**HISTORY of THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS of BUCKS COUNTY**

**On Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1920, six months before the ratification of the 19th Amendment which gave women the vote, delegates from the National American Woman Suffrage Association met for a victory convention in Chicago. President, Carrie Chapman Catt, said “Winning the vote is only an opening wedge, but to learn to use it is a bigger task” and suggested that a League of Women Voters be formed as a living memorial to the leaders of the women’s suffrage movement. The vote was “a tool to build a better nation . . . to provide for the common welfare . . . to help humanity upward.” Women’s voting power, she said, would benefit “all the weak and the erring . . . all the homeless and unloved .”**

 **In August of that same year, on the day the vote of the 38th state legislature in Tennessee was tallied and the 19th Amendment was proclaimed, the Pennsylvania League of Women Citizens became officially the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters.**

**On Saturday, September 25, 1920, men and women gathered in Philadelphia’s Independence Square. There, hung the “Justice Bell”, a replica of the Liberty Bell but without the crack. A ceremony began as the doors of Independence Hall opened and forty-eight girls came out. Each girl wore a white dress and a green ribbon with the name of a state. The “Goddess of Justice” wearing a Grecian robe unchained the Justice Bell’s clapper and set it to ring. The bell’s clapper had been chained in 1915, awaiting this moment when women had the freedom to vote. Maud Wood Park, the president of the National League of Women Voters, came from Washington to celebrate.**

**Many Leagues were formed and were active early in Bucks County. Newtown League was officially begun in 1920 but its origin was some years earlier on February 26,1886 when nineteen men and women joined together to form the Good Government League of Newtown. It underwent several name changes, becoming at various times the Equal Suffrage League of Newtown, Women Suffrage Party, and League of Women Citizens. Maude Stuckert was the Newtown League’s first president and continued in that capacity for more than twenty years** **and served as county president for six years.**

**The Leagues held their first inter-county conference in January of 1921. Representatives of twelve local counties met in Philadelphia to discuss current issues, as the movement to exempt women from jury duty.**

**The New Hope Area League started in 1944 with Ester Osterlenk as President. Tam St Claire was president of the New Hope League from 1985 to 1987. The Yardley League also started in 1944 by Mrs. Wright (no first name). Past Presidents of the Yardley League include Marion Dahlman, Nancy Jeanne Everest, Loretta Rector and Bette Sovinee.**

**Elizabeth “Betty” McCain, the daughter of a National American Woman Suffrage Association member, extended the cause to her hometown when she left the New Hope League to start the Doylestown Area League in 1955. The Doylestown Area League originally covered only Doylestown Borough for study and action but did include voters’ services in Doylestown and Plumstead Townships, until the New Hope League absorbed Plumstead Township in its area. In 1964, Plumstead became under the Doylestown League. Chalfont and New Britain Boroughs, Warwick and New Britain Townships became part of Doylestown League in 1965. In 1966 the Newtown League joined with the Middletown Area League of Women Voters.**

**The Doylestown League celebrated it’s 30th Anniversary on October 25, 1985, honoring “Ten Women of Achievement” : Lois Burpee (posthumously), co-founder and supporter of Welcome House; Helen Hartman Gemmill, historical preservation in Bucks County; Margaret H. George, state government and local governmental organizations; Carolyn C. Jarin, environmental preservation and education; Elizabeth McCain, pioneer for rights of women and minorities and founder of the Doylestown LWV; Mary McCaw, co-founder of Big Sisters of Bucks County and Prison Outreach; Margaret “Peggy” O’Neill, organizer of the Bucks County Area Agency on Aging and of numerous programs for senior citizens; Pauline Spare, citizens advocate for mentally ill and mentally retarded persons; Prudence W. Suydam, volunteer and chairwoman of the relocation fund committee for Doylestown Hospital; and Marion White, officer of the Bucks County Free Library and the Central Bucks Family YMCA.**

**In June of 1995, the four remaining Leagues in Bucks County, New Hope, Doylestown, Newtown and Yardley (Warminster-Upper Southampton having already disbanded), each voted to merge to form the League of Women Voters of Bucks County.**

**Throughout the years the League of Women Voters changed with the times. In 1972 Bert Moyer offered babysitting services to encourage young mothers to become active members and by 1977 the League started holding evening meetings to accommodate the many working members. Beginning in 1983 programs called “Let’s Talk “, the brain child of Shirley Hart, were created and shown on a local cable TV public access channel to educate and advocate for the League. However, Voter service, as well as voter registration and candidate forums, and voter education, including a non-partisan voters guide, have been the constant through the League since its founding. Over the years, as today, the League also tackled many issues important to our Bucks County communities as, for example, teen pregnancy, local transportation, water quality, state support of higher education, recycling, the Juvenile Court System, nutrition, affordable housing and educating the public on the use of new voting machines!**