

# A POWERFUL VOICE FOR SEVENTY FIVE YEARS:

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS IN MICHIGAN:

IT'S HISTORY



MICHIGAN

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DIANE M. ROCKALL

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A POWERFUL VOICE FOR SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS:  
THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MICHIGAN:  
ITS HISTORY

by

Diane M. Rockall

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Photographs come from the files of the League of Women Voters of Michigan, the League's archival collection housed at the Bentley Library and The Detroit News. Permission to include them with this work is much appreciated.

Thanks to all of those who took time to discuss the League and League memories with me, especially everyone connected with the State League office. I have enjoyed working on this project and consider myself much more aware of this vital and important organization. I hope that others who read this work will share my new found enthusiasm.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

MISSION STATEMENT (1993): The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.<sup>1</sup>

MICHIGAN LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, ARTICLE II, APRIL 1924:  
...to promote education in citizenship, efficiency in government,  
needed legislation, and international cooperation to prevent war.<sup>2</sup>

This monograph discusses the creation of the League of Women Voters of Michigan (LWVMI). The primary objective of this work is to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the League of Women Voters of the United States. Secondary aims are to determine the reasons the organization was established on a state level, to clarify how the League sought to reach its goals, to describe some of its successes and failures, to discuss some of the group's contributions to better government and to identify State League presidents, as well as their individual interests and foci. In order to describe the League's founding, this study also highlights its origin within the suffrage movement and the history of suffrage activity in Michigan.

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<sup>1</sup>1993 Mission Statement - League of Women Voters, **Michigan Voter**, (Lansing, Michigan: League of Women Voters of Michigan, June 1993), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Constitution and Bylaws. Article II, Michigan League of Women Voters, 1924.

From the onset the organization exhibited a duality of action focusing on non-partisan citizen education which provided information on issues and on political advocacy which supported or opposed legislation. This division has often led to confusion for those with little understanding of how the League operates. This project expands further upon this topic and, hopefully, clarifies the distinction.

From its creation the organization focused on final approval of the national suffrage (19th) amendment to the United States Constitution by advocating immediate passage, and on literature and instruction to provide more informed voters through citizen education. It also began a nationwide study to develop a program to cover areas of concern to the general membership.<sup>3</sup>

In Michigan, members worked on permanent voter registration, civil service reform, and child welfare legislation along with other items. In later years the organization looked at issues as varied as expanded citizen education, school financing, taxation, state Constitutional revision, mental health, and natural resources. This project looks at these issues to determine the League style used to affect their outcome as well as its success or failure in achieving the objectives of members. While looking at these issues, the work presents the founding and history of LWVMI.

The project is, indeed, timely as the state organization commemorates the 75th anniversary of the League of Women Voters United States (LWVUS) in 1995. This study demonstrates that the organization was not created as a spur of the moment whim or in a

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<sup>3</sup>Sara B. Brumbaugh, *Democratic Experience and Education in the National League of Women Voters*, (New York: Columbia University, 1946). p. 1.

vacuum, but rather that the League continued from a long tradition of women's involvement and participation on a state and national level.

The group's early leaders, those who had a vision and pursued it, and those who continued to work for the concepts the organization established seventy-five years ago appear as key players in the early organization. From its inception within the suffrage movement the League espoused democratic beliefs emphasizing the principle of grass-roots governmental control with direction and power generated from its membership just as America's democracy is based upon control from the electorate. It may appear, to some, inappropriate to emphasize presidents and accomplishments during their terms rather than general membership opinions and attitudes when discussing League activities. It is, however, fitting to recognize these leaders for their contributions to the furtherance of the organization's agenda. Reference to leaders is also in keeping with traditional historic scholarship which recognizes leaders in business, government and community life.

This research began as the result of an interest in the generally untold history of local women. The quest for information on women in this state led to an interest in the history of the founding and the continued maintenance of the League of Women Voters. The story has not been told previously in its entirety. This book proposes to tell the story.

## Chapter 2

### The League's Suffrage History

The League of Women Voters developed as an outgrowth of the Woman Suffrage movement and in its development provided an outlet for, at least, some women to express their political ideas and to work for the governmental changes they considered necessary. Most historians who have studied women's rights in this and the previous century in this country have focused on the nationwide effort. Historian Ellen DuBois, who specialized in women's history, suggested that regional studies were needed to add dimension to the information available on the activities of women before, during and after suffrage.<sup>4</sup> Available historical information on women in this state led to the study of the League of Women Voters in Michigan as a reaction to DuBois' call to enhance the national perspective.

The narrative began in the early decades of the nineteenth century. While Michigan was still a territory and its population started to increase, across the nation, election laws were revised providing the franchise for a larger group of individuals than originally defined by state law which provided voting authority in the newly formed country. As new Western states entered the Union, property qualifications for voting and holding office were eliminated.<sup>5</sup> Approximately 300,000 voted in the 1824 presidential election

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<sup>4</sup>Ellen Dubois, **Feminism and Suffrage**, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>John Garraty and Robert Mc Caughey, **A Short History of the American Nation**. 5th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 154-155.



while 1.1 million voted in 1828.<sup>6</sup>

An upsurge in popular political energies during the 1820s and 1830s among working men and throughout antebellum life led to the emergence of the women's movement as a response to the changing roles in society.<sup>7</sup> The promise of a truly democratic society created through political activity attracted women as well as men.<sup>8</sup>

Agitation for equal rights for women began early in the 19th century in Michigan. Prior to statehood in 1837 Michigan females worked for improvement of their own rights and freedoms. Tied to the inability to vote early endeavors for rights aimed at the elimination of inequity. Concern for equal treatment led many citizens eventually to believe that the only way everyone could achieve equality was through the political process.<sup>9</sup>

One primary issue of that pre-statehood period for many women with economic influence was the property rights of married women.<sup>10</sup> At that time real property and earnings of wives were legally considered the property of their husbands. In Michigan, in 1844 married women first received control over property which they brought into marriage only to lose that right in 1846 when the law was repealed. However, their right

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*. (New York: Transaction Publications, 1991), p. 373-377.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup>Virginia Caruso, "A History of Woman Suffrage in Michigan," (Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State University, 1986), p 35; Karolena Fox, "History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Michigan," *Michigan History Magazine*, (Lansing, MI: Michigan Historical Commission, Vol. II, 1918), pp. 90-109.

was restored again under the Constitution of 1850 although it took many years for these same people to gain control over their earnings received during marriage.<sup>11</sup> In addition to equity in property rights women raised concern about equality in education and in employment opportunity.

At this point the seeds for a future organization, the League of Women Voters, were sown. During this period many Michigan women, feeling that the expansion of the voting privilege to previously disenfranchised men should include them as well, began to agitate for women's rights. Michigan became a state in 1837, but entered the union with only male citizens eligible to vote.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned previously, although they did not receive the right to vote during this period, married women in the state obtained ownership rights over property which they brought into marriage and that which they inherited during marriage. While the battle over property rights went on women spoke out on other issues as well.

In 1846, Ernestine Rose spoke before the Michigan Senate, becoming the first woman to do so, leading the way to further state government action moving toward the enfranchisement of women.<sup>13</sup> Rose spoke twice that year before the legislature in the legislative hall then in Detroit. Her topics were: "Science of Government" and

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<sup>11</sup>F. Clever Bald, **Michigan in Four Centuries**, (New York: Harper and Row, 1954, 1961), p. 268.

<sup>12</sup>K. Fox, p. 92; Clara B. Arthur, "Michigan," **History of Woman Suffrage**, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ida Harper, and others, (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, 1848-1922) Vol. 6, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup>K. Fox, p. 90; Willis F. Dunbar, **Michigan, A History of the Wolverine State**, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 1970), p 681.

"Antagonisms in Society."<sup>14</sup> Just two short years later a recognized beginning to what became known as the women's movement occurred.

Female activists throughout the nation identified the Seneca Falls (New York) conference of 1848 and its **Declaration of Sentiments** as the ignition sparks for the suffrage movement.<sup>15</sup> While the conference and document served as the linchpin they, certainly, were not the first or the only early efforts made for women's rights.

As early as 1849, in Michigan, members of the Senate Constitutional amendment committee reported in favor of the State's first Senate document to provide for a suffrage amendment.<sup>16</sup> Proposals for Constitutional revisions in 1850 and 1867 featured discussion on the right to vote for women.<sup>17</sup>

During Michigan's Constitutional Convention of 1867 over 5000 persons petitioned in favor of voting rights for women. Over half of the petitioners were female.<sup>18</sup> The discussions and petitions led to a vote on the issue of Woman suffrage. A proposed suffrage amendment was voted upon, but defeated by a vote of 34 to 31 in the Senate.<sup>19</sup>

In 1868 property owning women in Sturgis, Michigan exercised their right to vote in school elections and individual women elsewhere worked for further extension of

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<sup>14</sup>Stanton, ed. **HWS**, Vol 3, p. 514.

