

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OHIO

<http://www.lwvohio.org/>



In 1920, just six months before the U.S. Constitution was amended to give women the right to vote, the National American Woman Suffrage Association's President, Carrie Chapman Catt, proposed the creation of the League of Women Voters. The League's first purpose was to teach women how to exercise their new right to vote. Thus, the League was to "finish the fight" that the suffragists had started. For over 75 years the League has continued to serve all citizens and has opened its membership to any citizen of voting age, male or female. Today, the League of Women Voters is a three tier organization, including Leagues at the local, state, and national levels. A member joining any of the 49 local Leagues in Ohio is automatically a member of the Ohio and the U.S. Leagues.

As a citizen education organization, educational publications published by the League are on such topics as Ohio government, Ohio government finances, writing your government representatives, Ohio's open meetings law, and education finance in the state.

As a multi-issue organization, the Ohio League currently has positions on the Ohio constitution, apportionment/districting, state government finances, children's services, primary and secondary, education, juvenile justice, and natural resources.

The OHIO History of LWV

The late Mrs. Frank Shaw, Oberlin, president of LWV of Ohio, 1947-49

This special issue of the Ohio Voter is a Fiftieth Anniversary gift to the League of Women Voters of Ohio from the Mary Shaw Fund, established in 1956 as a living memorial to an outstanding Leaguer. It is not intended as a comprehensive history. We merely wish to take you along to cast a nostalgic look over half a century. Let your glance linger over a landmark we have illuminated here and there; then join us in the work of moving ahead in the next fifty years.

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The First Fifty Years -- A Glance Back

The Commencement

On August 18, 1920, the church bells of Cleveland rang out, factory and ship whistles blew, and Euclid Avenue was bright with flags. The occasion was the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States by the state of Tennessee. By its action, Tennessee completed the "perfect36" of states needed to put woman's suffrage into law.

The then president of the Cleveland League of Women Voters, Miss Belle Sherwin, who later became national president, said of the Suffrage Proclamation, "Today will go down in history as women's commencement day. It marks the hour when women began to take a hand in outlining the policies of the nation."

In anticipation of that moment, on May 4 and May 5 of that year in Columbus, the thirty-fourth (and last) Convention of the Ohio Women's Suffrage Association had transformed itself into the "first Congress State League of Women Voters."

Fourteen other organizations had joined in as midwives to the League and participated as voting delegates in the fledgling organization. They were: the Federation of Women's Clubs, WCTU, the Ladies of the Maccabees, the DAR, the Nurses' Association, the Ohio Teachers' Association, the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Ladies' Auxiliary of the State Letter Carriers, the Consumers' League, the Catholic Women's League, the Federation of business Women's Clubs, the Ohio Council of women in Industry, the Child Welfare League, and the Ohio Newspaper Women's Association.

But the spiritual parent of the League were unquestionably the suffragist. An excerpt from one of their Resolutions graced the masthead of the League's newsletter in the early days. "We will be," it proclaimed, "faithful, conscientious, and intelligent voters; we will tolerate no malice in party and will go on record as utterly opposed to vituperation, slander, falsehood."

Gradually translated into more prosaic terms, the purpose of the League has remained the same;" to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government."

At the Joy dinner on May 5, 1920, however, the birth of the League was celebrated in sentimental, inspiring and intensely personal oratory which remained in style for some time, in contrast to our present day matter-of-fact objectivity.

While oratory yielded to more practical matters, such as money, fund-raising was then as personal as the speechmaking. Mrs. Malcolm McBride of Cleveland (who is now serving as one

Anniversary Campaign) recalls calling for pledges at the Joy dinner in the manner of an auctioneer: "Who will give me \$10? Who will give me \$100?" Although her method yielded the substantial sum of \$2,745, this was a far cry from the adopted dream pipe budget of \$15,985.

Financial malnutrition, which has plagued the state League throughout its, set in early. After the LWV treasury got down to \$50.59 in its first year, the League, having to borrow \$500, was said in the minutes to exist "on the credit of Mr. Mallon" husband of the state president.

In its most difficult years the Leagues in Ohio did not hesitate to put on rummage sales, to sell scented soap, to have marionette shows, silver teas and garden parties, to sponsor benefit theater performances or even in the late forties, to run a boat ride to the races from Cincinnati to Marietta.

