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A Historical Tidbit for Election Day and 100 Years of Womens' Suffrage

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IN CELEBRATION OF 100 YEARS OF FEMALE TOWN CLERKS IN THE TOWN OF ULYSSES: A look at the first female clerk, Maude S. Tompkins

By Carissa Parlato & Sarah Koski, Ulysses Town Clerk & Deputy Clerk

One-hundred years ago on November 4, 1919, the Town of Ulysses held its first election in which women could vote, and in that election, voters chose Maude Stewart Tompkins as Town Clerk. She was the town's first female clerk, and her election began a legacy of female town clerks that continues through present day.

Ms. Tompkins was forty-seven years old when she won the 1919 election against Edwin P. Bouton- 531 votes to 453. The Trumansburg Free Press from November 8, 1919 noted:

"Last Tuesday was the first town election in which women were allowed to vote and they voiced their sentiments in no uncertain terms. No especial effect was produced by their vote on the usual republican majorities, except the complimentary vote which is said to have elected Miss Maude Tompkins Town Clerk over E P Bouton the republican nominee. Miss Tompkins is thoroughly competent to fill the office and we doubt if the voters will have occasion to regret their choice. "

Ms. Tompkins was born in the Village of Trumansburg in 1872 and grew up at 19 Washington Street. Her parents, Benjamin Franklin ("Frank") and Anna Stewart Tompkins, participated in various business, civic, and social activities in the Village. Mr. Tompkins also served as Overseer of the Poor for the Town of Ulysses, and was a direct descendant of former New York Governor Daniel Tompkins, for whom Tompkins County is named.

The Trumansburg Free Press shows that Ms. Tompkins was an active member of the community. Her name is prominent in the paper from 1891 forward, exhibiting her community engagement. Over the years she was noted to have completed her school regents exam in Latin, placed 1st at the fair for her embroidery and crochet (1899), participated in various church and charity events, became Whist Club president (1903), was elected President and Treasurer of the Ladies Aid Society (1907), and served on the Grove Cemetery board. In 1910, she was the Chairman and Manager of Finance for the Business Women's Club.



1910 Women's Business Club Lunch -Town of Ulysses Historical Collection

Ms. Tompkins started a job at the Post Office around 1903, under her future election opponent, Mr. Bouton. He promoted her to Deputy Postmaster in 1914, and it appears that she kept this job concurrently with her job as Town Clerk.

The photograph below from the Town of Ulysses Historical Collection shows the Trumansburg Post Office in 1911. Since Ms. Tompkins worked for the post office at that time, she is likely one of the two women pictured.



Apparently, the public was pleased with Ms. Tompkins' job as clerk—she won the 1921 election against Charles C. Taylor two years later. (At that time, Ulysses Town Clerk elections were held every two years, instead of the four-year election cycle today). After 1921, it does not appear that any men ever ran again for the seat. Ms. Tompkins ran unopposed for the next three elections and was, at least once, also nominated as the opposing party's candidate. She lost the 1929 election to Edith Updike after 10 years of service.

The Town of Ulysses minutes books bear her signature:

Maude S. Tompkins
Town Clerk

After her tenure as Town Clerk, Maude Tompkins stayed active in the community, and her name continued to appear in the press. She was appointed registrar (of the town and/or village- it's unclear), completed her post as secretary for Grove Cemetery in 1931, sought assistance for a lost dog in 1933, celebrated her 68th birthday dinner in 1940, and passed away in 1943. Her obituary, however, does not mention her public service.

OBITUARY

MISS MAUDE S. TOMPKINS

Miss Maude Stewart Tompkins, 72, of Washington Street, died Sunday, October 3, 1943, in the Smith Nursing Home.

The daughter of the late Frank and Anna Stewart Tompkins of Trumansburg, Miss Tompkins was a direct descendant of Daniel D. Tompkins, a former governor of New York State. A member of the Methodist Church, she was employed by the Trumansburg Post Office for 40 years.

Nearest relatives are Miss Stephanie Tompkins of Ithaca and George Stewart of Trumansburg.

Funeral services were conducted at 3 p.m. Wednesday in the Stewart Funeral Home. The Rev. Chester V. Zogk, pastor of the Trumansburg Methodist Church, officiated. Interment was in Grove Cemetery.

New York State was ahead of the times, granting women suffrage in 1917 even before they were given the constitutional right to vote through the 19th Amendment in 1919. Still, women were often not acknowledged for their work in public sectors, and it can be difficult to piece together a full picture of the roles they played in our history.

What we do know is that Ms. Tompkins was the first of many women who have held the position of Town Clerk in Ulysses:

Maude S. Tompkins 1920-1929 (9 years)
 Edith Updike 1930-1947 (17 years)
 E. Katharine Dimick 1948-1960 (12 years)
 Alice Conover 1961-1977 (16 years)
 Marilyn Ough 1978- 1983 (5 years)
 Carolyn Duddleston 1983 (less than 1 year)
 Marsha Georgia 1984-2013 (29 years)
 Carissa Parlato 2014-present (5 years)

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Best,

[Carissa Parlato, CMC \(Certified Municipal Clerk\), RMC \(Registered Municipal Clerk\)](#)

Ulysses Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Records Manager, Notary Public

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(After hours by appt.)

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