<sup>15</sup>Dubois, p. 23; Eleanor Flexner, **Century of Struggle: the Women's Rights Movement in the United States**, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1975), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup>K. Fox, p. 90; Judith Martin, "Political Progression: Suffrage and Beyond," (Master's Essay, Wayne State University, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Martin, p. 4-5; Fox, p. 90-91.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, Martin, p. 5; Fox, p. 92.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

political rights<sup>20</sup> In addition to school suffrage women worked for municipal rights and later some, most notably, Detroit widow Nannette Gardner registered to vote.<sup>21</sup>

Activists and politicians campaigning for women's rights recognized the need for better coordinated efforts and as a result in 1870 the Michigan State Women's Suffrage Association (MSWSA) was formed and began to work on registering women to vote.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1870s under the leadership of this organization, some women across the state attempted to vote, but they were generally unsuccessful.<sup>23</sup> Among those who attempted to vote, at least, Nannette Gardner in Detroit and Mary Wilson in Battle Creek were successful having been properly registered earlier.<sup>24</sup> Both Gardner and Wilson owned property not represented by a male vote and so argued in order to be allowed to vote as property owners.

MSWSA worked for suffrage legislation, but in 1874 the first state suffrage amendment submitted to the voters was defeated. Several attempts were made during the early 1870s to introduce legislation in the Senate to alter the Constitution and permit women to vote. Most of these efforts failed until legislation introduced March 10, 1874, by Mr. Hoyt received support on March 12 from MSWSA. The MSWSA "memorial" as it was called reiterated the request for enfranchisement of women deemed citizens by the United States government. It pointed out that women were being taxed and therefore

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<sup>20</sup>Stanton, ed. *HWS*, Vol. 3, p. 515-516.

<sup>21</sup>Caruso, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup>Stanton, p. 515; Caruso, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup>Caruso, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup>Stanton, Vol. 3, p. 523-524.

facing taxation without representation, "...which our fathers declared to be tyranny; and which is contrary to the genius of our republican institutions..."<sup>25</sup> By March 18 both the House and the Senate approved submission of the Constitutional amendment to the voters.<sup>26</sup>

Although Susan B. Anthony appeared throughout the state speaking frequently as she did in Monroe on October 19 and Elizabeth Cady Stanton spent one month traveling throughout the state making stops in towns such as Northville, with far fewer than 2000 residents in the region during this period, and giving speeches like one at St. Andrews Hall in Detroit, the amendment lost overwhelmingly by a vote of 135,957 to 40,077.<sup>27</sup> Michigan became the second state in the nation to attempt to pass such an amendment.<sup>28</sup>

After its first suffrage defeat MSWSA became inactive, but reformed as a revitalized body, the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association (MESA), on May 21, 1884.<sup>29</sup> Under the strength of the reformed organization municipal suffrage occurred in 1893, but was declared unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court in that same year.<sup>30</sup> The court ruled that the legislature "had no authority to create a new class of

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 517.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>**Detroit News**, October 30, 1873, p. 1; **Northville Record**, May 23, 1874, p. 1; Louise Sauce, "How the Suffragists Changed Michigan," leaflet, (Lansing, MI: Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame, 1989), p. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup>Flexner, p. 178; K. Fox, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup>Arthur, Vol. 3, p. 303.

<sup>30</sup>**Evening News**, October 24, 1893, p. 1.

voters."<sup>31</sup>

In the early years of the 20th Century, as a result of repeated failure to win the elective franchise through the legislature, suffrage leaders focused their attention and energies on state Constitutional revision.<sup>32</sup> The Michigan legislature refused to place the issue on the ballot while the Constitution was being revised assuming Woman suffrage would be included in the new document.<sup>33</sup> Between 1902 and 1906 Michigan legislators and citizens worked to develop a revised Constitution. During this period representatives of MESA and anti-suffrage organizations were called to testify in Lansing.<sup>34</sup> The voting rights battle in Michigan reached new heights in 1908 after the revised Constitution failed to give women what they believed to be their natural right.<sup>35</sup>

The battle moved to the election booth with a referendum to allow women the right to vote as a key issue of Michigan's 1912 election. The referendum initially appeared to pass, but on recount was closely defeated, losing by 760 votes statewide.<sup>36</sup> Many suffragists charged collusion and criminal wrongdoing as a result of the recount. MESA leader Clara B. Arthur wrote:

...newspapers fixed majority between 3000 and 12,000  
...rumors of large errors were immediate...Ballot  
boxes mysteriously lost -- official returns delayed  
...clear evidence of fraud was apparent in Wayne,  
Kent, Saginaw and Bay...It developed that there was

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<sup>31</sup>Sauce, p. 1-2.

<sup>32</sup>Caruso, p. 148-149.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Lucia Grimes, **A History of the Suffrage Movement as related to Michigan and Detroit**. (Detroit: Cass Technical High School, 1968), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Arthur, p. 305.

<sup>36</sup>**Michigan Manual**, (Lansing: State Printers, 1913), p. 448.

no law allowing recount in a vote on constitutional amendment and in the face of glaring fraud defeat had to be accepted.<sup>37</sup>

Newspapers reported ballot disappearances and widespread vote disqualification as a result of marking or technical error in several key precincts. On November 8, 1912, **The Detroit News** reported that "although the amendment passed in Flint the issue might fail because the ballot there was incorrectly printed."<sup>38</sup> On November 23 the same paper reported that "two Wayne County districts provided no tally sheets invalidating their vote."<sup>39</sup> On that same day **The News** reported that election officials in Lansing believed the amendment had passed "unless Wayne County opposition is in excess of 14,000...total canvass shows 2,128 less than needed (for defeat)."<sup>40</sup> That newspaper also reported evidence of "gross fraud by inspectors in some districts." Similar newspaper accounts appeared throughout the state. The turnout had been large for this multi-party presidential election which brought Woodrow Wilson and the Democratic Party to power.

The election of 1912 provided voters, nationally, the opportunity to choose among three popular candidates and offered a viable third party, the Progressive Party headed by presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt who had previously served as Republican president. The election brought out a large electorate with the emphasis on progressive

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<sup>37</sup>Arthur, p. 307.

<sup>38</sup>**Detroit News**, "Woman's Suffrage Defeated in City by less than 10,000," November 8, 1912, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup>**Detroit News**, "Wayne County Downs Suffrage by 11,872," November 23, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

change, the creation of a modern twentieth century society.

Upon discovery that Michigan's new Constitution provided no means by which to appeal for a recount on the highly contested Constitutional amendment, suffrage leaders worked for another referendum vote the following spring to harness the strength of their support just as, for the first time, their opponents developed a network of organized opposition.<sup>41</sup> The next election on the suffrage amendment which had come so close to success six months earlier brought out fewer voters in the spring of 1913, but went down to significant defeat.<sup>42</sup>

Historian Virginia Caruso examined the contentions of suffrage leaders of the day like Clara Arthur who charged that the liquor lobby lead to defeat in Michigan.<sup>43</sup> Caruso found first that members of the House "...voted as if liquor issues and woman suffrage were connected in some way."<sup>44</sup> Her research revealed that "wets and dries voted as if they believed that women in general supported prohibition and would vote that way if women got the vote."<sup>45</sup> She surmised that heavy turnout by pro-liquor forces lead to the 1913 referendum defeat. She found that in districts where a local option for prohibition appeared on the ballot, a large turnout resulted and the pro-liquor vote was largely also anti-woman suffrage. She further surmised that since women were perceived to be

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<sup>41</sup>Arthur, p. 307; Michigan Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage brochures, Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library; Michigan Association of Michigan Men Opposed to Woman's Suffrage, Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.

<sup>42</sup>Arthur, p. 308.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Caruso, p. 202.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.



predominately anti-liquor the pro-liquor forces became overwhelmingly opposed to the vote for women.<sup>46</sup>

A link to this general belief that women were anti-liquor was the growth of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded in 1874. Ian Tyrrell, a researcher who specialized in Progressive era history, saw the WCTU as the first mass organization among women seeking social reform.<sup>47</sup> Its founding leader, Frances Willard, strove to create an environment where men and women could live together in harmony without coercion or the subordination of women.<sup>48</sup>

Joseph Gussfield, another noted authority on the Progressive era, identified the link between Woman suffrage and temperance in the nineteenth century, but believed that connection diminished in the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> While the connection may have vanished in the 20th Century, Caruso's research provided evidence that it was still seen to exist by those on both sides.

