Soon after American women obtained the right to vote in 1920, Martha Ellis Hopkins (1870–1959) launched her career in Indiana politics—not as a politician, but rather as a dedicated local precinct worker in Jasper County, Indiana. A staunch supporter of the Republican Party, Hopkins spent thirty-plus years working as a polling officer during elections as well as the Precinct Vice Committeeperson of the Third Precinct in Marion Township, Jasper County, Indiana. She was appointed the Republican Vice Chairperson for the Tenth Congressional District in Indiana, an office she held from 1922 to 1932.

Martha Ellis Hopkins was the daughter of John B. Ellis (1832–1914) and Mary Crowel (1837–1875). In 1872 Martha moved with her parents and siblings from her birthplace in Jefferson Township, Carroll County, Indiana, to Kokomo in Howard County, where she remained until graduation from high school in 1887. She returned to Carroll County, where she taught at an elementary school. In 1902 she married Arthur Herbert Hopkins (1866–1952) of Rensselaer, Jasper County, Indiana, and moved there with him to reside until her death in Lafayette in 1959.1

Housed in the Indiana Historical Society’s William Henry Smith Memorial Library, the Collection of Martha Ellis Hopkins, Jasper County, Indiana, 1920–1952 (M146/BV1446–1453), contains a varied selection of political documents and memorabilia. The political collection includes correspondence written between 1920 and 1937; voter records from 1940 to 1952; clippings on Indiana politics; Indiana-printed items consisting of mainly Republican-oriented leaflets, broadsides, and programs; and campaign buttons as well as poll books for Rensselaer’s Third and Fourth Precincts during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Similar to today, poll books were used by those working at a voting location to record the names of individuals voting that day. Due to the serious nature of their position, poll-takers (or polling officers) were responsible for accurately and diligently recording the information provided to them by the voters. Early twentieth-century poll books not only supply the voter’s name but also other interesting and pertinent facts about that person. For example, scribbled
next to a voter’s name and voting information is the name of a previous owner to where the voter is currently residing as well as other insights into the individual’s life.²

The poll book for the 1932 primary election is a good example of what information can be found. Within this particular poll book, voters’ names were entered by the poll-taker (in this instance, Martha Ellis Hopkins), who arranged them alphabetically by the first letter of the voter’s last name. An occasional last name appears out of order at the top or bottom of each list, indicating that these voters, although eligible to vote, may have registered late, and their names were written in upon their appearance at the poll. Generally, the names of married women voters are identified with the title “Mrs.” followed by the husband’s first name in parentheses written next to their own first name and are entered immediately below the husband’s name. Hopkins also noted the marital status of single women by following the name with “Miss” and acknowledged those holding a religious office with either “Rev.,” “Bro.,” or “Sister.”

After each name are columns requesting such information as the voter’s political affiliation; whether he or she is a first-time voter, absentee voter, a person of “color,” or a soldier (and in what war served); address; occupation or place of occupation; and any other remarks (Hopkins chose to write in the voter’s telephone number). Throughout this poll book, several names have been crossed out, indicating that either these individuals did not vote during this particular election or they were ineligible to vote in that precinct due to a change of residence.

The following list contains all of the names written in the 1932 Primary Day Poll Book in the order they appear in the book. Note that, in the poll book itself, the last names beginning in “N” follow those beginning in “Mc” and precede those beginning in “M.” Therefore, they have been listed in that same order here. Because of the nature of given names employed by women associated with religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church, the title of “Sister” has been included as means to identify them as such. Other titles, such as “Rev.” and “Bro.,” have not been included here even though they appear in the poll book.

Notes

**Voters Listed in Poll Book for Fourth Precinct, Rensselaer, Indiana, 1932 Primary**

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Paulus, Keith
Pierson, Annie Lou

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