

Four Minute Men

I recently purchased a small card on eBay, which listed a Miss K.E. Blum as a “four minute man”, and since it was March, Women’s History Month, my interest was piqued – what was a “four minute man”, and how often was the man a woman? A little online sleuthing offered the following excerpts from Wikipedia:

“In the year of 1917 the war in Europe had been raging for three years and America's involvement had not begun. [Woodrow Wilson](#) had just been re-elected president under the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War". . . . Eventually on April, 6th 1917 the US Congress declared war on Germany. With a large number of German Americans in the United States, and many others with strong isolationist feelings, there was a strong need for a [propaganda](#) campaign to stir support for the war. . . . Wilson needed to speak directly to the fragmented and spread out audience in the United States.”

“One of the challenges of the effort was the fragmented audience of the United States. Many different heritages were represented in the United States, and the president needed their support for the war. To address each groups specific needs, the director of the Four Minute Men, William McCormick Blair, delegated the duty of speaking to local men. Well known and respected community figures often volunteered for the Four Minute Men program. This gave the speeches a local voice.”

“The Committee on Public Information, headed by [George Creel](#), appointed William McCormick Blair as director of the Four Minute Men. Blair appointed state chairmen of the Four Minute Men [*in Washington, M.P. Goodner*], who then would appoint a city or community chairman [*in Granite Falls, C.H. Cleaver, who ran Granite Falls Electric Company*]. Each of these appointments needed to be approved in Washington. The local chairman would then appoint a number of speakers to cover the theaters in the city or community for which he was responsible.”

It was clear from the documentation, the card, and the newsletters sent out periodically to the Four Minute Men that it was assumed they'd all be MEN, but it was also clear that WOMEN quickly moved into roles of responsibility.

One newsletter had an article titled: NOW THEN—WATCH YOUR PANTS.

First, most speakers wear their trousers too long. A man appearing on a stage should hitch his trousers up higher than ordinary. Second, audiences should be addressed as "Fellow citizens" or "My friends," or some similar phrase, rather than "Ladies and gentlemen."

W. S. GILBERT, Local chairman, Spokane, Wash.

Such suggestions as the two above are by no means regarded as trivial; minor points may mean success.

Another article said:

Mrs. W. E. Ferree is local chairman of Four Minute Men at Hoquiam, Wash.—only woman chairman in that State—doing fine work.— [*maybe the only female chairperson, but not the only female four minute man*]

M. P. GOODNER, Washington State chairman.

But as with anything remotely political, not everything was always “smooth”. There was some confusion in audiences about whether the speakers were paid or volunteers (they were, in fact, volunteers).

Olympia, Wash.: One evening I was addressing an audience at this theater in the interest of the Red Cross; I was just finishing when a man in the audience took exception to my remarks and voiced his sentiments as follows: " Cut out the bunk on the Red Cross and go on with the show—who are the people you refer to ? " The part of the speech he seemed to have taken exception to was that when I spoke of the malicious lies, etc., that were being told about this organization; I left the stage and went down to where he was and by that time a crowd had gathered around him; they immediately took hold of him and in anything but a gentle way put him out; outside the theater, he continued to cast remarks at me and said: " I make my living honestly," I then knew he was one of the crowd who thought we were being paid for the work; his wife sat with him and called me names that wouldn't look good in print.

M. P . GOODNER.

I could find no record of Miss K.E. Blum speaking in the Granite Falls Theater, but I'm quite sure she must have done so. I found no record of her residence in the area, but with the cooperation of Paul Dorpat (Seattle Times, "Now and Then"), uncovered a Miss Katherine E. Blum who was the salutatorian of the Lincoln High School 1910 graduating class, also listed in the 1918 Polk Directory as a teacher, living in Seattle. Are there any detectives out there who can add some more information?

By the way, the term "4 Minute Men" ostensibly was based on the premise that it took four minutes to change reels in the movie theaters of the time – time otherwise "wasted" by the viewers!