In Michigan members of the WCTU were early and avid proponents of suffrage. A November 1907 appeal by MESA for support brought in a significant number of endorsements from WCTU locals throughout the state. Support came from Detroit South

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p. 213.

<sup>47</sup>Ian Tyrrell, **Women's World: Women's Empire: The Women's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930**, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup>Joseph Gussfield, **Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement**, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1963), p. 53.

Haven, Plymouth, Lapeer, Chesaning, Shelby, Holly, Pentwater and others.<sup>50</sup>

While those opposed to the extension of suffrage did not come only from those allied with the manufacture of alcohol, records showed financial support for suffrage opponents came from liquor related individuals. The financial support was directed toward newspaper advertisements and printed literature throughout the state with special emphasis on German ethnic neighborhoods.<sup>51</sup>

Recent Wayne State University Graduate Judith Martin in her Masters' Essay on the period argued that mobilization of pro-liquor forces may not have been the only reason for defeat. She concluded that four factors entered into the 1913 loss. Martin saw the temperance/prohibition issue, the first organized opposition groups, unfavorable publicity resulting from simultaneous English suffrage efforts, and extremely bad weather limiting the vote in some areas all as reasons for the significant defeat.<sup>52</sup>

The overwhelming defeat in 1913 did not discourage suffrage enthusiasm as MESA leaders soon gained support from influential organizations throughout the state.<sup>53</sup> In 1917, legislation introduced by Senator John Adams Damon of Mt. Pleasant providing Michigan women the right to vote in presidential elections was approved by both

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<sup>50</sup>Michigan Equal Suffrage Association resolution, November 11, 1907; letters in response dated November, December, 1907 and January 1908; scattered throughout papers of Clara B. Arthur, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

<sup>51</sup>Steven M. Buechler, **Women's Movements In the United States, Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights and Beyond.** (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 15; K. Fox, p. 95-95; Arthur, p. 309; Flexner, p. 268-269.

<sup>52</sup>Martin, p. 13-14.

<sup>53</sup>Alice Boutell, "Report to the 27th Convention." **Michigan Equal Suffrage Association**, January 15, 1913; Ida Chittenden "Report of the Equal Suffrage Campaign for 1912," Michigan State Grange, n.d.; Arthur, p. 309.

houses.<sup>54</sup> In order to achieve full suffrage, Rep. Charles Flowers of Detroit introduced legislation for a general referendum. That referendum which passed in November 1918 granted Woman suffrage in the state.<sup>55</sup>

Female activists of the era, sometimes called feminists, had become involved in a number of activities by the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> Their involvement in the war effort was central to their belief that soon voting rights would be granted to them. Clara B. Arthur, state suffrage leader and author of the "Michigan" segment in **History of Woman Suffrage (HWS)**, believed suffrage finally became a reality for four reasons: prohibition, the war work of women, the combined activity of all organized women, and the political trend of franchisement.<sup>57</sup>

The political trend mounted nationwide as numerous organized women's groups joined to support the cause. Almost simultaneously voters in Michigan voted to establish prohibition in the state.

Michigan voters approved total prohibition in 1916 after bitter quarreling which may well have postponed the enfranchisement of women by six years.<sup>58</sup> The loss of the liquor lobby as an ally greatly lowered the resources of those opposed to Woman suffrage. As it turned out, prohibition in Michigan, as Arthur interpreted, led to Woman

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<sup>54</sup>Arthur, p. 309.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid; Martin, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup>Nancy Cott, **Grounding of Modern American Feminism**. (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1987), p. 3-4.

<sup>57</sup>Arthur, p. 309.

<sup>58</sup>**Encyclopedia of Michigan**, (St. Clair Shores, MI: Somerset Publishers, 1981), p. 80.

suffrage.

In addition to the effect which prohibition had upon the issue the important contributions of women in the workforce during World War I greatly enhanced public support for suffrage.<sup>59</sup> In many cases they took jobs never before held by women and proved that they could do the work. The earlier distinction between the sexual spheres became blurred. Women had proven, once again, that all could unite behind their nation when the need arose.<sup>60</sup> Many women joined men overseas as nurses in the field. Others remained home, formed defense leagues, raised money for organizations like the Red Cross, or joined the work force.<sup>61</sup> Nationwide suffrage organizations joined in efforts on the homefront to aid in the war effort.

In a different vein, the active demonstrations of the National Woman's Party (NWP) which included members picketing the White House and chaining themselves to fences during the War pointed up the rationality of the more moderate National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) position.<sup>62</sup> One of those who joined the NWP active efforts at the White House in May 1917 was Ella Aldinger who later became the second president of the Michigan League of Women Voters (MLWV).<sup>63</sup> Many writers and individuals saw the NWP position as one with purely selfish motivation requesting as

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<sup>59</sup>Arthur, p. 309; J. Stanley Lemons, **The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s.** (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>60</sup>Lemons, p. 5-8.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid, p. 14-15.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, picture, May 6, 1917; same picture **Detroit News**, April 1917, Ella Aldinger papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

had been done during the Civil War that women wait until the War's culmination to work for female rights. Strategists within the NWP saw the War as an opportunity to make their point strongly and encouraged the continued active protest. Conceivably without this active and visible spur at this important time in American history women might not even to this day have been enfranchised. The combined efforts of both organizations during this crucial period led to the ultimate passage of the National Suffrage Amendment.<sup>64</sup> The coalition of support for women's political equality which developed occurred both nationally and statewide.

Suffrage groups won the support of Women's Clubs, temperance, labor, farm and church groups to forge a coalition which was difficult to defeat.<sup>65</sup> Suffrage workers had the support of women and men from every part of the country and from every economic bracket. In Michigan support came from the State Federation of Labor, Detroit Garment Workers, the Michigan Grange, the Women's Press Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, women's and farmer's clubs across the state, and Maccabees groups.<sup>66</sup> The diversity of individuals concerned reflected the widespread support. Development of a strong coalition which crossed economic and party lines led to ultimate passage of a state suffrage amendment.

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<sup>64</sup>Lemons, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup>K. Fox, p. 95; Arthur, p. 306.

<sup>66</sup>Bulletin #12, Michigan League of Women Voters, May 25, 1924, p. 1.

## Chapter 3

### ORGANIZATION OF THE MICHIGAN LEAGUE

On November 5, 1918, Michigan voters provided the women of their state with total suffrage by a vote of 229,790 to 195,077.<sup>67</sup> The suffrage cause had been a long and hard battle. The Michigan Equal Suffrage Association (MESA) founded in 1884 and its predecessor the Michigan State Woman Suffrage Association (MSWSA) founded in 1870 had faced three earlier suffrage ballot questions and had been defeated each time. Nationwide similar efforts frequently were defeated. With each defeat suffrage leaders on a state and national level reorganized for future efforts and planned what they would do when the vote was finally won. Part of their plan was an outline for action, a plan which would "...aid in the reconstruction of the nation..." after ultimate victory.<sup>68</sup>

Passage of the suffrage amendments set the stage for creation of the citizen oriented League of Women Voters.<sup>69</sup> The suffrage movement moved into its next phase: its plan to improve the electorate by providing citizen education and informed voters. The move was phase two of the women's plan to improve the electorate and thereby government by

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<sup>67</sup>Arthur, p. 306.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, p. 305.

<sup>69</sup>Lemons, p. 49-50; Flexner, p.340; Cott, p.86; Brumbaugh, p. 1-3;  
Susan Becker, **Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars.** (New York: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 203-204.

gaining the right to vote. During the years of the battle for the vote popular literature placed much emphasis on the purity and moral superiority of women. This moral purity was frequently used as an argument to keep women out of political life. Leaders within the Suffrage movement believed in their own ability to improve government by adding their own brand of moral superiority to the political process and turned the argument to their own advantage.

Between suffrage victory in November 1918 and their reorganization the following year two suffrage groups, the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association (MESA) and the Equal Suffrage League of Wayne County (ESLWC), worked for two specific program objectives: passage of the national suffrage amendment and voter education for newly enfranchised women.<sup>70</sup> These program objectives became the first goals, the hallmark, of the newly organized Michigan League of Women Voters (MLWV). They represented advocacy and citizen education and created the League's lifelong duality.

