

During the Middle East crisis over the Suez Canal (1957) the national League sent out an emergency call for local League action. A nationwide project called "Focus on the Future" was set up to provide American citizens with as much information on the subject as possible. The historical background of Middle East problems, and responsibility on the United States was reviewed by the League. Miss Pauline Frederick, NBC correspondent to the United Nations, was brought to Schenectady to address a public meeting. Other civic groups cooperated with the LWV in supporting the meeting. League members wrote and presented five daily half-hour radio programs before this meeting to brief people on background information. Over seventy letters were received from listeners, asking for pertinent material.

About this time the chairman of the League's speakers bureau revitalized this service by preparing kits that provided League speakers with excellent background information, on practical politics, voting information, school elections, and other related subjects. A convenient, easy to read pamphlet on political party organization and function was one help that was provided. A special program on "You and Your Vote" was outlined, and offered to 40 Home Demonstration Units, at the suggestion of the county agent. Some 29 talks were given and this led to requests for others later on "You and Your School Board Elections."



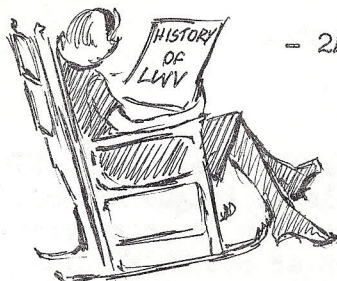
The League's public relations chairman arranged a full page spread in the Schenectady Gazette to show various League activities and to encourage community good will.

Another pamphlet called "Who's Who in Government" listing federal and state representatives and county, city and town officials, both elected and appointed, was mimeographed by League workers. Public requests for this have required revision and reprinting each year.

The third printing of the county booklet is now complete and on sale. (1961)

This has been the story of one local League. It represents 35 years of the "Great Idea," in Schenectady County: — "the idea that a non-partisan organization could provide political education and experience which would contribute to the growth of the citizen and thus assure the success of democracy."* The League of Women Voters was founded upon that idea.

* From the national publication "Forty Years of a Great Idea."



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IN RETROSPECT

In addition to the activity, work and achievements recounted in this Schenectady LWV history, there belongs the mention of nation and state Conventions which are attended by delegates from each local League. It is at these, in alternate years, where the state and national programs for the ensuing two years is selected by the delegates, and where policies are debated and adopted. Every local League has a voice in the matter, and the outcome is determined by the majority.

The New York State League, each year, holds a two day Legislative Conference in Albany, attended by delegates from local Leagues during the session of Legislature. At this Conference matters of League interest which are related to state government are highlighted and called to the attention of the legislators. The New York State budget gets its share of attention; visits to the Legislature in session and interviews with legislators are planned as the order of the evening. League conventions seldom have evenings off!

Those Leagues which are fortunate enough to be situated in the Capitol District have for years made a practice of having members attend the Women's Joint Legislative Forum which meets each Tuesday morning throughout the legislative session. Here, bills coming before the lawmakers are presented and explained, with special consideration for the various interests of the women's organizations which are members of the Forum. The Schenectady League has maintained membership in this Forum for several years, and the faithful members who have attended, good weather or bad, are the unsung heroines of the League.

In recent years, the practice of holding semi-annual Area Conferences in the state has been carried on by the state League. At these round table sessions, delegates from local Leagues discuss their problems and search for solutions.

These are extra curricular activities, but are all vital to the work of the LWV. The benefits derived from them, in addition to League education, rejuvenated interest, the know-how acquired and the chance to exchange ideas, are beef, iron and wine to the members and program alike - as any member knows who has attended one of these sessions or has talked to a delegate who has just returned from one.

This has been, in the main, the story of one local League - one of the hundreds of such groups in the U. S. Through these pages we can trace backward, like Hawkshaw, to discover that in most cases League activities represent a nearly continuous sustained effort in certain fields, and to discover, also, that League thinking has changed very little on these subjects. Pre-election work, now called Voter's Service, has been stressed from the start and never forgotten through the years. Education has been present in some form throughout

the life of the League. Legislative reforms, public health, probation and child welfare are old friends. The study of county government attacked from many angles over the years, could conceivably bring about the adoption of a Home Rule Charter with a County Executive, equitable representation on the Board of Supervisors and further consolidation of county services. The whole subject of appointments to public office and sound fiscal administrative policy in government has kept the League constantly alert. Any legislation which the League has opposed or supported, any studies or action in the community, are founded on a few basic principles. It has been jokingly stated that the League never acts "on principles." (It doesn't, but that is a separate story.) However, it certainly lives up to them.

Added to this local story belongs the record of action on national and state levels, which has resulted in a large degree from the fact-finding and considered decisions of local Leagues. National and State Boards act on many bills before Congress and the Legislature in the name of the LWV and in a manner agreed upon at Convention, or by consensus of opinion of the local Leagues.