A novel windfall once hit the League in Columbus when a member won \$100 in gold in a grocer's product-naming contest. Another Columbus Leaguer, having bought the gold for \$102.50, in cash, donated the whole to the League treasury. The local Voter then gave the grocer a free ad.

Eventually these unorthodox money raising methods gave way to something more dignified as Leagues turned to their communities to garner support for LWV service in finance drives. Dues had been kept low so that the League could remain, in the words of first national president, Mrs. Maud W. Park, an "every woman's organization." Even so, inflation has taken its toll. dues in 1920 were 50 cents; now some Leagues charge \$120. The Ohio Voter remains a bargain, though, at the same \$1 a year now that it cost in 1920.

There might be no Ohio Voter or League had the infant organization not been nurtured by the lively ladies who brought it into being. Often wealthy and socially prominent, sometimes spinsters or childless Mothers in Israel, they dug into their pockets to pull the League out of the red time after time.

Well educated in age when very few women were, these grandes dames of the League put great faith in donning a pair of fresh white gloves before sallying forth to do battle for the cause. While usually house and children were left in the care of maids, at a suffrage parade in Columbus, Mrs. Younger, and early League leader, remembered that she "carried a baby and a banner. Both survived."

Moving among these more mature ladies of distinction was a covey of very young women, full of zeal, gay energetic. Alight with the belief that what they and the League did mattered enormously, these girls often worked as LWV executive secretaries or were trail blazers in hitherto all-male or new professions, such as social work and law.

Lucia McBride, perhaps the most influential and durable of all: Amy Maher of Toledo, first state chairman; the Johnson sisters, Margaret and Lucia Bing; Belle Sherwin; Judge Florence E. Allen -- the names of most of these and many more are engraved on a bronze Roll of Honor in the State House Rotunda. But they left an equally lasting imprint on the League itself. Burning with a sense of cause, driven to very specific action by years of voteless frustration, they dominated the

tree-pronged activity of voter education, legislative program and financing of a League that was the creature of their aspiration.

Tackling first things first, the new League of Women Voters taught women how to vote in a three-day Citizenship School, conducted simultaneously with the first Convention. The climax of days of lectures on political parties and state and local government was a voting demonstration, still a League mainstay activity. Thus was born Voters Service, the best-known endeavor of LWV on all levels. A Manual for Voters, announced to enthusiastic reception in one of the earliest state newsletters, was the forerunner of the present Voters Primer. Soon voter information bulletins began making their appearance prior to each election. But the custom of accepting paid political advertising, which started with a picture of Warren G. Harding in the Joy dinner program, was abandoned early as the principle of non-partisanship triumphed over the urgent need to make ends meet.

The ultra-personal touch of the early days pervaded program as well. In their desire to support "Needed" legislation, the ladies took up the cudgel in the womanly matters of laws concerning their own sex, children, domestic relations and peace. The often-expressed pre-suffrage fear that women would throw out of office all those who had been opposed to Prohibition proved groundless. The first piece of legislation on the program of the Ohio League was the Bing School Attendance Law in 1921. It signalled the start of interest in education that is still going strong.

The author of the bill, Mr. Simeon H. Bing was so taken with Lucia Johnson, the League lobbyist who worked with him for passage, that he married her. Mrs. Bing's sister, Margaret, commented when interviewed in 1966, "Men in the Assembly, after Lucia Picked off Sim, were afraid to work with any woman, for fear they would be caught too."

But the undaunted League ladies persisted. They organized the program into departments, each chaired by a woman with burning, often professional, interest in the field. The amount of expertise this generated has been called more impressive than a Ph.D. and resulted in a string of the kind of factual and thorough publications for which the League is justly famous. Although Platforms, running into dozens of items, were duly voted in at Conventions, they provided a carte blanche for the experts, rather than informed decisions. The final determination was the lobbyist's, who would choose whatever legislative item seemed to have a chance of success. Yet some of the old techniques have changed little, as witness the following admonitions to legislative workers from the Ohio Woman Voter of 1929:

- Don't tell everything you know;
- Don't tell anything you do not know;"
- Don't repeat the slightest remark made to you in confidence;
- Don't lose your temper;
- Don't nag;
- Don't ever give up.