On April 4, 1919, at its thirty-third Convention, held in Grand Rapids, MESA became the Michigan League of Women Voters (MLWV), an organization for women only which elected Belle (Mrs. Wilbur) Brotherton of Detroit as its first president. The action was little more than a name change although four delegates dissented believing that men should be allowed to participate in the new organization in recognition of their service to the suffrage cause. Other issues considered at the Convention included the Reed Scores amendment which was a state proposal that attempted to bring back

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<sup>70</sup>Equal Suffrage League of Wayne County Constitution, Article 2, adopted 1914; ESLWC resolutions 1912 and 1913.

the recently outlawed saloons, and a bond amendment for good roads.<sup>71</sup> The change of name occurred barely one week after the call for formation of such organizations was made by President Carrie Chapman Catt at the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) Jubilee Convention.<sup>72</sup>

At NAWSA's Jubilee Convention held in St. Louis, Missouri, in March 1919 Catt proposed creation of a League to continue the work of the suffrage organization which needed to be done to create an educated electorate.<sup>73</sup> Catt envisioned an organization which would last approximately five years and which would aid in the reconstruction of the nation, win final enfranchisement worldwide, and end legal discrimination against women.<sup>74</sup> Citizen education Leagues were created in the nation's sixteen suffrage states.<sup>75</sup> Action by New York and Michigan to reorganize their suffrage parties into Leagues of Women Voters was highlighted in a May 22, 1919 press release.<sup>76</sup>

In November 1919, shortly after Catt's proposal and the April creation of MLWV, the Equal Suffrage League of Wayne County (ESLWC) reorganized as the Detroit League of Women Voters (DLWV) in what **the Detroit Free Press** termed a merger. The reorganization "merged" ESLWC into the newly formed DLWV. The meeting was highlighted by a memorial presented by suffrage leader Clara B. Arthur honoring Dr.

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<sup>71</sup>"Detroiter Heads Woman Vote Body." **Detroit Free Press**, April 5, 1919, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup>Lemons, p. 49-51.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Rose Young, National Press Department. **National American Woman Suffrage Association Press Release**. New York, NY: May 22, 1919.





**Michigan delegation to National American Women Suffrage Association Convention in St. Louis, M. March 24-29, 1919: Mrs. Helen Lovel Million, Mrs Alice B. Locke, Mrs. Charles Cobb, Mrs. Norman Banks, Miss Julia Parker, Mrs. Henry Sherrad (former State League President) Dr. Blanche M. Haines, Mrs. Myron Vorce, Mrs Percy Farrell, Miss Grace Van Hoesen, Miss Caroline Gibson, Mrs Alberta Van Droelle, and Mrs Ida Portis Boyer. Several became active in the development of the State League.**

Anna Howard Shaw, past president of NAWSA and a Michigan native who died during the year. It featured lectures on the vital needs in Detroit including care of unmarried mothers, creation of a Wayne County institution for the feeble minded, and provision for a more generous compensation for widows and dependent women. The first regularly scheduled meeting was set for the first Wednesday in December at which time it was announced officers would be elected.<sup>77</sup>

At the December meeting Mrs. Stevens T. Mason was elected president of DLWV, a new constitution was adopted, and Pliny Marsh of the Citizens' League discussed a municipal court reform bill requesting League assistance in securing signatures.<sup>78</sup> Michigan had a state organization and at least one local unit.

Belle Brotherton became first president of the State League when MESA reorganized under that name in 1919 having as primary objectives the passage of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the registration and education of newly enfranchised citizens.<sup>79</sup> Brotherton, no stranger to organizational leadership, set about creating a state body to work toward these objectives.

The creation of the League on a state level was predated by weeks by the first opportunity in this state for women to go to the polls in the March general primary and newspaper reports of the day indicate they made an impressive showing. Women in Michigan reacted well to their first vote. Large numbers of women voters turned out

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<sup>77</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, "Woman Societies Combine Forces." November 13, 1918, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup>**Detroit News**, "Officers Elected by Women Voters." December 5, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, April 5, 1919, p. 10.

throughout the state for the March 5, 1919 elections. **The Detroit News** reported, "men outvoted by women in the state."<sup>80</sup> **The Detroit Journal** wrote, "women sway primary."<sup>81</sup> **The Christian Science Monitor** announced, "Detroit women cast 40% of the vote."<sup>82</sup> **The Detroit Free Press** headline read, "Heavy woman vote recorded"<sup>83</sup> as the **the Detroit News Tribune** acknowledged, "Women prove dutiful voters."<sup>84</sup> These headlines challenged earlier predictions that women would not be capable of or willing to make responsible electoral decisions.

Later that same spring, Mary Garrett Hay of the New York League remarked, "We shall adopt as our main purpose, after woman suffrage is won for the Nation, the purpose of the National League of Women Voters - a country in which all voters speak English, read their own ballots and honor the American flag."<sup>85</sup> Hay's view conveyed a strong affirmation of the nationalistic emphasis exhibited by early League members. It also revealed some of the anti-immigration sentiment of that era. Aileen Kraditor, another noted Women's historian, saw in comments like this nativism as well as racism.<sup>86</sup> Hay's remarks more accurately reflected the emphasis of the Leagues' belief in the importance

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<sup>80</sup>**Detroit News**, "Men Outvoted by Women in the State." March 6, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup>**Detroit Journal**, "Women Sway Primary." March 6, 1919, Belle Brotherton papers, Michigan State Archives, Lansing, Michigan.

<sup>82</sup>**Christian Science Monitor**, "Detroit Women Cast 40% of the Vote.:" March 7, 1919, Belle Brotherton papers.

<sup>83</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, "Heavy Woman Vote Recorded." March 6, 1919, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup>**Detroit News Tribune**, "Women Prove Dutiful Voters." March 6, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup>Young, NAWSA Press Release, May 22, 1919.

<sup>86</sup>Aileen Kraditor, **The Idea of the Woman Suffrage Movement: 1890-1920**. (New York: Columbia University press, 1965) p. 115-140.

of the elective process for all citizens and the need for these new citizens to understand the issues and vote intelligently and responsibly. This emphasis on the ballot led to an effort to register all women to vote and then to educate them about the significance of that vote. The education further described how to affect government policy.

From their roots in suffrage organizations early League leaders learned the advantage of letter writing as a means of swaying legislative action. League members used this technique to encourage Michigan legislators to be among the first to ratify the suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>87</sup> Michigan joined Illinois and Wisconsin as the first three states to ratify the 19th amendment on June 10, 1919, and the first objective of the fledgling organization was achieved within a few months.<sup>88</sup>

Although suggested by Carrie Chapman Catt at the NAWSA Jubilee convention in 1919 the NLWV was not officially organized until February 1920.<sup>89</sup> After NLWV was formed existing state leagues like that in Michigan affiliated under its leadership. By establishing a national organization Catt was determined to create "a living memorial dedicated to the memory of our departed leaders and the sacrifices they made for our cause" and "to assist women in making decisions which would make the nation safer for their children and their children's children."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Arthur, p. 309; Flexner, p. 328.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 1-5; Arthur, p. 309; Lemons, p. 49-50.

<sup>90</sup>Finding Aid, League of Women Voters of Michigan papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, excerpted from "Speech ...Carrie Chapman Catt," NAWSA Jubilee Convention, Victory Convention, Chicago, 1920.

Indications are that the young League was well received as one October 24, 1921 newspaper clipping predicted 60,000 women were expected to attend the MLWV convention. Today that type prediction might be considered a typographical error for a group of that size would be extremely difficult to accommodate, but the prediction reflected the strength held by women's organizations of the day. The article described the new organization as the only one with the objective of the political education of women.<sup>91</sup> Newspaper coverage of the meeting held November 9 and 10, 1921 in Detroit was scant and failed to record the actual attendance. The newspapers for those two days reported record snowfall of 4 inches in Detroit before 8 a.m. and 19 inches in Lansing on November 9, however.<sup>92</sup> Convention coverage mentioned only that no new actions would be begun and that those assembled planned to hear a number of prominent women of the day speak.<sup>93</sup> A combination of the lack of coverage, significant snowfall for that time of year, and overly optimistic projections lead to the probability that the attendance was significantly lower than projected. Organizational records for the period no longer exist hindering further substantiation.

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<sup>91</sup>news clipping, Belle Brotherton papers, Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library, October 24, 1921, no identification or page number.

<sup>92</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, November 8, 9, 10, 11, 1921; **Detroit News**, November 8, 9, 10, 11 1921; **Detroit Times** November 9, 10, 11 1921. All three newspapers identified the storm as a record snowfall for that date. It received substantially more coverage in the evening newspaper than in the morning periodicals; **Detroit News**, November 9, 1921, p. 25; ; According to Nancy Cott, p. 86, nationwide about 5% of the NAWSA membership transferred allegiance to the new League, it might be extrapolated that Michigan experienced the same numerical decline.

