

2019 begins a series of years with important centennial anniversaries for Anoka County organizations and businesses. We will be celebrating here at the History Center with the “We Are 100” exhibit series, beginning with the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

As the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution passed by Congress in 1919, it then began the ratification process, with the final needed state ratifying it in 1920. Minnesota ratified the 19th Amendment on September 8, 1919, and the women’s suffrage movement here could then adjust its efforts in a different but related direction:



helping to educate women about their new voting ability.

The Minnesota Women Suffrage Association reincorporated as the League of Women Voters, Minnesota in October 2019, and local chapters began to form, including one in Anoka with Nellie (Erickson) Peterson as President (pictured at left). She wrote to the *Anoka Union* after final ratification in 1920, pleased with the victory, but encouraging women to exercise their newly-gained voting rights. Many women did, with about 40% of the Minnesota vote in the 1920 election coming from women. Others went further: a charter member of the League, Minnie (Hill) Beatty, also served as the first female election judge chair in her Anoka ward in 1922. Another local chapter, located in Columbia Heights, was also formed in the following

years.

The LWV Anoka chapter was permanently re-established in 1938 by Mary Spurzem, and promptly got to work on local issues that needed to be addressed. (The Anoka chapter merged with the Coon Rapids and Blaine chapters in 1979, to become the LWV-ABC chapter.) In 1940, they successfully worked to organize garbage collection throughout the city of Anoka, and later got trash cans placed on public sidewalks throughout the city as well. Also in 1940, LWV began one of their longest-running programs: that of candidate forums. These forums allow candidates for local and state political office to make their positions clear, helping ensure voters are educated on the issues and discern which candidates support or oppose them.

From the beginning, the LWV has also made strong efforts to register as many citizens as possible to vote. Getting women registered was important in the early years of suffrage, and since then they have made sure to focus on groups of citizens who have recently gained the right to vote: high school students turning 18 and new citizens at naturalization ceremonies.

Local League members have made other voting-related efforts over the years. In 1990, legislation was passed in Minnesota allowing those with long-term disabilities or illnesses to register as permanent absentee voters, so that they would receive an absentee

ballot application automatically for each election. The push for this legislation was made by LWV-ABC member Sandra Shanley, who herself suffered from Multiple Sclerosis, so that citizens whose physical mobility was limited would be able to exercise their voting rights more easily.

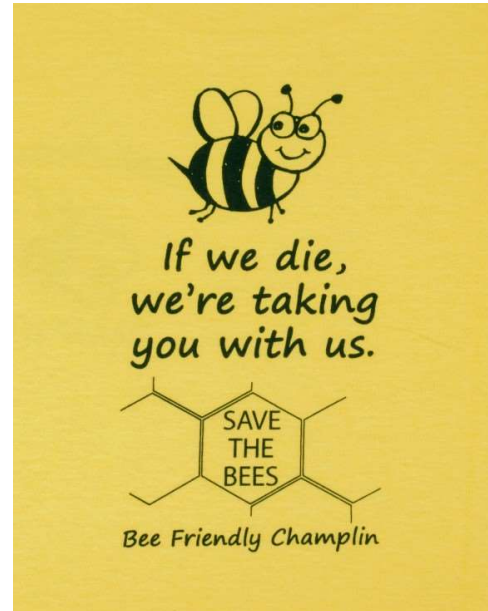
In addition to these Voter Services, LWV-ABC follows the League practice of studying various topics of concern to citizens, learning about an issue over the course of two years. Following this period of study and consideration, the chapter will then adopt an official position on that topic. Positions can be held at the local, state, or national level.

Local League chapters also pursue other projects in the community. The ACHS exhibit examines these as well, looking at the Bee Safe and Pollinators projects that the LWV-ABC chapter undertook in 2004 and 2015, respectively.

Another development for the League over the years was the eventual inclusion of men. While initially only women were allowed to join the LWV, that later changed. Fred Strobel became the first male member of the LWV-ABC in 1974.

Participation in the League has also led many women into local and state offices over the years, or coincided with their time in office. Some notable names include: Zilla Way, Susan Anderson, Kathy Tingelstad, Natalie Haas Steffen, and Margaret Langfeld.

Join us beginning on January 19, 2019 to learn more about the League of Women Voters, and help us kick off the “We Are 100” centennial celebrations.



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## EXHIBIT OPENING!

You're warmly invited to the official opening of The League of Women Voters exhibit. Come celebrate their history of advocacy, civic mindfulness, and election promotion with us. We are excited to tell this story thanks to a partnership between ACHS and our local League of Women Voters—Anoka, Blaine, Coon Rapids Area.

**WHEN:** January 19

**TIME:** 2—4 p.m. *program at 2:30 p.m.*

**WHERE:** Anoka County History Center