

The League of Women Voters - Decade of the 1940's

The League programs during the 1940's emphasized the responsibilities of the United States beyond its borders, strengthening democracy at home and modernizing the League.

The changes at the 1944 and 1946 National Conventions gave birth to the modern League. The League became an association of members. The name was changed from the National League of Women Voters to the League of Women Voters of the United States. The local Leagues were empowered to send voting delegates to the conventions. There was a new and revised emphasis on voter services with new guidelines on nonpartisanship and candidate forums. This was a key to recruiting new members. Local Leagues gained in recognition with only one League in a community giving more opportunities for stronger local studies and action. The local Leagues were organized into a state League to work together as a whole.

A purpose and policy statement were adopted.

Purpose: The purpose of the League of Women Voters shall be to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.

Policy: The League may take action on government measures and policies in the public interest. It shall not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

League membership grew to 93,000 by 1950 from 34,000 in 1934 with 739 Leagues.

With all of the changes in the League governance, the League was also active in national and international issues. After the 1944 convention the LWW trained 5,000 local members in a "Take it to the People" campaign to generate public support for a United Nations. They reached out to small and large groups to educate people on this major issue and distributed over a million pieces of literature. The efforts of the League helped to establish

the United Nations and ensure U.S. participation. The League still maintains official observer status at the U.N.

The League supported “domestic policies which would facilitate international solutions.” They needed to be the watchdog on the provisions of the use of atomic energy since unknown factors were involved. The League worked with other organizations in supporting the passage of the Douglas-McMahan bill creating the Atomic Energy Commission.

The League also declared its support for the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) that was signed in April 1949. The League supported the creation of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Marshall Plan.

The League gained a reputation for “pricking the conscience of our public life.” Its standards were highly effective at all levels of government.

The year 1948 marked the hundredth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention and the movement for woman suffrage by its Declaration of Sentiments with the prime mover, Lucretia Mott. One hundred years later, at the 1948 League of Women Voters Convention, Anna Lord Strauss, Mott’s great-granddaughter presided over “an organization that had grown from a seed planted there.” “We will take a glance back over the road over which women have come...(now) we (the League) will be devoted to deciding how we can contribute to the progress of the future.”

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*.