

POST-WAR REORGANIZATION

After World War II basic changes were made in the structure and methods of the League of Women Voters. Under the Department system, as the League members gained in experience, each department produced specialists in their fields. The League established a reputation for providing dependable factual information, but the real purpose of the League, to give all citizens practice in the responsibilities of democracy, was being lost.

Miss Wells, a national League President said: "A program participated in by the few rather than the many is alien to the League's purpose . . . good citizenship requires not only knowledge but the ability to act . . . to cause more people to use effectively what knowledge they possess seems to be the unique aim of the League of Women Voters."

So in 1944 the Department system was abolished. The League extended discussion groups and devised many different methods of reaching people in the community to bring them information and to arouse them to take part in democratic action.

The organization was also renamed the League of Women Voters of the United States. The number of program items was greatly reduced and at each succeeding convention of local League delegates, efforts were made to consolidate and simplify the Current Agenda. Not until the 1960 convention was the long desired goal of ONE item on national program finally achieved. The same changes were being made gradually in state and local programs. Also current agenda items adopted on each level of League program pertained to national, state, or local governmental problems respectively. The "work load versus woman power" complaint has always had to compete with the enthusiasm of members for tackling jobs that clamor to be done. The all inclusive wording of program items testify to the reluctance of League women to give up their fight for causes they believe in.

May 1945 found League membership at 294 with a budget of \$2,250. This was a sizeable increase in spending capacity, but actually was the first realistic budget of the Schenectady League. Board members and committee chairmen were persuaded to present statements of their expenditures to the treasurer, instead of assuming the cost themselves and calling it a contribution. Individual contributions were gratefully received but true accounts of the cost of League activities showed what was spent on each project and encouraged women of any financial means to undertake any League job.

The first Student Conference was held in 1945 at Union College, in cooperation with the International Relations Club of the college. This was for senior high school students from area schools. League members and college people alternated in acting as leaders of discussion round tables and as resource persons. The subject the first year was, "The Peace - Yours to Build - Yours to Keep."

With the war ended, world peace problems had priority. Realizing that the most important task confronting everyone was the need to understand what the United States and the entire world had at stake in an international organization to maintain the peace, the LWV tackled the job of studying the United Nations Charter. The International Relations Committee found itself with a formidable education project. To this was added calls from National Board for letters to Congress urging the passage of the U. N. Relief and Rehabilitation Act, and the funds to support it. They also supported the continuation of price controls. They opposed a bill that they thought would lead to military control of atomic energy, and supported the bill which became the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, placing atomic energy under civilian control. Schenectady members discussed this subject on a radio program. National also called for support of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements which Schenectady League had studied and approved.

Unit meetings were organized in 1948 to give members an opportunity to gather in small neighborhood groups for more informal discussion of League program items. Evening Units were formed for people who could not meet in the daytime. Discussion leaders were trained for the Units, and resource people came from workshops conducted by item chairmen on the various subjects. Three or four general membership meetings were held during the year rather than each month.

During the last of the 1940's League women persisted in their search for better local government in addition to their support of the United Nations and their study of national and world problems.

PPR

Permanent Personal Registration was continuously publicized and efforts made to educate the public to its advantages.

Probation



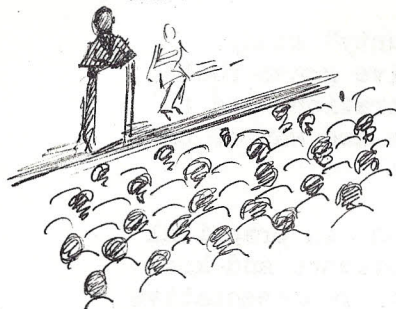
They helped in the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee for the county probation department and League members served on it for several years. They called for a better detention program for children, the appointment of a Youth Aid officer, and a council of social agencies. This council became the Related Activities Council and later the Community Welfare Council.

City Planning



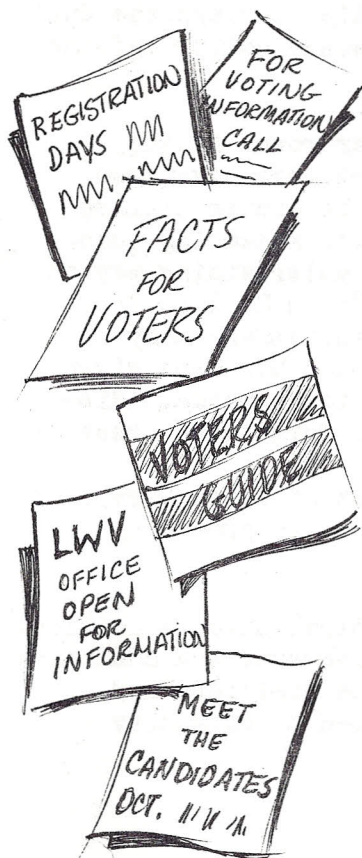
Representatives from the League and ten other civic organizations met to consider the proposals of the city planning commission. In 1947 the League chose City and County Planning as a study item. "Go See" tours were renewed for members, to housing projects, sewage disposal plant, and other city and county institutions. A professional firm was hired to study assessment procedures in the city, an action which the League approved.

