



Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

ACTIVITY: Anna Alene Clemons Southport's Secret Suffragist



Enamel Pin, National Woman's Party, c. 1920, sold by Heritage Auction 2008.

Anna Clemons of Southport in Brunswick County was about 30 years old when women gained the right to vote. A nurse and single mother, Clemons was ready to use her vote to influence politics. However, when she went to register, the election official issued her a literacy test and told her she did not pass. She went home and wrote a letter to the Secretary of the National Women's Party in Washington, D.C. in hopes that organization could advocate on behalf of Black women in the South.

The following five letters are part of the Library of Congress' microfilm collection:

Letter from Anna A. Clemons to the National Woman's Party, 10 October 1920; Letter from Emma Wold to Miss Anna A. Clemons, 20 October 1920; Letter to Miss Emma Wold from Anna A. Clemons, 24 October 1920; Emma Wold to Miss Anna A. Clemons, 2 November 1920, National Woman's Party Papers, 1913-1974, Library of Congress (microfilm (1979), reel 5)

Transcriptions at: <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000688566>

Southport N.C.

Oct 10th 1920

The National Woman's Party-

Washington D.C.

To The Sect. of above Party,

I am an american colored woman property owner in Brunswick County State of North Carolina and am seeking way to vote by mail if there is a way, because a colored person in my county is unable to vote, because they are colored. Please send me information how to send votes or register to general Headquarters by mail before it is too late to register.

am oblige.

(Miss) Anna A. Clemons

Bx 294 Southport N.C.

Miss Anna A. Clemons,
Box 294,
Southport, N.C.

My dear Miss Clemons:

Your letter of October 10 inquiring about registration and voting by mail in North Carolina has just come in my hands.

Registration must be made in person in North Carolina and in the precinct in which you live. It is possible to vote by mail on applying for a ballot to the county board. Registrations close on October 23. As you undoubtedly understand, no one may register or vote outside of his own precinct.

We have been making inquiries and learn that colored women are being registered in North Carolina. Have you tried personally? If not, will you try to and let us know the result. Should the registration board refuse to register you, we shall be glad to look into the matter and see what can be done about it. Please be sure to let us know the result of your attempt to register.

Very sincerely yours,

[Emma Wold]

Headquarters Secretary

Reflection

Was Emma Wold's response fair? Did she understand Anna's situation? Explain.

Southport, N. C.

Oct 24th 1920

Miss Emma Wold:

Washington, D.C.

My Dear Miss Wold:

In reply to your letter, which was duly received yesterday, will take the greatest of pleasure to write you my result, in attempting or trying to register. I went before the registrar Oct 15th, and was refused to be registered, as this board requires all colored to be able to read and write to "suit" the registrar and all persons of colored origin in this whole county have been unable to suit the registrar; North Carolina laws require one to be able to read and write, to register, still we have in our county ones to fill requirements then they are refused. I hope, and ask if you should have this matter investigated, then please do not let my name be brought into this matter because there is so much prejudice existing until I am most assured I will be a victim of lawless Mob. To show you I am no agitator, or race leader, I will try to explain just my position. I am a nurse, have nursed in most every home in this town for past 9 years, acting at times as assistant to one of the South's best Surgeons Dr. J Arthur Doshice [?] of this [?]. I donated to the Red Cross, Volunteered during the epidemic of "1918," "flu," and hold a certificate for heroic services rendered over my State and own property, and pay my tax. Am a Christian belong to the Methodist Church, attend to my own business, don't interfere with no race of people, and try to live here as I expect to live when I pass in the great beyond, that is in peace. I have seven (7) brothers law abiding supposed to be citizens denied the same as myself.

Hoping and resting assured you will not use my name in this matter that I will close.

From

Anna A. Clemons

Bx 294 Southport N.C.

Reflection

As Anna clarified the voter registration situation in Brunswick County, what emotions does her reply to Wold show?

November 2, 1920.

Mrs. Anna A. Clemons,
Box 294,
Southport, N. C.

My dear Mrs. Clemons:

I have called Miss Paul's attention to your letter of October 24 describing the registration conditions for colored women in your neighborhood.

We have been giving the situation in the south a good deal of thought. but at present we see only one solution to the matter, and that is one which is not available now. We feel that we must press through Congress an Enabling Act which will place federal authority over the registration and election officials in all the states and so make interference with, or prevention of, the proper execution of the election laws a federal offense. We had hoped to get this Enabling Act through Congress before its adjournment last spring, but did not get farther than the introduction of the measure. We expect to be able to work for the passage of this Act at the coming session of Congress.

Very sincerely yours,

[Emma Wold]

Headquarters Secretary

Reflection

If you were Anna Clemons and read this response, would you still have hope that the National Woman's Party could help? Why or why not?