<sup>93</sup>MLWV, **Third Statewide Conference of Women Voters**, pamphlet, December 6-7, 1922.

With national suffrage a reality and popular support still in evidence the young League began to work for a series of additional projects deemed significant by its membership. The National organization developed a three year program to analyze the ideas and objectives of its membership. The program was to study membership opinion and then develop an organizational structure to address these needs.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 16-20.

## Chapter 4

### MLWV - THE FIRST TWENTY FIVE YEARS

As a result of its organizational study the League developed a process by which member opinion was shaped into program objectives and then these same goals were used to move to action. Throughout its history MLWV, later LWV-MI, members worked outside and within government toward efforts the group believed to be in the best interest of the state and the state's residents. Major issues in which the League achieved some measure of success during the early years included: Civil Service reform, election law reform, and legislation concerning children's welfare.<sup>95</sup>

One early agenda, the November 1930 call to the 11th annual state convention listed key areas of concern as children's welfare, women in industry, education and efficiency in government. The first twenty-five years of existence saw MLWV success in citizen education through the citizenship schools, in changes to voter registration laws and in civil service reform.<sup>96</sup>

As League saw success it also saw failure. Early leaders believed the addition of women to the ranks of voters would provide immediate new moral direction. This new direction did not develop and many were surprised to learn that women did not vote en masse for any particular legislation. There appeared no apparent women's bloc.<sup>97</sup> It was

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<sup>95</sup>League of Women Voters in Michigan, *Michigan Voter*, 1958, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Lemons, p. 51; Flexner, p. 340; Joan Hoff, *Law, Gender and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women*. (New York: New York University Press, 1991) p. 208.

also believed that numerous long desired goals such as that of child labor reform would be immediate. Although reform did come eventually, the long delay in passage was seen by many as a failure as was the inability to immediately change government for the better.<sup>98</sup>

At its creation, Catt envisioned an organization to last, approximately, five years to correct all the inequities as they were seen by her and fellow leaders and to educate women to vote to improve the existent system.<sup>99</sup> It quickly became apparent that these goals would require more than five years to achieve.

As a result the new organization developed a system to provide study and direction for future action.<sup>100</sup> Programs of concern and interest to League members were determined by an internal membership process which resulted in creation of a proposed program. Throughout most of its existence for each biennial period the League developed a proposed program to highlight areas of concern and action. The program created during the year prior to the Convention was begun by the Local League members. Members, at this level, voted to establish a state program called an **Agenda for Action**.<sup>101</sup> Issues covered by LWV received support only after members studied them fully and then met to achieve consensus. This process of agreement has remained a strong point of the League policy in the state and the nation.

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<sup>98</sup>Flexner, p 338; Lemons, p. 51; Hoff, p. 208; Cott, p. 106-107.

<sup>99</sup>Lemons, p. 50.

<sup>100</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 16-20.

<sup>101</sup>**Michigan Voter, 1958**; League of Women Voters of Michigan, **Program and Action**, after 1984, n.d.



At the first NLWV convention in 1921 members voted to support programs upon which a large membership agreed and established a means by which the leadership could assess member opinion. For the following three years leaders worked to gather the full thought of the membership as to what the program should be.

The method allowed establishment of a policy to respect the opinions of individual members and to encourage expression from everyone. The procedure allowed for dissension and minority viewpoint as well as reflection of the feeling of the majority. Although League action usually resulted from majority opinion, those holding minority views were encouraged to continue to participate within the system. This organizational system provided valuable experience and education. Workable experiences were incorporated into the method for creating a program.<sup>102</sup>

The document which developed through decisions reached at convention level was derived from study based upon member suggestion. After study concerned members met to discuss the issue and to reach a mutually agreeable position which then became program policy.<sup>103</sup>

Once program policy was established League members and officials were expected to move to action. The nature of the issue determined the action although usually action consisted of letter writing, lobbying and testimony. Governmental bodies accepted testimony from informed and interested individuals when preparing legislation and

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<sup>102</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 16-19.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid, 16; LWVUS, **The Program Record**, (Washington, DC, LWVUS, 1955), p. 1-2.

policy. League programs on a national and state level were the result of decisions reached at biennial conventions held by the respective units.

Administering an organization to provide citizen education and an informed electorate developed into a complex undertaking. National and State conventions were held in alternate years and were typified by that held in 1932. That year the NLWV proposed program of work featured informing, discussing, observing, conferring, training, publishing, and encouraging participation with emphasis on efficiency in government, living costs, social hygiene, women in industry, the legal status of women, international cooperation to prevent war, and immigration problems.<sup>104</sup> As the League developed it became necessary to narrow and refine its original broad base. It was no longer possible to operate as spokesperson for every issue. The effort to refine its own mission and purpose occupied much of the organization's early years<sup>105</sup>.

One element carried over from its origin within NAWSA was the League's commitment to non-partisanship. This non-partisan policy was articulated at NAWSA's founding convention, during a session entitled "Our Attitude Toward Political Parties." Early leaders felt that assistance must come from all sides and that therefore their allegiance should be to no particular political party. In order to avoid even the appearance of allegiance of any form the early leaders developed their non-partisan position. The policy carried over into LWV and continues to exist within the

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<sup>104</sup>National League of Women Voters, **Proposed Program of Work, 1932-34**, January, 1932.

<sup>105</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 15-17.

organization.<sup>106</sup>

Some historians considered this removal from the political process a major limitation of the organization's power while others considered it the group's major strength.<sup>107</sup> Eleanor Flexner, one of the first historians to renew interest in women's history during the 1960s, discussed whether Catt's early direction steering women toward education and non-partisan reform may have "short-circuited the political strength of the most gifted suffragist women."<sup>108</sup> Flexner believed that NLWV non-partisan emphasis convinced many politicians of the day that women were interested in reform only and not in politics. She postulated that this dichotomy remained a stumbling block for women.<sup>109</sup>

Naomi Black, another authority on the suffrage era, referred to many later women candidates who identified their early training within League membership so, although non-partisan, the organization served as a training ground for women interested not only in reform, but in the political process and in becoming politicians.<sup>110</sup> The movement of females into the political arena began to occur, but only gradually as the years progressed. The early leadership seemed to confine itself primarily to working within the organization it had created.

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<sup>106</sup>Ellen DuBois, ed. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches.** (New York: Schocken, 1981) p. 181.

<sup>107</sup>Susan D. Becker. **The Origins of The Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars.** (New York: Greenwood Press, 1981) p. 204.

<sup>108</sup>Flexner, p. 340.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Black, p.289.

While the organizational study was underway active members continued their efforts toward citizen education, one clear objective carried over from the suffrage program. The majority of the leaders recognized that the newly enfranchised women voters must be educated to better understand the political process. To achieve this objective the League developed and sponsored citizenship training schools to provide education on the elective process devoid of political party partisanship.<sup>111</sup> The League also directed special attention to a study looking for the best means to foster and encourage political education. That study found that existent political education did not provide training to the voter but, generally, fell into three areas: the first area was the education of politicians which was personal, usually partisan and not particularly issue oriented, the second was that of the academician, then, aimed primarily at children's education, and the third was that of the social scientist aimed at basic cause and effect research not at educating the voter.<sup>112</sup> As a result of this research the League decided that the electorate needed to be provided with straightforward, simple and clear-cut, non-partisan information to enable voters to make intelligent, informed, accurate political judgments. This became the mission of the newly established citizenship schools.<sup>113</sup>

Early citizenship schools aimed to educate the new electorate, primarily women, so

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<sup>111</sup>**The Program Record**, p. 3; Brumbaugh, p. 1-5; postcard, Wayne County League of Women Voters, June 1, 1934; Michigan League of Women Voters, **Bulletin**, Vol. III, #3, January 28, 1925; Dorothea Steffens, letter to Emma Fox, October 15, 1925.

<sup>112</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 1-5.

<sup>113</sup>LWVUS, **The Program Record**, p. 3.

it focused on League members.<sup>114</sup> This priority reflected the view of the early suffrage leaders who believed that the addition of women to the electorate would improve the quality of government.<sup>115</sup> They genuinely believed that American democracy would be better because women had attained their place within the process. One pre-election citizenship school was held in 1925.<sup>116</sup> On June 8, 1934, the Wayne County League of Women Voters held a citizenship school at the home of Mrs. F. P. Anderson. Speakers included Mrs. Paul Jones, then president of MLWV, prominent political scientist William McFarland of the institution which became Wayne State University and Ruth Huston Whipple, later mayor of Plymouth.<sup>117</sup>

By 1940 the emphasis shifted and educational endeavors focused on the population at large. League members not only worked to inform themselves, but they began to create simplified publications for use within the school system and for the general electorate. Citizenship schools developed into the citizen education program.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the citizen education efforts early League members began to press for government reform in voter registration, taxation, civil service, and laws effecting children.<sup>119</sup> The programs of the League were always based upon careful research followed by discussion and consensus on what the membership believed needed to be

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<sup>114</sup>Avis D. Carlson, **Survey Graphic**, "Trail Blazers In Citizenship," (Washington, DC: reprinted NLWV, Sept. 1945), p. 3.

