

## The League of Women Voters the Decade of the 30's

The league membership swelled to 100,000 by 1924. After the 1929 crash, the depression and recession, the membership fell to 41,000 by 1935. Budget, staff and services were reduced. The challenge of the League was studying, fact finding and inducing members to see themselves as participating members through the local Leagues. Members met in small neighborhood groups to discuss the importance of informed individuals and the threat to democracy. The League earned a reputation of thorough research and accurate information on the issues.

The league played an important supporting role via the local leagues in the passage of the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority), the utilization of hydroelectric power. The TVA was "a corporation clothed with the power of Government but possessed with the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise." The League conducted extensive nationwide surveys regarding domestic electric power with the fact finding study supporting the passage of the Muscle Shoals Norris Bill (TVA). Norris sent a note to the League thanking the members of the League of Women Voters for their untiring efforts on behalf of the legislation.

The 1934 League Convention adopted thirty-eight items in the program. The Civil Service Reform was the first priority. The goal was to secure career service for government personnel appointed on the basis of merit without discrimination or partisan consideration. "Find the man for the job - not the job for the man." The League did extensive surveys and studied the results. They held 1200 local organization meetings, twenty-five states held 600 meetings and collected 250,000 signatures in favor of the merit system. As a result of the efforts of the League campaign along with other organizations supporting the merit system, federal jobs were placed under the Civil Service Act.

The League supported permanent voter registration and a commission on election law. They worked to enact Social Security and the Food and Drug Act. They pushed for international understanding and cooperation and membership in the League of Nations. They believed in the “interdependence of all nations.” They were advocates for the World Court. Carrie Chapman Catt testified at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with an “impressive appeal for ratification” of the World Court. A few days later, the vote for ratification failed in the Senate by seven votes.

Although the membership of the League diminished, the League of Women Voters was a formidable, well respected organization that impacted the legislation and events of the 1930's.

By Marge Massarello, League of Women Voters Oak Park and River Forest

Thank you to...

Nancy M. Neuman, *The League of Women Voters In Perspective 1920-1995*

Kay J. Maxwell, League of Women Voters U.S., *The League of Women Voters Through the Decades*

Barbara Stuhler, *For the Public Record, A Documentary History of the League of Women Voters*

Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters 1920-1970*