of Sharon was turning political heads in both Columbia and Washington. During the spring of that year a number of local women in the tiny town began making an effort to get President Franklin Roosevelt re-elected by forming the Sharon Woman's Roosevelt for Re-election Club. The newly formed club's president, Mrs. James D. Grist, notified the White House of their support and in turn received a reply from James A. Farley, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and Post Master General.**

**Congratulating the women, he wrote, "Your recent letter to President Roosevelt advising him of the formation of the first Roosevelt for Re-election Club to be formed entirely among women in South Carolina, has been referred to me by the White House. We are glad to know you are for the continuance of the Roosevelt administration. It was the activity of just such clubs as you suggest, cooperating with the regular Democratic organizations in the various counties and communities of the country that brought us such a glorious victory in November 1932."**

**The women quickly moved into action by planning a fund raiser to be held in August. The club agreed to sponsor a political picnic to be held at the public swimming pool. Local and state dignitaries were invited to be part of the festivities, such as Governor Olin Johnston and Senator Jimmy Burns. Though Johnston and Burns sent their regrets, a number of local politicians were among a crowd of about thousand. The master of ceremonies was the notable John S. Rainey who did the welcoming and introduced each candidate with a wisecrack or two. As it was always at picnics in Western York County, food was plentiful and present in a wide variety of dishes. Western York County's ubiquitous hash was ladled out in buttery spoonfuls, prepared at the town cannery by Vines Howell, R. C. Blackwell and John Davidson.**

**The highlight of the day, however, was the auctioning of a "re-election quilt" made by members of the Woman's Club. The first bid was \$35, and at first it seemed as though the bids would skyrocket, but the auction sputtered and halted several times until the final bid of \$150 was made and auctioneer Robert M. Whiteside cried out, "Sold!" to the cheers of the crowd.**

**Discounting the few Republicans in York County, not everyone was content with President Roosevelt. One unidentified Sharon minister was frank about**

his disgust for the President. “No, I don’t see how any minister, can give his personal support to the Roosevelt administration. It was Mr. Roosevelt who personally gave the impetus that resulted in the repeal of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment; it was he who perhaps engineered the fruition of that plank of the 1932 Democratic platform, and it is the only plank of that platform that has been carried out. No, I can’t give my support to Mr. Roosevelt and I will not.”

The presidential election was not the only thing on the minds of the people of Sharon. In November a chapter of Future Farmers of America (FFA) was organized at the high school. Professor J. J. Cox, the agricultural teacher at Hickory Grove and five officers of that chapter came over and assisted in the initial rites: W. D. Montgomery, W. B. Wilkerson Jr., Brice Comer, Howard Bratton and Sam White.

Officers elected for the Sharon chapter were: Pete Mellette (President), John E. Plexico (Vice President), Ray Sherer (Secretary), Thomas Hope (Treasurer), Joe H. Rainey (Reporter) and F. M. Mellette (Advisor), the agricultural teacher at Sharon. Other members enrolled were: John R. Blair, Jr., James Brakefield, J. C. Brakefield, John W. Burris, Davis Cranford, Jim Gourley, Lewis Gwin, Johnny Hill, Faye Hood, W. A. Latham, Junior Norris, David Ratchford, B. B. Ferguson, Hunter Sherer, Wayne Sherer and Robert Shillinglaw.

A few miles north of Sharon, in Clover, Reverend W. S. Patterson, a popular pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, was beginning his ninth year as leader of that congregation. During his eight years of service 248 new members had been added to the rolls, making a total of 475, and had performed 62 marriages. Patterson was an avid collector. He had a large coin collection, many of which had been obtained in Rome, London and other cities when he traveled through Europe. A number of them predated the birth of Christ. Secondly, he collected Native American artifacts. This collection consisted of fine specimens of arrowheads, tomahawks and stone cooking implements.

The new 1936 Chevrolet models arrived in dealerships in Western York County in November. M. L. Ford & Sons of Clover purchased a half page in the *Yorkville Enquirer* to advertise “the only complete low-priced car.” That year’s models boasted of perfected hydraulic brakes, solid steel Turret top, no draft ventilation, valve in head engine, shockproof steering and a gliding knee action ride--all for \$495. Over in York, beginning at seven o’clock in the

morning, a steady stream of people visited the York Chevrolet Company to give the new models a once-over. Proprietor T. C. Dunlap was busy all day greeting his visitors and talking up the features of his cars on display. He must have been a good salesman since on the first day he sold five cars.

Nearly from the beginning of America's romance with the automobile, the expense of a new tag had to be considered when buying a new car. In 1936 the South Carolina Highway Department fixed the cost of car tags at \$3.00 regardless of make, year or model. This did not set very well with most people as they considered it out of line with the idea of paying taxes in proportion. These reasoned that it might be very well to charge \$3.00 for a tag for a beat up old T Model, but the man who could afford a Model A, 6-cylinder Chevrolet, Austin, Ford V-8, Dodge, Buick, Studebaker, Oldsmobile, Reo, Packard, Lincoln or a Cadillac ought to pay more.

During the fall Governor Johnston charged the State Highway Department commissioners to be in a state of insurrection. The commissioners had, against their attorney's advise tried to make several counties responsible for large bond issues. This action threatened all other counties with entailment of local property levies for roads. Too, the commission had refused to seat four of Johnston's appointees as their replacement.

Governor Johnston, not being one to put up with too much, used his powers as Commander in Chief and called on the National Guard to surround the department with bayonets, remove the commissioners and seize all assets. The old commissioners appealed to the courts to declare the department under Martial Law to stop Johnston; the Governor, however, not only ignored the order but blocked law officers access to his appointee to serve papers.

In spite of the Governor, the old commissioners still believed that they had the upper hand, as there were no funds available to pay the employees. But again, Johnston outwitted the ousted commissioners; he was holding \$100,000 seized when the militia stormed the offices. Again, the commissioners tried filing proceedings to freeze the funds but Johnston quickly ordered Major Barnwell to disburse the cash among the employees, meeting a \$70,000 payroll. The following Saturday the Governor unexpectedly appeared at the highway offices and praised the employees for their loyalty to their work and the state.

From reports across the state it seemed that everyone in South Carolina had an opinion or prediction to the outcome of the Governor's fight with the

highway commissioners. Most agreed to one thing: that Johnston was in charge and he would stay in charge either at the point of bayonets, the legislature, the supreme court or through the ballot box. Through legal process Governor Johnston's commissioners were seated and the state settled back with more peaceful things on their minds. Christmas was approaching and Democrats were confident that Roosevelt would be elected. Especially confident and proud of their efforts would be the members of the Sharon Woman's Club.

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