<sup>115</sup>Brumbaugh, p. 1-5.

<sup>116</sup>Michigan League of Women Voters, **Bulletin**, Vol. III,#3, January 28, 1925.

<sup>117</sup>Postcard, Wayne County League of Women Voters, June 1, 1934.

<sup>118</sup>Carlson, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup>LWVMI, **Michigan Voter**, 1958, p. 1.

accomplished. Once positions were approved, the League followed with educational programs and lobbying efforts. In the early days, as today, strong emphasis was placed upon individual member contribution to the effort. Members were encouraged to write to their legislators and newspaper editors on behalf of League program.<sup>120</sup> Members also provided testimony before government agencies and legislative bodies and appeared before community organizations to explain and clarify issues.<sup>121</sup>

Throughout its existence the organization has worked for a wide variety of legislation to improve the living conditions of children. League concerns about improved conditions for children included: childbirth and maternity, child labor regulation, adequate child care for working mothers, the educational environment and later concern about physical and mental health. These concerns are lumped by the League in its agenda as child welfare practices.

Although League efforts with regard to child labor practices began even before the group organized, successful legislation in the state was not completed until 1948. For that reason, the topic was included in the chapter on the League's second quarter of a century for the purposes of this work.

While efforts to achieve suitable child labor regulations went on State League members pursued additional efforts to benefit children. Mrs. Carl Thorborg, Chairman

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<sup>120</sup>Herbert Hoover, telegram to Lucia Grimes, November 19, 1921; Ella Aldinger, letter to Lucia Grimes, n.d.; Paul Voorhies, draft of bill to Lucia Grimes, February 20, 1923; Emma Fox, letter to Mrs. Herbert Prescott, April 11, 1925.

<sup>121</sup>Michigan League of Women Voters, **Bulletin #5**; Michigan League of Women Voters, pamphlet, **State Wide Convention Women Voters**, December 6-7, 1922.

of the MLWV Child Welfare Department during the early 1920s expressed ongoing League concern for the general welfare of all humanity, but particularly child welfare, in much of her remaining existent early correspondence. An early focus led to efforts to reduce maternity death rates and to combat infant mortality through adequate instruction in infant hygiene and maternity.<sup>122</sup> Training and instructional literature provided during ensuing years aided the decline in both maternal death during childbirth and infant mortality. This training was assisted by grants in aid for mothers and child care provided by the State League which further reduced the mortality rate before 1930.<sup>123</sup> During its early years infant mortality and labor reform were the League's central foci relating to child welfare.

As concern for child welfare remained of central importance so did the efficient and effective administration of government. Related to the belief that a simplified election system would improve the elective process was the League decision to support permanent voter registration and a simplified ballot.

A member study by MLWV made in 1928 concluded that permanent voter registration would safeguard the purity of elections and registration laws.<sup>124</sup> As a result of that study the League supported the Stevens bill which altered Michigan's Election

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<sup>122</sup>Mrs. Carl Thorborg, Child Welfare Department report to Michigan League of Women Voters, n.d. circa 1921.

<sup>123</sup>Voter, 1958.

<sup>124</sup>Michigan League of Women Voters, "Registration Law", **History of the Passage of Law In Michigan**, n.d. circa 1930; League of Women Voters Papers, Bentley Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Box 7, Folder - Election Law Reform.

Code and established a permanent registration law.<sup>125</sup> As part of the campaign for enactment of this law, letters were mailed to every member of the legislature. The letter writing campaign proved one of the Leagues first successes as a citizen lobbying organization.<sup>126</sup>

On January 9, 1929, Governor Fred Green announced appointment of a commission to suggest amendments to the general election law.<sup>127</sup> That commission reported back to the governor on February 16, 1929, recommending permanent registration and shortening of the ballot.<sup>128</sup> As legislation moved before a joint meeting of the House and Senate, Dr. J. P. Harris, a scholar who toured the United States studying election laws came to Lansing at the invitation and expense of the State League of Women Voters to support the proposed changes.<sup>129</sup> In testimony before the joint meeting Harris stated that cities with permanent registration had the "cleanest elections."<sup>130</sup> By the time Harris arrived the legislation had already passed the Senate and was expected to pass in the House. So although his influence may have been slight the commitment of MLWV to participate actively in the decision making process by inviting him to testify and by paying him a

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid: Donald McGowan, "Registration for Life Asked," *Detroit News*, October 26, 1928, p. 54.

<sup>126</sup>MLWV. "Registration Law."

<sup>127</sup>W. A. Markland, "Detroit's Vote Views Prevail," *Detroit News*, January 9, 1929, p. 14.

<sup>128</sup>W. A. Markland, "Election Law Amendments." *Detroit News*, February 16, 1929, p. 16.

<sup>129</sup>"Permanent Poll List Gets Backing," *Detroit News*, April 25, 1929, p. 51.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.



\$1500 stipend was apparent.<sup>131</sup>

After little legislative debate, on May 24, 1929, Gov. Green signed the measure providing for permanent registration of voters. Mrs. Siegel W. (Dorothy) Judd, then president of MLWV, and representatives from eleven local Leagues witnessed the signing. Mrs. Judd addressed those present stating that the League believed the new method would make for greater voter convenience, a cost savings to municipalities and a reduction in the possibility of fraud.<sup>132</sup>

Successful passage of the voter registration legislation allowed members on a state level to move to yet another concern about the administration of government - the patronage system. After another study, this one during the thirties, the League began a vigorous campaign to end Michigan's spoils system of political appointment and establish a merit system for Civil Service employees.

On October 14, 1935, Gov. Frank Fitzgerald appointed a five member non-partisan Commission to study civil service and report back its recommendations. One of the five members of that commission and its only female was Dorothy Judd, former State League president and active member of the Grand Rapids League.<sup>133</sup> The report returned on July 20, 1936, signed by all five members, contained two parts, a survey of existing practices and recommendations for creation of a permanent state Civil Service.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>League of Women Voters of Grand Rapids, **The First Fifty Years**, (Grand Rapids: LWVGR, 1972) p. 8.

<sup>132</sup>"Election Code Bill Signed," **Detroit News**, May 24, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup>Lansing Bureau, "Civil Service Plan Ordered." **Detroit News**, October 14, 1935, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup>Civil Service Study Commission, **Report of the Civil Service Study Commission**, (Michigan: State, 1938).

The recommended system was established when the State Civil Service Act was passed in July 1937 and took effect January 1, 1938.<sup>135</sup> The first Commission consisted of three members: George J. Burke of Ann Arbor, Mrs. Paul W. (Florence D.) Jones, and Stuart H. Perry.<sup>136</sup> Mrs. Jones was immediate past president of MLWV.<sup>137</sup>

The Commission reported the results of their first year's activities on December 31, 1938.<sup>138</sup> During its first year the Civil Service Commission established and held qualifying examinations, studied compensation schedules, and completed all essential elements of installation of the Civil Service System. The Commission listed as its accomplishments the creation of rules, writing orderly procedures, establishing position and employee rosters, the allocation of positions, holding qualifying examinations, examinations preparation, auditing, payroll improvement, developing means of timekeeping, employee training, and new procedures.<sup>139</sup> They determined their limitations to be in time and money allocated and proposed plans for the second year of operation.<sup>140</sup>

In 1940 Michigan voters approved a finalized Civil Service Act supported by

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<sup>135</sup>Civil Service Department, **First Annual Report of the Michigan State Civil Service Department.** (Michigan: State Civil Service Commission, December 31, 1938), p. 4.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup>**Detroit News.** "Budget Paring Called Al Peril." November 15, 1932, p. 3; **Detroit News,** "Again to Head Voter Legue." October 15, 1935, p. 10.

<sup>138</sup>Civil Service Department, 1938.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid, p. 26.