The League in Ohio did not quite give up, not even in the great depression. The Ohio Woman Voter assumed a more modest guise; office staff was cut along with the budget which plunged to

\$6,550 in 1934, the lowest in 50 years. Membership followed the downward trend to a nadir of 15 Leagues (from 35 in 1920) and 3,000 members. According to Mrs. Werner Blachard, long-time leader and now chairman of the State Anniversary Committee, there was serious talk about closing the League shop forever. Many professional and special interest groups had sprung up and took over some traditional League functions, such as s candidates' meetings. The New Deal took the heat out of the fight for the kind of social laws the League liked to fight for. The simple fires to the Cause, first for suffrage and then for rights dear to the hearts of women were dying out as their status was changing in a continuously more complex society. The moneyed leaders of the twenties were now being supplanted by women who had to work for a living, who could ill afford large downtown meetings with good food and outstanding speakers. The single-minded zealots of early days were now joined by women who became members more out of a sense of citizen responsibility and a need to become informed.

So the League did not give up. But it did change. Mrs. Lucia Johnson Bing was no longer lobbyist. Mrs. C. C. Shively, another famous legislative chairman who is now honorary chairman of the 50th, served in her place, second in a line of strong personalities which later included Mrs. Fed Davis and Mrs. James Briers. New names appeared on League rosters -- Mrs. A.A. Treuhaft, Mrs. Werner Blachard, Mrs. Griffith L. Resor, Jr. These ladies, who soon reached -- and have remained in -- leadership positions, are representative of the modern breed of Leaguer, profiled in the Michigan survey of the League as 85% college-educated, mobile and belonging to at least five organizations.

As membership went more current so did the program. This was the decade when the League went to bat for causes that have the ring of today, for some represent still-unfinished business: county home rule (1932), School foundation program (1935), appointive judiciary (1938). And it was the study of apportionment that launched the next program decade in 1940.

The Grass Roots Spread

The austerity of World War II, and the subsequent prosperity with its servantless baby boom hastened a change in the city-centered, East-led, top heavy national League. The LWV of Ohio had an important part to play in that metamorphosis.

Unlike other large states, in Ohio Leagues were spread all around the state, had a movable rather than a stationary state office, and a fair mixture of big city and small town members. Moreover, by 1941 the state League had prospered enough to begin paying for some state board members expenses. Previously, the only benefit accrued in the form of unstamped stationery so that service on the board had been limited to those who could afford it. LWV of Ohio was also proud of its role in organizing new Leagues, increasing membership and in its record of action.

Prior to the 1944 national convention, the national board made radical bylaws proposals. Prompted by the success of small discussion meetings during depression and gasoline-ration days and by a demand for more membership participation, the proposals called for the abolishment of the departmental structure, and with it the rule of experts. But the plans, made without prior consultation, included also doing away with State Leagues.

The Ohio State Board would not take this lying down. Having put fund it could ill afford into organizing opposition among Leagues all over the country, the Ohio delegation went to the convention. There it was Mrs. McBride who nominated a rebel slate leader from the floor, a slate which included an Ohioan for secretary. The grass roots revolt carried the day, but it took the Ohio LWV a long time of penny pinching to recover from the financial shock of that campaign.

The advent of the grass roots LWV culminated in the adoption of the unit system in 1948. Now the League became the unique association of member it has remained, in which no program action is taken unless all members have had the opportunity to participate in the decision.

In Ohio, as elsewhere, the League moved toward the fifties thriving ewiththe grass roots spread. As wealth, education, respectability and mobility increased, the League followed many of its members to the suburbs. Instead of a well-publicized big luncheon, a League meeting since then has been apt to take place in the living room of a modest split level. Far from being the zealous spinster of old, the hostess has just wrestled four kids under then into bed, pushed the dog into the basement and plugged in the coffeemaker.

