

Rebecca Clark - Politics

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In this oral history interview excerpt, Rebecca Clark remembers working for Howard Lee's campaign to run for mayor of Chapel Hill and counting votes at the polls.

Audio

File:

Duration: 4:05

Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Bob Gilgor

Did you help Howard Lee and his campaign get elected?

Rebecca Clark

They said I did. What happened, Howard Lee, I'll never forget: this lady called me to her home and said, "You know, Rebecca, we're thinking of you. We got a young man on campus, have you met him?" I said, "No, I heard of him." "His name is Howard Lee. We would like for him to run for mayor. We want a black mayor." And I said, "Fine." We met two or three other people at this lady's house, she lived up on McAuley Street. And we all got together and we worked. And talk about working; we worked hard. At that time, my son had a Greyhound bus. My children were all registered to vote. We were getting everybody that we knew to vote. So on that election day - I'll never forget it - my son had a Greyhound bus () and he went street to street and they knew he was coming. Blowing his horn. We loaded them to the poll. Howard Lee won before the votes all got in. And I'll never forget because I was working with Charlotte Adams and Mrs. Pappa, from the School of Social Work, Dr. John Pappa's mother. We were out at that poll with Charlotte Adams and others counting that night. Then we were doing it by hand, counting ballots, one, two, three, four, five, tally. And that place was packed. I guess we must have had a thousand people to vote in our precinct that night. And I had a man at our table who became a good friend later. And we were counting. And photographer was standing there. (). And Howard was winning. And in doing so, the fellow was looking to see how we were tallying so he'd know what to call into the newsroom. And this fellow turned and said, "Stop standing over me! I don't want you breathing over me!" Of course that fouled up everybody's count. We had to count over. We did more counting over than we were really counting that night because of this man at our table. So we had this lady by the name of... I was hoping I'd remember her. I'm getting where I forget. She worked at the Y. So she was there. She lived in my precinct, she was there. And in doing so, the votes were coming in, the votes were coming in. And coming in, she came to me and said, "When you get a break, come into the janitor's room." After a while, there was someone to relieve me, I asked for a break because you're not allowed to have radios at the polling place. But somebody had put a radio in the janitor's closet. So we were sitting in the janitor's closet. And Howard Lee was getting ready to make

his acceptance speech. I said, "Can't be. We ain't even through." She said, "Oh, yes, we are." But we're still counting at Lincoln precinct. And he went on to thank all the folks that helped him, calling all these names. She said, "You heard that?" I said yes. Calling all those names. And when he was winding down, he said, "I'm asking for Rebecca Clark. Where is she?" And they had packed St. Joseph's Church. The spread over in the street; there wasn't any room inside. The whites and blacks; they had to close off part of Rosemary Street there where St. Joseph Church is. "Rebecca Clark, Where are you? Come on down." And we're standing there, laughing. We're in the closet at Lincoln Center. And they were applauding, they were applauding. You talk about work. We had worked and registered more people. And now you can't hardly get 'em to the polls.

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