Education



The city Board of Education asked the League to prepare recordings for use in Americanization classes. This was the first of several years when the League cooperated in citizenship training of potential new voters. A new high school to meet needs of all children was their continuing goal. In 1948 the Education Committee compiled a History of State Aid for schools in New York State which was mimeographed and 2000 copies were distributed. Student Conferences were held each May at Union College to inform high school students on world problems.

"Get Out The Vote"



Campaigns went on before each election, using various tricks to persuade people to exercise their right to vote. The LWV became identified with this voter service work in the community. The 1947 State League Convention adopted the following statement to put new emphasis on League program as a whole: "Basic to all League work is YEAR ROUND Voters Service."

Facts for Voters, a State League publication giving all kinds of information on voting qualifications, and pros and cons on the amendments and propositions to be voted upon by the public, was distributed free by thousands and sold to business concerns for further distribution.

Information booths in public places, candidates meetings, the office telephone available to answer questions, Voters Guides and Handbooks to give facts on candidates, radio and television programs, all became standard Voter Service work.

Here honor should be given to all the women who steadfastly refrained from indicating their preference for political party or candidate while they were active in League work. League women are encouraged to enroll and work for their party except while they are on the League Board or are closely identified with the League.

THE NEW LOOK - 1949 TO 1961

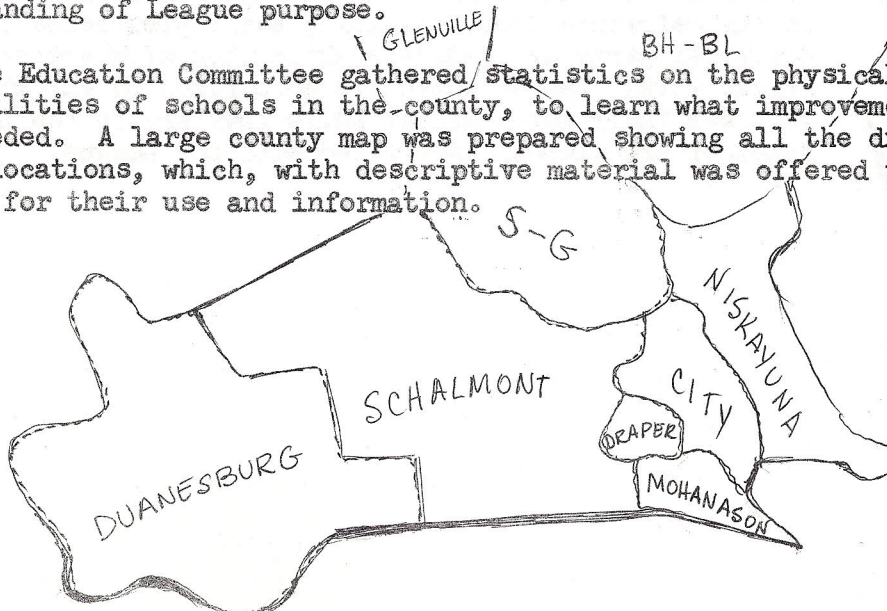
The local program for 1949 to 1950 was a "Know Your County" study. League members in state Convention voted to carry on an active grass-roots campaign for a statewide system of Permanent Personal Registration, and to study ways of improving legislative procedures: the who, how and why of the state legislature, and how a bill becomes law.

These studies and the action that followed taught lessons in practical politics at the county level. League members gained in experience and know-how by giving people the facts, showing them how to let their representative know what they want, and constantly urging them to take an interest in government. This know-how, plus persistence and a strict non-partisanship policy, strengthened the respect and influence of the League in the community. Also through the Unit system of small neighborhood meetings more League members became better informed, and more active in League work.

More attention was given to making Voters Service a year round League activity. Political Party organization and the Election Laws were discussed, using the League booklet called "What's the U. S. to You?" To arouse citizen interest "Quiz Whiz" tags were awarded to public officials for answering questions, and civic groups were urged to use the booklet as an entertaining way to learn the facts of politics. A Candidates Meeting held at Union College drew a record turnout of 750 people including 75 of the local candidates and many committeemen. This was probably the first time that the public had been given an opportunity to meet committeemen as a group. A panel of four speakers discussed methods of financing city improvements, and party platforms were presented.

The League's finance drives now began to show the result of Voter Service work in the community, not only by increased contributions but in greater understanding of League purpose.