MLWV with direct involvement by active League leaders.<sup>141</sup> League participation in this issue included member study, letter writing and legislative testimony.<sup>142</sup>

An ever present concern was the necessity of generating ongoing revenue. During the Leagues early years Good Citizenship Bonds raised funds needed for the continuation of the Leagues' work. William A. Comstock, later governor of Michigan, was an early and regular contributor. Comstock received recognition for contributions in 1922, 1923, and 1927.<sup>143</sup> In 1927 his \$100 contribution aided the League in obtaining \$9000 of their \$10,000 goal before its Gala Fundraising luncheon.<sup>144</sup> The budgeted money was used for citizenship education.<sup>145</sup> Although called bonds the funds were probably contributions as we know them today and not interest bearing investments for donors. Most early financial contributions were returned to the community in the form of citizen education because members served as volunteers and required little, if any, financial remuneration.

Although finances were always a problem Michigan members hosted one of the new organization's earliest national conventions. The 10th national convention was held April 25-30, 1932 at Detroit's Book Cadillac Hotel. That meeting became the NLWV's third biennial convention. Discussion at that meeting abolished the Committee on Social

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<sup>141</sup>Ruth Jacobsen, letters, Senator G. Elwood Bonine and Elmer Porter, January 15, 1947, LWVMI Papers.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Mrs. James G. Macpherson, letter, Mr. and Mrs. William Comstock, November 2, 1925. William Comstock Papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

Hygiene forming in its place the Committee on Public Health. Other areas of concern included discussion on shortening the period between federal elections and the beginning of terms, reorganizing county government, and establishing management plans for local governments.<sup>146</sup> Representatives of the Detroit League served as hostesses for the event.<sup>147</sup> The convention was well attended and well received. The organization had established itself nationwide as one of significance dealing with citizen education and governmental reform.

As the League developed and became more formalized internal problems became more prominent. At the November 12, 1940, state board meeting participants grappled with the question, "How can a state board evaluate the strength of a local league?"

Discussion centered on membership count, program, and financial worth. Did a viable league need all of these or something else? The meeting resulted in a call for more help from the State League in community activity.<sup>148</sup> By this time it became clear that the three levels, national, state, and local needed autonomy yet interconnection to provide the most successful strength and unity.

The modern League developed into the organization it is today while continuing to provide education, leadership and direction into areas in which it saw need. The objectives and operating style for the national and statewide organization developed over time to create the framework for the powerful institution which the League became. In

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<sup>146</sup>NLWV, **Proposed Program of Work, 1932-34, 1932; Convention Announcement 1932**, National League of Women Voters.

<sup>147</sup>MLWV, **Bulletin Vol. X, No. 3**, May-June, 1932.

<sup>148</sup>MLWV, **Board Minutes**, November 12, 1940.

its first twenty-five years from a foundation in the suffrage movement the League moved to leadership in citizen education and volunteer activism.

## Chapter 5

### LWV-MI -- FROM TWENTY FIVE TO FIFTY

Not long after entering its second quarter century the League faced a name change as the Michigan League of Women Voters became the League of Women Voters of Michigan in 1947.<sup>149</sup> This occurred to conform with the change by the NLWV which became the League of Women Voters of the United States.

Never an organization to sit back and rest on past laurels the group continued to move into new areas while reaffirming commitment to long held positions, at that time called Continuing Responsibilities or simply CRs.<sup>150</sup> During the twenty-five to fifty year period the LWV-MI continued to focus on child welfare issues, citizen education, and simplification of government to mention only a few concerns. With regard to child welfare the long fought battle for child labor reform was finally completed and efforts for the creation of specialized institutions to further children's mental health met with success. In the area of citizen education the State League began publication of its successful book **Know Your State**. In the area of government improvement members worked for and achieved Constitutional revision.

One of the first issues embraced by the Michigan League was that of child labor reform. As early as 1905 Clara B. Arthur, a suffrage leader who assumed an active role

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<sup>149</sup>LWVMI, letters, documents, LWVMI papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Box 3.

<sup>150</sup>LWVMI, **State Continuing Responsibilities**, (Lansing: LWVMI, August 8, 1961), p. 1.

in the early Detroit League, worked for child labor reform.<sup>151</sup>

In 1925 National League of Women Voters (NLWV) president Belle Sherwin wrote members of efforts to secure ratification of a national Child Labor Amendment in preparation for the sixth national convention.<sup>152</sup> League members supported the ratification which succeeded in only sixteen states by 1930.<sup>153</sup>

When passage of a national amendment failed state and local Leagues renewed effort for passage of state child labor legislation. By 1941 Michigan law had been amended to forbid factory work by those under sixteen and to mandate school attendance by all children between the ages of seven and sixteen.<sup>154</sup>

In 1947 the Michigan League, the Junior League and other organizations in Michigan joined together to endorse child labor legislation in this state. To further their aims they created a pamphlet entitled **The Sweat of Their Brow** which highlighted labor legislation in this state as it pertained to children. The organizations speaking through the brochure called for a number of specific regulations regarding children which included: an eight hour day, a minimum age of sixteen to leave school, a maximum forty-eight hour work week, no night work for those under sixteen, and a mandatory half

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<sup>151</sup>Owen Lovejoy, National Child Labor Commission, correspondence Clara B. Arthur, May 5, 1905, also 1906, 1907. Clara B. Arthur Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

<sup>152</sup>Belle Sherwin, letter to Friends of the League, letter in preparation for sixth Annual Convention, February 24, 1925, Emma Fox Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

<sup>153</sup>LWVUS, **The Program Record**, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup>unsigned memo, RE: Michigan Child Labor Bill, 1941. LWVMI Papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

hour lunch break.<sup>155</sup>

The League maintained this battle until in January 1948 state legislation it considered suitable took effect.<sup>156</sup> The fight over labor rights for children had been lengthy, but, at last, the League saw legislation which its members considered acceptable come to fruition.

Feeling successful in regard to infant mortality and, finally, child labor legislation, child welfare concerns shifted to education and mental health. Members continued to work, directed by their own program agendas, for improvements in the educational system and for changes in the state's laws regulating mental facilities for children.<sup>157</sup> Children and their welfare have remained a focal point throughout the League's seventy-five year history.

During the 1950s State League members worked for creation of a children's mental health facility. Mrs. Thomas Gwyn, Chair of LWVMI Children's Service Committee testified at a public hearing before the State Health and Welfare Committee in early 1952. In January 1954, Governor G. Mennen Williams invited Mrs. Clifton Drury, then State League president, to observe the National Governor's Conference on Mental Health

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<sup>155</sup>Michigan Legislative Council, **The Sweat of Their Brow**, (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Legislative Council, 1947).

<sup>156</sup>LWVMI, **Voter**, summer, 1958, special edition; Gloria Rottman, letter to Fran Parker, April 7, 1992.

<sup>157</sup>W.J. Maxey, Department of Social Welfare, Director, letter, Mrs. Thomas Gwynn, thanking for appearance before public hearing, March 7, 1952; Mrs. C. Drury, letter, Governor G. Mennen Williams, December 29, 1953; G. Mennen Williams, letter, Edna Drury, January 20, 1954.



because of the League's ongoing concern about the issue.<sup>158</sup> Mrs. Drury sent Mrs. Gwyn as her representative to the February 8 and 9 program which was held at Detroit's Statler Hotel. In June of that same year Mrs. Gwyn received thanks from Charles Wagg of the State Department of Health for "valuable support on the creation of Hawthorne Center."<sup>159</sup> Hawthorne Center was developed in Northville to serve the mental health needs of the state's children.

While some leaders worked for creation of the new children's health facility others were working to develop what came to be one of the organization's most successful publications. Mrs. William S. (Sarah) Preston chaired the Know Your State (KYS) initial project. It developed out of the 1953-55 proposed program and used the nationally developed **Know Your Town** outline as a guide.<sup>160</sup> Throughout 1953 and 1954 Mrs. Preston worked to develop the book. In one letter she described the project, "...to be mainly for factual information...include suggestions for possible improvements...the suggestions to originate with those who know our governmental processes at first hand."<sup>161</sup>

By February 1956 chapter outlines and revised table of contents were available. The first **Know Your State (KYS)** was printed in 1957. The publication has been edited and reprinted numerous times since then. That publication developed into **The State We're**

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<sup>158</sup>G. Mennen Williams, letter to Mrs. Clifton Drury, January 20, 1954.

<sup>159</sup>Charles Wagg, letter to Mrs. Thomas Gwyn, June 17, 1954.

<sup>160</sup>Sarah Preston, **Progress Report: Know Your State Project**, (Lansing: LWVMI, November 10, 1953), p. 1.

<sup>161</sup>Sarah Preston, letter to Hon. D. Hale Brake, November 10, 1953.

