

## CHAPTER 26

*from Samuel H. Olson's book: A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell, 1849-1963*

### Rock-Ribbed Republicans

Ninety years ago this past August, Tennessee became the 36<sup>th</sup> state, the number constitutionally required to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, giving all American women the right to vote in the coming presidential election of 1920.

That fall, public-spirited Isabelle Faulkner Fogg, who was the wife of Horace Fogg, visited all the ladies in Norwell, urging them to exercise their franchise. Over the next 24 years, there would be seven presidential elections during alternating periods of boom and bust and during alternating times of uneasy neutrality and global war. Norwell voters, however, remained politically constant, revealing much about the town, the character of its people and how they met the challenges of the times.

In 1920, there was a resounding landslide for ‘back to normalcy with Harding’ and an even bigger landslide locally. The vote for Republican Harding was 409 with 48 for Cox, his Democratic challenger—a ratio close to nine to one. What Harding meant by normalcy was that progressive reform and international involvement had been overdone by the outgoing Wilson Administration. In 1924, Norwell voters opted to “keep cool with Coolidge,” again by a ratio of about nine to one. Four years later, Republican Hoover’s promise of “a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage,” triumphed over the “happy Warrior, Al Smith.” Smith was ‘wet’ on the prohibition issue while Norwell had a long history of being “dry.”

It was just eight months into Hoover’s term when, in 1929, “Wall Street laid an egg.” While Hoover promised, “prosperity was just around the corner,” breadlines, soup kitchens and lines of people trying to withdraw funds from failing banks stretched around the corner. In 1932, one of the biggest vote getters in presidential history, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, became the Democratic nominee with his promise of a new Deal for the “forgotten man.” Norwell voters, who had supported Hoover in 1928, didn’t abandon him, however. Hoover locally polled about four times as many votes as FDR, who won in a national landslide. It seems that Norwell voters agreed that the Depression was part of the normal economic cycle and that too much government interference with the economy should be avoided.

Four years later, Norwell voters gave Republican Alf London almost four times as many votes as Franklin “Deficit” Roosevelt, a surprise in that the vast majority of Norwell citizens were affected, some very seriously, by the lingering Depression. A strong chord of rugged individualism resulted in Norwell’s rejected Public Works Authority funds for replacing the high school destroyed by fire in 1935.

The year 1940 found FDR running for an unprecedented third term. FDR argued that he needed a third term to bring the nation completely out of the Depression and for making good on his pledge, “Your sons will not be asked to fight and die in a foreign war.” The defense build up beginning in the summer of 1940 took care of the former and the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, would cancel out the latter. That November, Norwell voters gave their nod to Wendell Wilkie by almost three to one. Many Norwell voters evidently believed that FDR was steering the country into choppy international waters.

In 1944, in the midst of World War II, a dying FDR was elected to a fourth term against New York Governor Thomas Dewey. Roosevelt’s “Don’t change horses in the midst of a stream” had

a big country-wide impact, but still he had his weakest electoral college showing. Norwell voters were close to four to one for Dewey.

On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Georgia. Harry S. Truman, sworn in as president that evening, presided over V-E Day, made the decision to drop the A-bomb and announced the victory over Japan on August 14, 1945. After the euphoria brought by peace had died down, however, many wondered whether he could meet the challenges of the Soviets and successfully guide the transition to a peacetime economy.

Would the Republican hold over Norwell voters continue? Or would changing post war demographics and the influx of new residents bring about new election results?

**How Norwell Voted**  
(Winner in the town of Norwell placed first)

<b>Election</b>	<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Votes</b>
1920	Warren G. Harding, R	409
	James M. Cox, D	48
1924	Calvin Coolidge, R	443
	John W. Davis, D	48
1928	Herbert Hoover, R	567
	Alfred E. Smith, D	122
1932	Herbert Hoover, R	592
	Franklin D. Roosevelt, D	153
1936	Alfred M. Landon, R	672
	Franklin D. Roosevelt, D	180
1940	Wendell Wilkie, R	777
	Franklin D. Roosevelt, D	247
1944	Thomas E. Dewey, R	808
	Franklin D. Roosevelt, D	204