Aside from possible loss of influence in cities, the price the League has paid for its democratization has been increasing rigidity of structure. No longer could some states have " A League at every corner." Strict recognition standards for new Leagues followed uniform methods of financing, initiated in 1938. Laborious program-making techniques came into being as did consensus, as hard to define as it is to practice. A concept "to shatter the nerves," for Mrs. Shively, consensus is a way of reaching substantial agreement on an issue without counting noses.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Constitutional Convention

Most legislative items in the forties were holdovers from earlier years. Taxes and a study of the state Constitution (1947) which were not, are very much alive today. To the minds of some leaders of those days, the fight for a Constitutional convention in 1952, when the state League sallied forth with a supreme effort into all corners of the state, was the last of the Causes. The issue failed by a vote of two to one.

Says Mrs. Balchard, who was state president at the time, "We had no idea it was going to be...a fight. (The item became a cause because we had opposition." And Mrs. Resor, who was chairman of the item, says of the two powerful state organizations which opposed the Convention, "It was very interesting...that they over-estimated the power of LWV.":

The battle was lost but the war not quite. All through the fifties, politicians who had claimed that some changes were easier by amendment, passed measures that the League was pushing, sometimes practically on request. With some deadwood removed from the Constitution, a State Board of Education established, and four-year terms for governors and state senators a reality, the question on Constitutional Convention.

Attacks on the League during that campaign resulted in inquiries from 49 non-League towns and in a spurt of new Leagues. Also, it was the first time that, to quote Mrs. Resor, "A lot of local Leagues got to realize...who was running their town -- it wasn't the politicians." The League thus learned the meaning of the power structure.

No Malice in Party

On March 19, 1969, both Houses of the Ohio General Assembly passed a Joint Resolution. Full of "WHEREAS's" that list League accomplishments, it ends "commending the League of Women Voters of Ohio and the League of Women Voters of the United States, whose unceasing activities on behalf of good government have constituted a most meritorious and rewarding service to the people of the state of Ohio and the entire nations."

Have we then fulfilled the pledge of the suffrage days, as the two parties give us honor with no malice?

Voters Service, designed to help citizens become "faithful, conscientious and intelligent voters," keeps on. In recent years, we have tried to take it back into the cities to those who until lately have felt disenfranchised, much like the new women voters in 1920.

The publications parade has also proceeded unabatedly, even through the lean depression years. Marked by such bestsellers as Tax Facts in the forties and Know Your Ohio Government in 1964, the list now includes a series of Ohio Briefs, in expensive, readable pamphlets on LWV program items.

The League may be less idealistic about "malice in party" and "vituperation, slander and falsehood," but it tries hard to keep its own non-partisan skirts clean. Sometimes it is criticized for the kind of over-respectability that may result in paralysis. "We've always been front door lobbyists," said 80-year-old Miss Margaret Johnson in 1966. "Why don't we picket?"

Picketing has not yet been reembraced by the heirs of the suffragists, in spite of its present popularity. But the more than 9,000 member of some 70 Ohio Leagues have bent their methods to the times. According to Mrs. Howard Cromwell, state president, we have applied the lesson of the power structure to our big issues of the sixties: apportionment, which finally became a fact after 27 years; conservation of water resources in which the League has garnered numerous accomplishments as well as kudos; development of human resources through civil rights and education. The grass roots spread has been extended to active cooperation with other organizations, to the application of pressure on opinion makers and to return to participation on Boards and Commissions, which, though common in the early decades, was later considered tainted with partisanship. The kind of direct community action some Leaguers take and promote in our troubled cities is also right in the spirit of our zealous pioneers.

But the League, its own severest taskmaster, keeps seeking to evolve in such a way as to keep up with the highly complex and changeable tomorrow. Ohio has joined the national League in an attempt to catch up financially with the needs of 1970. In streamlining our structure we try to

return to it some of the flexibility it needs for maximum effectiveness.

Judge Florence E. Allen, early Leaguer and late Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio, once said, "The League is always on a hot stove -- that's why I support it."

Armed with hot issues, white gloves and a mimeograph machine, the League intends to keep its pot boiling in the next fifty years.

Mrs. Harry Jerrison

TEN YEARS AT A TIME IN OHIO

1920-1929

May 4-7, 1920 LWV Ohio founded in Columbus when the annual convention of the Woman Suffrage Association transformed the organization into a League of Women Voters. 104 women attended, from 35 Leagues. 15 sponsoring women's groups each sent two delegates. First President - Miss Amy Maher of Toledo. First of many Citizens' Schools, to instruct in voting procedures, opened by Governor James Cox.