The Education Committee gathered statistics on the physical size, conditions and facilities of schools in the county, to learn what improvements and additions were needed. A large county map was prepared showing all the districts and school locations, which, with descriptive material was offered to community groups, for their use and information.



Again supporting the principle that well qualified personnel should be appointed to government positions and acting under a local Continuing Responsibility, the League sent letters to the city mayor and members of the council urging that the men selected for City-Manager be well trained and unhampered by political ties.

Three radio programs were put on: one on legislation permitting the sale and use of colored oleo-margarine in New York State, one devoted to "equal pay for equal work," and one for PPR. At one time in the fight for colored oleo it is said that some practical minded member mixed up a mess of oleo in the State Assembly Chamber, to show what a terrible job it was to add color to oleo by hand. But it was not until the February of '52 that a bill was passed allowing the manufacture and sale of colored margarine.

One of the improvements in the field of child welfare, which was a League interest from the beginning, became possible when legislation was passed in Albany that allowed the County Board of Supervisors to set up a Children's Court separate from the County Court. "Probation and Child Welfare" was promptly adopted as the local current agenda for 1950-51, so that the League would be ready to act as changes were being made. Study and discussion revealed the need for a revitalized Citizen's Committee that would work with the probation department and the new Children's Court Judge. The League was asked to aid in the formation of this committee. The League also urged the County Building Committee to plan adequate space and better facilities for the probation department and the Children's Court. League spokesmen went before the Board of Supervisors to plead for a trained and well qualified case work supervisor, an addition they felt was necessary. Later publicity was initiated by the League on proposed raised in judges' salaries.

The PPR Committee in an all out effort to acquaint the community with the advantages of a modern registration law, carried petitions through several city wards and parts of the towns. They rang door bells, explained the PPR law and asked people to sign the petitions attesting to their desire to have the law passed. Five hundred cards with voter signatures were strung together and taken to the home of the Republican County as evidence of people's interest in PPR.

The Schenectady League has always done a fine job in covering the complex items on national Program. At this time members studied and discussed the problem of aggression, the Acheson proposals "Uniting for Peace," and the Korean situation and the role of the Chinese communists. One membership meeting emphasized the United Nations with a speaker from Lake Success. Letters went to congressmen urging support of Reciprocal Trade Agreements, support of United States commitments under the UN, and the Atlantic Pact. Three Units discussed the causes and remedies for inflation, three more reviewed the Federal Budget. The third national item: "evaluation of measures to improve administrative efficiency in the development and use of natural resources," isn't mentioned in this year of records. Could it be that there simply were not days or women enough to attack another governmental problem?????!!

Nevertheless Schenectady LWV was awarded third prize by the American Heritage Foundation for its "outstanding non-partisan service in getting out the vote in 1950 political campaign." The Voters Service chairman submitted for the contest a large scrapbook illustrating the League's work, and she accepted for Schenectady a framed copy of the Declaration of Independence and a set of miniature ribbons worn by General George C. Marshall during his tenure as Chief of Staff 1939-1945. A listing of some of the Voter Service activities is proof that the committee, and other members who worked, deserved the award:



- 5000 Voter Vitamins prepared and handed to people on the streets. These were gelatin capsules filled with rolled messages reminding them to register and vote.
- LWV Duck and Rabbit were paraded on State Street. These were large wooden animals on wheels with signs: "Don't Duck Your Responsibilities" and "Don't Be A Dumb Bunny---VOTE."
- 5000 Handbooks, "Your Vote Counts" were given out.
- Candidates, state and local, were interviewed and their answers to campaign questions were put in the handbook.
- Booths in markets were manned and League office staffed to give information on voting requirements.
- Window displays, movie screen announcements, League speakers, press articles — all stressed the importance of registering and voting.
- Candidates Meeting at Mont Pleasant High School, with candidates for State Senate and Assembly, and US Congressman on hand, for an audience of 350.
- 1000 flyers on PPR distributed with the handbook.

In April of 1951 the League adopted as current agenda, "A Two Year County Survey, to culminate in publication of a County Booklet." This survey was organized in ten fields with a committee for each, so that a good many members took part in the project. Lt. Governor Frank C. Moore, an authority on county government spoke at the September meeting to launch the survey. During the summer while most people were vacationing, a small group met for a training course for discussion leaders. Others spent many hours painting and renovating the new League office in the basement of the Womens Club on Washington Avenue.

In the fall all the stunts to stimulate the public to register and vote were repeated, before primary, registration, and election days. TV and radio was the accepted means of reaching the people and the League was given excellent cooperation by the studios and newspapers. Letters to many organizations, including labor unions, were mailed requesting permission to send League speakers to their fall meetings to talk about PPR. In this way several endorsements for this legislation were obtained, that added to the pressure on legislators in Albany. The only opposition to PPR was from the printers' union which had previously also opposed the use of voting machines.