

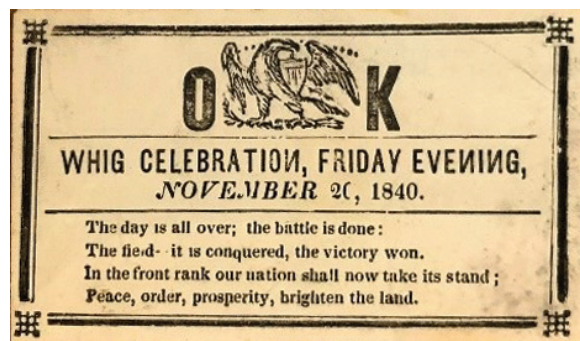
POLITICAL ECHOES

FROM THE SHELDON MUSEUM ARCHIVES

TICKETS TO THE PAST

Currently we live in one of the most politically divisive times in American history. However, the past is full of politically charged moments that still resonate with us today as documented by the Sheldon Museum's archival collections.

Henry L. Sheldon collected materials related to national and local politics including tickets, ballots, invitations, posters and other paraphernalia that now illuminate and facilitate our understanding of political symbols, slogans and fraught moments of national history.



THE ELECTION OF 1840

The ticket celebrating the winner of the 1840 presidential election carries a wealth of political history. The campaign was widely regarded as the first modern presidential campaign complete with character defamation, veneration of a military hero, catchy slogans ("Tippecanoe and Tyler, too"), campaign paraphernalia, and symbols. Democratic President Martin Van Buren fought for re-election and the Whig Party unified behind war hero William Henry Harrison, who won as a result of the Whigs successful campaign strategies. The "OK" on the ticket illustrates the sudden rise to national prominence of one of the most common words in the English language — "OK." Most authorities agree that "OK" began in 1839 at the office of a Boston newspaper as an editorial abbreviation for "Oll Korrekt." The Democratic Party's slogan, "Vote for OK," which stood for Van Buren's nickname, "Old Kinderhook" widely popularized the term. The triumphant Whigs then claimed the word as their own.

1868 IMPEACHMENT

The impeachment hearings of President

Trump were only the third such event in the nation's history. The first presidential impeachment occurred in 1868 after Andrew Johnson assumed the presidency following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Combative Johnson was accused of violating the Tenure of Office Act that forbade the president to remove civil officers without senatorial consent. The public trial lasted from March to mid-May and was so popular that the police had to guard the entrance from unruly mobs. Each day 1,000 tickets were printed in a different color. The tickets mainly went to white elites. African Americans were excluded. Johnson was impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate by a single vote. The Sheldon archives holds three tickets to Johnson's impeachment trial. We do not know to whom they belonged but today such tickets are a rarity eagerly sought after by collectors.



THE DEMOCRATIC ROOSTER

Today's Democratic donkey can be traced to Andrew Jackson and the 1828 presidential campaign. But for many years the rooster was the prominent Democratic symbol. It began in Greenfield, Indiana during the 1840 election when Joseph Chapman, a Democratic candidate for state representative, was called upon to "stir up the Democracy,"... "he must CROW!" There is more to the story but suffice it to say Indiana Democrats chose the rooster



as their symbol. From then on the rooster also appeared on Democratic national and local campaign materials and it became the Party symbol in several states. The ticket to the 1890 Democratic State Convention attests it was also present in Vermont.

The rooster symbol took on a racist edge when the Alabama Democratic Party combined it with the motto "White supremacy — For the right" in 1904. [Image 4] The symbol that began as a proud and crowing affirmative was now used as a symbol of Black disenfranchisement in the South. In 1966 the Alabama Democratic Party voted to replace the "White supremacy" with just "Democrats."

Recently the Proud Boys, a far-right, neo-fascist, fraternal organization affiliated with white supremacists that engages in political violence, adopted the rooster. This symbol is present on their website, flags, jackets, literature, and recently with the phrase "stand back and stand by."



From the quiet of the Sheldon Museum archives to the chaos of today's politics and racial reckonings, may the rooster symbol someday be redeemed?

Contributed by Eva Garcelon-Hart, Sheldon Museum's Research Center Archivist and Lucinda Cockrell, Research Center Committee Chair.