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A woman forgotten by history

By JEAN BAKER

LOST IN Maryland's history is the story of Anna Ella Carroll, a political writer and activist whose life serves as a model for all women who struggle to achieve public goals within a restrictive society.

Carroll was born into a lesser-known Protestant branch of Maryland's famous Carroll family in 1815, on a plantation in Somerset County.

Her father, Thomas King Carroll, lost his land and slaves in the 1837 depression. He was more successful in politics — first as a legislator, then as governor of Maryland from 1830 to 1831.

Miss Carroll, who never married, inherited her interest in politics from her father. By her late 20s, Miss Carroll was a paid lobbyist in Washington, promoting railroads.

Later, Miss Carroll joined a new political organization called the Know Nothing or American Party. Like many women of the era, she sought an affiliation with the party, even though she could neither vote nor attend all-male nominating conventions.

The Know Nothings, named for their refusal to answer any questions about their organization, hold little appeal for us today given their harsh anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant positions. But during the 1850s in cities with growing Irish and German populations such as Baltimore and Boston, they elected mayors, city councilmen and state legislators.

Miss Carroll played a significant role in the party's local success. In vigorous prose, she contributed pamphlets and a 500-page book, "The Great American Battle," which party members called "the textbook of our Cause."

Like many other Marylanders, Miss Carroll believed the Know Nothing crusade upheld noble revolutionary ideals in its efforts to end the corruption of party hacks, to insist on the separation of church and state, and to prevent the use of the Catholic Bible in public schools.

In the long run, Miss Carroll's partisanship was less important than her methods. Soon other

vide book-length manuscripts for their presidential campaigns.

By the late 1850s, the Know Nothings had been absorbed into other parties. Carroll focused on preserving the Union. In the widely circulated, "The Union of the States," the anti-slavery Miss Carroll became one of the first Marylanders to argue for a border state conference to negotiate a compromise between the North and South.

Once the Civil War began, Miss Carroll, as a paid consultant to the War Department, provided the Lincoln administration with a series of closely argued position papers on the war powers of the government. After a trip to the West in 1861, she said that the Union invasion route to sever the Confederacy must not be the well-fortified Mississippi River. Rather, she informed officials in the War Department, a successful offensive first must clear the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers — a strategy that was accomplished in early 1862 when the Confederate Forts Henry and Donelson fell to a Union assault.

Certainly there were others who offered a similar strategy, but Miss Carroll was among the first. Yet the limits of female power soon became infuriatingly clear when she entered a claim for payment for her Tennessee plan.

The lesser claims of males were honored; hers was not.

Suffrage leaders were no more successful in persuading Congress to pay the penniless Miss Carroll; but that was their point. Without the vote, without political authority, without a campaign to change public opinion, and without attention-getting crusades replayed as late as Women's History Month, 1999, women would never be fairly treated.

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Early feminist: *Anna Ella Carroll planned the Union Army's successful Tennessee River campaign.*