The League has supported from its beginning, and still continued to push for, good child labor legislation, full citizenship rights for women, sound tax policies, adequate public school educational facilities, good public health and welfare organizations, public housing to remove substandard living conditions, international relations and trade policies which properly and adequately cope with the realities of living with our neighbors in a shrinking world, and the preservation of our democratic form of government, as well as the rights and obligations of the individual.

When the League takes a stand and supports or opposes legislation or other acts of government, it is taking a carefully considered position based on the following: (1) Does it come within the scope of League activities? (2) Is there majority agreement among the members? (3) Has it been adequately studied and evaluated by the members so that it is an informed opinion?

You can see where the members come in - without their constant efforts there never could be a healthy, informed League, for, just as in a democracy, the strength of the whole depends upon the action of the individual.

The threads of this history are firm, strong and enduring, and are the warp and woof of League principles and activity. In telling the Schenectady story it has become evident that the League of Women Voters is consistent, determined, well-educated in what it undertakes, and very much like a dog with a bone - an old, familiar, favorite bone. How delicious this morsel turns out to be when some long-sought and hard-won goal has been reached. League goals have never been suddenly or easily achieved without a struggle, but from the beginning have been won as a result of persistent reiteration. They have been gained inch by inch, year by year, due to the determination of women who believe in what they are doing. These traits of character have been the strength of the League and the means of penetrating the armor of those who have opposed decent reforms. When we "let the people know, make the people care and help the people act" things are bound to happen.

OUTLINE OF LOCAL PROGRAM

- 1925-1926 Mrs. Charles Richmand, Chr. *
Know Your Town Survey. Speakers on Council-Manager Plan versus Mayor-Alderman Plan, City Health Organization and Courts
- 1926-1927 Worked for Child Welfare Board for Schenectady County.
Considered extension of voter registration period.
- 1927-1928 Mrs. Victor Starzinski, Chr.
Continued same program. Had Governor Alfred E. Smith as speaker at formal dinner.
- 1928-1929 Mrs. Harriet Grussner, Chr.
League stated they favored a Council-Manager form of government. Did pre-election work and studied local government.
- 1929-1930 League manager by Committee of Ten - no Chairman
Continued work for Child Welfare Board.
Discussed need for county re-organization.
Studied city and county health programs.
- 1930-1931 Mrs. Lewi Tonks, Chr.
Continued program as above. Joined Adult Education Council.
- 1931-1933 Mrs. Edward Jerome, Chr.
Study Board Plan set-up: research on program items by groups (workshops).
Program: Efficiency in Government; Living Costs; Child Welfare; Education.
Urged consolidation of health services in county.
Sent letter to City Mayor urging appointment of qualified Welfare Commissioner and to the Governor supporting State Aid for Education.
- 1933-1935 Mrs. Samuel Fortenbaugh, Chr. *
Local Bulletin started in 1934. First Finance Chr. appointed.
League represented on Municipal Housing Authority Committee. Schenectady MHA first in the state, under instigation of this committee.
Supported the Charter League in work for the City-Manager Plan.
Study of County Government.
Did survey of rural schools.
- 1935-1937 Mrs. Robert O. Coggeshall, Chr. *
First letter urging appointment of well-qualified city manager.
Also asked for politically independent Civil Service Commission.
Proposed County Health Unit.
Began study of county probation department and children's court.
Studied library facilities, slum clearance and low cost housing.
Urged stiffer regulation of meat inspection.

* deceased

- 1937-1939 Mrs. Bruce Buckland, Chr.
Supported bills for County Re-organization. Approved County Charter recommended by Committee of 21, on Nov. 1937 ballot. (defeated)
Studied care of dependent and delinquent children.
First local committee on PPR. (1939)
Studied county and city budgets and appeared at public hearings to support or oppose them.
- 1939-1941 Mrs. Harry E. Lewis, Chr.
"Go-See" tours for League members. First "Voters Guide," in regular Gazette edition.
1940 first League bill for PPR in legislature.
Asked for consolidation of city and county welfare departments.
Agreed on need for new high school and asked for funds in city budget.
- 1941-1943 Mrs. David Prince, Chr.
Studied new civil service extension law.
Voter Handbook published with help of paid advertisements.
League office opened at 207 State Street.
Backed MHA on slum clearance.
- 1943-1945 Mrs. David Prince, Chr.
Full study of the county probation department and children's court.
Campaigned for County Health Unit with mental health clinic to be included.
War-time activities, consumer problems, and post-war planning.
Local school problems of health, recreation and facilities studied and recommendations made.
- 1945-1947 Mrs. Harold Larrabee, President
First Student Conference at Union College.
Under Probation supported: a Citizens Advisory Committee, better detention facilities, appointment of a Yount Aid Officer, a council of social welfare agencies, and the separation of county and children's courts.
Worked for new high school in city and adequate school budgets.
Helped with citizenship training of Americanization classes for new voters.
Advocated County Health Dept. with mental health clinic.
- 1947-1949 Mrs. Kilgore Macfarlane, Pres.
"Voters Service" became year-round activity.
City and County Planning local C. A.
County Library approved, and extension to rural areas urged.
History of State Aid to Education written up and 2000 distributed.
Campaigned for local support of PPR.
1948, League set up system of Unit Meetings: small neighborhood groups to discuss LWV Program subjects.
Administration and Personnel in assessor's office, 1948 current agenda.
Continued work for new city high school and improvement in county probation department.