Bing School Attendance Law -- first piece of legislation supported by LWVO. April 11-21, 1921, second convention of LWVUS held in Cleveland, with 2,000 in attendance.

Worked for passage and enforcement of school attendance laws and for protection of illegitimate children.

Participated in a Tri-State Institute International Cooperation to Prevent War in Cincinnati, attended by 1,000 women from Ohio and adjoining states. Supported constitutional amendment to strike out the words, "white male," from requirements for voting. Failed.

Mother's Day celebrated as Peace Day, May 1924. Worked for maternity leaves. Distributed blotters marked, "Let's Blot Out War."

\$4,800 raised by Mrs. Malcolm McBride and Miss Peters at Convention gala lunch. Interested in child labor laws, school attendance, civil service and minimum wage for women legislation.

LWVO dues 50 cents. Mrs. Bing chairman of meeting of Ohio Council on maternity and infancy about the Sheppard-Tower federal law for welfare of mothers and infants. Interested in revision of the method of distributing state aid to weak school districts and in larger units for administration and taxation.

625 new members for the O.S.U.LWV. Eighteen sororities with 100% membership.

Helped draft the Five Day Marriage Bill to establish a waiting period and a bill for permanent registration. Neither bill passed in spite of League work for them.

1930-1939

Tenth Anniversary Fund Drive, Members asked to give 10 cents for each year of LWV's life.

Five Day Marriage Law passed, Intangibles tax providing income for libraries passed. Worked for Merit System and county reorganization bill. Failed.

Circulated petitions for constitutional amendment to permit county home rule. Short of signatures.

Got county home rule on ballot by initiative petition. Passed, but many conditions.

Mrs. N.M. Stanley, president, LWVO, appointed to Governor's Commission on County Government.

Published the Judicial Primer. Supported first School Foundation program.

League at its smallest: 15 Leagues, 3,000 members.

Unsuccessfully tried for State Board of Education.

Supported appointive judiciary, without success.

Appeared in support of an Office Type Ballot Bill. Again tried for State Board of Education. Began work for bill for commitment of mental defectives.

1940-1949

Study of apportionment.

Successfully supported bill to require pre-marital examinations. Upheld merit system.

Studied loopholes in Ascherman Act (mental defectives).

Interested in Ohio Supreme Court decision that public housing not tax exempt.

Undertook Tax study; published bestseller, Tax Facts.

Began study of Ohio constitution.

Study of constitution continued.

Successful with state wide committee, in fight for Office Type Ballot. Housing study.

1950-1959

Judge Florence Allen - spoke at Akron convention on the suffrage movement to a very emotional reception.

LWVO organized Citizens' Committee on the Ohio Constitution. Meeting attended by leaders of many statewide groups.

All-out effort for Con-Con fails but League fame spreads with a spurt of new Leagues.

As result of work on constitutional convention nine amendments passed including that governing a State board of Education. Some outdated portions deleted.

Four-year term for state senators passes. Tax study.

Presidential election franchise to newcomers passed. Paying Our Way sold all over Ohio.

Trade Hat, Illustrating what foreign trade means to Ohio, appeared on TODAY Show.

Mary Shaw Fund, honoring past state president, issues certificates to individual leaders upon contributions from Leagues. Unsuccessful effort to pass Metro federation amendment. Study of governmental units and their relationships.

1960-1969

Study education beyond high school, water resources, mental health problems.

Study of Ohio election laws, education beyond high school.

Study of Ohio finance. Cuyahoga county ballot the longest in the U.S.

Worked for subdistricting of populous counties. Failed. Bestseller, Know Your Ohio Government published. Women voters week proclaimed by Gov. Rhodes. Civil rights adopted as emergency item at council.

Study of Ohio's major services and civil rights. Helped kill the Buy American bill.

Continue welfare, water resources, civil rights.

Development of registration and voting drives in poverty areas.

Study of Ohio Constitution adopted, education as the major service to be studied this biennium.

Local league members, Mrs. Germann of Clermont LWV testifies before Congress.

Mrs. Howard Cromwell appointed to Governor's Crime Commission.

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