

GOOD NEWS FROM YOUR TOWN CLERK/TAX COLLECTOR

The year of 2016 marks the 100th Anniversary of the first New Hampshire Presidential Primary and NH's Secretary of State is commemorating this event by recognizing the towns that have used their original ballot boxes since they were issued in 1892, as well as using them in each presidential primary since New Hampshire's first in 1916. The Town of Nelson qualifies for this recognition and I for one am very proud of this fact. Our old, sometimes dusty ballot box will finally be honored for its true value and place in the history of Nelson and New Hampshire.



A little background about the 1892 Election ballot boxes

During the January 1891 session, the NH legislature passed an act requiring the use of secret ballots. "To enforce the secrecy of the ballot, "the law said, the Secretary of State among other things was to prepare and print all ballots at public expense, and "provide every city and town with a ballot-box for use at each polling place."

Thus, ended the practice of political parties and candidates printing and distributing ballots of their own design to citizens, who in turn cast these "tickets" or ballots openly at polling places, for anyone to observe. Because anyone could see how a person voted, including candidates, their supporters, political

bosses and other interested partisans, this system fostered such corrupt activities as vote-buying, ballot counterfeiting and outright intimidation.

Because the law also required guard rails and voting booths at each polling site, this was the first time NH citizens statewide were assured a way to cast their ballots in complete secrecy. Note that those NH citizens were only men, since women were not allowed to vote at that time.

Ballot boxes were therefore ordered constructed and delivered by the Secretary of State to the then 272 voting places in New Hampshire in time for use in the November 8, 1892 presidential election. These boxes were each constructed to include a counting device with a hand-crank and a bell to signal each ballot cast. Regretfully, those original elements are not attached to our box.

According to our present day Secretary of State's office, 43 New Hampshire towns have used these ballot boxes continuously in every election (federal, state and town) since they were issued 123 years ago and the town of Nelson is one of these towns.



To mark the 100th anniversary of the New Hampshire Presidential Primary, a poster of these historic artifacts will be on display at our Town Hall during the primary in February (we don't have an exact date yet). As you cast your vote, give thanks to our previous town officials who took the time and effort to preserve this 1892 Ballot Box.