- 1949-1951 Mrs. Robert Burnett, Pres.
1949 Local C. A.: Know Your County Study.
Continuing Responsibilities (not yet worded as CR items):
1. Education-made large map of districts and schools and supplied informative material for use by speakers.
2. County Health Unit 3. Probation Dept. and Children's Court
4. Housing 5. Library 6. City Manager qualifications
1950 Local C.A.: Probation and Child Welfare.
- 1951-1952 Mrs. Ivar Johnson, Pres.
Local C.A.: A County Survey to end in publication of a County Booklet.
Cont. Resp: 1. Probation-Citizens Committee, Case Work Supervisor.
2. City Manager - qualifications
3. Education
- 1952-1953 Mrs. Charles Muir, Pres.
1952 C. A. Second Year on County Booklet, published in April 1953
Cont. Resp.: 1. Education-members attended school board meetings.
2. Probation-Urged Bd. of Supervisors to create position of Case Work Supervisor
3. City Manager - qualifications.
- 1953-1955 Mrs. Charles Muir, Pres.
1953 C. A.: Civil Service in Schenectady County
Cont. Resp.: 1. Probation, 2. City Manager 3. Education
1954 C.A.: A Study of School Systems in Schenectady County with view toward appropriate action. Duties and qualifications of school board members.
Consensus: That education should be State LWV Program.
Cont. Resp.: 1. Civil Service-qualified personnel under merit system.
2. City Manager-appointment of trained, non-partisan person.
Beginning of voter service type of work by League before school bd. elections.
League asked Board of Supervisors to study the PPR law adopted as optional for counties by 1954 legislature. League members served with county Elections Committee in this study.
TV program on U. S. Trade Policy written, produced and acted, for 6 weeks.
10th Student Conference May 1954.
- 1955-1957 Mrs. Dale Brown, Pres.
1955 C.A. Adoption of PPR in Schenectady County.
Cont. Resp. 1. Civil Service 2. City Manager
3. School Board Qualifications
1956 C. A.: Study of Optional Forms of County Government with view toward appropriate action.
Cont. Resp.: 1. Civil Service 2. City Manager
3. School Board Qualifications
4. Efficient Administration of PPR
2nd printing of League's County Booklet "You Are Entering Schenectady County"

1957-1959 Mrs. John Corr, Pres.

1957 C.A.: Review of County Government and Organization.

Consensus was that some form of county executive is needed, also more equitable representation on the Board of Supervisors and stronger lines of responsibility.

Cont. Resp.-Civil Service - Qualified personnel

PPR - efficient administration

School Board - qualifications

City Manager - professional, non-partisan

1958 C.A.: Draft a proposal for changes in the legislative and administrative branches of County Government which would strengthen the lines of responsibility and provide for an executive head.

Cont. Resp.: same

1959-1961 Mrs. John Corr, Pres.

1959 C.A.: Study and Appraisal of the Economic and Political Factors in Schenectady County as they relate to the growth of Schenectady and as they may relate to the future of the city and county.

Cont. Resp.: same

1960 C.A.: Action to bring about the kind of county government that past years of League study have shown is needed.

Consensus: The League should write a Home Rule Charter for the county to provide a County Executive and equitable representation on the Board of Supervisors.

Cont. Resp.: same

Postscript: In 1962 Local Continuing Responsibilities became an active part of local Program to conform with national, state and local by-law changes. Local C R's were reviewed by the membership and revised to read:

1. Continue work toward a Home Rule Charter for Schenectady County which embodies these principles:
 - a. Equitable representation on the elected governing body of the county;
 - b. Executive powers placed in a single county executive;
 - c. Strengthened lines of administrative responsibility.
2. Support the efficient administration of the Permanent Personal Registration Law in Schenectady County.
3. Support adherence to high professional qualifications and political non-partisanship in the selection of a City Manager for Schenectady, under the Council-Manager plan.

In true League spirit this history is the result of the cooperation of several individuals. The original research was done by Mrs. Clifton (Lucy) Vrooman and Mrs. Ivar (Olive) Johnson. A detailed League history was then written by Mrs. Johnson. A copy of this full text will be kept in the League office. Mrs. John L. (Vida) Davis condensed and revised the original work and added the outline, with the advice and help of Mrs. Charles H. (Florence) Muir. The illustrations were drawn by Mrs. Richard (Mary) Fritz. The multilith masters were typed by Miss Marjorie Hageman.