It has thus far been published three times in 1979, 1986, and 1990.<sup>162</sup>

While work progressed on this informative handbook a major focus of the early portion of the second quarter century of the League was the need for state Constitutional reform. Michigan had continued to operate under the Constitution of 1908 although that document, itself, called for more frequent revision.<sup>163</sup> League efforts in the late forties and again in the late fifties to call a Constitutional Convention (Con Con) were unsuccessful, but by 1960 the efforts of League members and others began to have an effect.<sup>164</sup> Governor Williams announced his support for a League sponsored Constitutional Convention compromise plan in January 1960. Under the plan endorsed by the League and the Michigan Junior Chamber of Commerce voters would be asked in November 1960 to increase convention delegate numbers. A second vote in spring 1961 would then approve the convention.<sup>165</sup>

The League prepared numerous pamphlets and booklets and spoke publicly in support of a Constitutional Convention. On February 11, 1960, State League President Mrs. Howard Lichterman discussed the need for Constitutional revision and the existing Constitution's inadequacy before the Senate Judiciary Committee. LWVMI sent out publicity packets statewide. In addition the organization staged mock Con Cons at high

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<sup>162</sup>documentation on **Know Your Town** history.

<sup>163</sup>LWVMI, **The State We're In**, (Lansing: LWVMI, 1979), p. 6.

<sup>164</sup>Mabel Hessler Cable, **The Con Con Story: 1958**, (Lansing: LWVMI, May 1959), p. 1; Carolyn Stieber, **Focus on Con Con**, (E.Lansing: MSU, 1961), p. 1.

<sup>165</sup>Carl B. Rudow, **The Detroit News**, "GOP Wary as Williams Accepts Con-Con Plan," January 20, 1960, p. D-3.

schools throughout the state.<sup>166</sup>

While the Constitutional Convention was underway in late 1961 League members acted as observers keeping track of the convention's progress. Their visibility served two purposes: to let delegates know that the League continued to be vitally concerned in discussion and secondly, to keep their own membership well informed.<sup>167</sup> By 1963 a new Constitution was approved.

During this entire period the League grew, not only in size but in influence, enlarging to 3500 women in 34 Leagues by December 1961. In 1960 as League celebrated forty years of service Governor Williams issued a proclamation commending the state organization for its support of Civil Service, fair employment practices, permanent registration and children's services in addition to its efforts at fostering informed citizenship.<sup>168</sup> During this period the organization continued to grow in membership.

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<sup>166</sup>LWVMI, **Publication #100**, (Lansing; LWVMI, 1960) pamphlets, letters, LWVMI papers, Bentley Library.

<sup>167</sup>Eleanor Breitmeyer, **The Detroit News**, "Con-Con's Anxious Guardian," December 3, 1961, p. G-12.

<sup>168</sup>G. Mennen Williams, Proclamation, cited LWVMI for forty years of service to state, January 8, 1960.

## Chapter 6

### Third Quarter of a Century

At fifty the Leagues official membership count was larger than it had ever been with continued interest in children's and human welfare as well as in improving government. The Leagues continued concerns expanded into new areas as well. By 1976 there were 42 local leagues.

During its third quarter of a century the League continued programs begun earlier working for changes in the state's tax structure, in school financing and in government. Concern about the environment grew during the period and the State League participated in and developed numerous projects to monitor, protect and improve Michigan's water, land and air.

During the 1970s work on Michigan's tax structure included support for a graduated income tax, a change in school financing, and opposition to constitutional restriction on the rate or base of property taxes. A 1977-80 study looked at taxation and budgeting finding among other things strong support for a system of sharing property tax base, but not revenue, as a fair way to reduce fiscal inequalities among local governments. That study resulted in the State League's addition of a section on budgeting to its current position. Members supported added input by the legislature, state and local government, periodic evaluation, sunset legislation, and zero base budgeting.<sup>169</sup> As this book goes to

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<sup>169</sup>LWVMI, *Agenda for Action: 1993-95*, (Lansing: LWVMI, 1993), p. 25-38.

press taxation issues affected by 1994 changes in the property tax law remain a concern.

Projects revolving around the environment included: water quality, land use, groundwater contamination, the Great Lakes ecosystem and solid waste management.<sup>170</sup> During the 1980s the Kellogg Foundation provided grant money under its Groundwater Education in Michigan (GEM) program, which enabled the State League to mount a massive education program on groundwater contamination, its sources, and cures. The projects developed included, in conjunction with a grant from the LWV Education Fund, a video distributed nationwide, a guide for use in Michigan college curricula and workshops for local League members, interested citizens, and government officials.<sup>171</sup>

During this period LWV-MI established its Citizen Information Center which continues to operate and handle questions of political concern from throughout the state. The Center can be reached toll free by dialing 1 800 292 5823. It can inform individuals on the status of Michigan legislative bills, agencies that can handle problems, names and addresses of government officials, the Michigan constitution and laws, voter information, election laws, campaigns and dates, disabilities rights referrals and LWV information. The League of Women Voters of Michigan provides the Citizen Information Center as a public service.

State and local Leagues continued and expanded involvement by providing

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid, p. 39-61.

<sup>171</sup>personal memories of this author who served as project coordinator for the program which developed college curricula.

candidate forums. They worked with regional newspapers to provide Voter Service Guides to benefit the general public.

During this period membership remained strong, but the numbers began to decline. An effect many felt of the increasing number of women returning to the full time work force. League members like those in other organizations began to define their objectives more specifically oftentimes with Local units devoting themselves to one or two areas only in order to provide the best possible service to the community in those areas. Candidate forums and Voter Service material became an emphasis particularly of many Local units.

## Chapter 7

### Leaders Who Shaped The League: Presidents

Most early leaders of the State League came from the ranks of the suffrage organization. They moved what they had learned as suffrage leaders into the early League rather than into political leadership, perhaps believing that in this way their service could do the most good as well as have the most impact. Some like Dorothy Judd and Florence Jones accepted government appointment and worked from within the government and from without as League leaders while others stayed in organizational leadership only.

Belle Brotherton, the State League's first president, had served as president of the Equal Suffrage League of Wayne County and had been an active suffragist.<sup>172</sup> During the final suffrage campaign victory she worked gathering signatures and financial contributions as MESA finance director.<sup>173</sup> Brotherton of Detroit was co-founder of the Women's City Club in Detroit and the Wayne County Women's Republican Club.<sup>174</sup> She was born Florence Belle Swickard in 1857. She married Wilbur Brotherton, an attorney, also active in the suffrage cause, and resided in Detroit. She helped Clara Arthur compile the section on Michigan for **The History of Woman Suffrage**. When she died

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<sup>172</sup>**Detroit Free Press**, "Detroiter Heads Woman Vote Body," April 5, 1919, p. 10.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Rachel Brett Harley and Betty MacDowell, **Michigan Women: Firsts and Founders**, (Lansing: Michigan Women's Studies Association, Inc, 1992), p. 9.

January 18, 1934, in Detroit, her obituary identified her as one of thirty-one women nationwide included on a bronze tablet by the NLWV as "American women who had done most to advance the suffrage cause."<sup>175</sup> During her years of leadership she continued to work for the early suffrage goals.

Under Brotherton MLWV maintained a Constitution and bylaws very similar in structure to that used by MESA and operated out of a Detroit office. During the early years MLWV offices were required by state law to be located in the same city as the residence of some key officers.<sup>176</sup> League records remained with the president and other officers and the continuity of files was broken. Meetings were held at varied locations at the convenience of the board. Although records available from the period are extremely limited and unclear on this point. A newspaper clipping from early in the League's history described the State League office move from Lansing to Detroit, just as existent records indicate other early regular moves.<sup>177</sup>

At the completion of Brotherton's single two year term in November 1921, Ella Aldinger became the second president of MLWV at the second convention, held in

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<sup>175</sup>Belle Brotherton, Biographical Sketches, Blurton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, news clipping, no identification.

<sup>176</sup>Detroit News, "Voter's Headquarters To Be in Mt. Clemens." April 19, 1931, Section 3, p. 16.

<sup>177</sup>newspaper clipping, circa 1923, Ella Aldinger Pappers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. A study of League files and newspaper clippings indicates that the office changed with each election as then state law required that some officers of an incorporated body live in the city of incorporation. The Lansing-Detroit change probably took place when Aldinger left office. This transfer also resulted in the reincorporation of the organization which has caused some dispute as to its actual age.



Detroit.<sup>178</sup> During the second year of her term fourteen local Leagues existed: Adrian, Ann Arbor, Bay City, Cassopolis, Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Grindstone City, Kalamazoo, Kaleva, Lansing, Marshall, Painesdale and Saginaw.<sup>179</sup> Representatives of these local Leagues attended the third State League convention held in Grand Rapids December 6 and 7, 1922.

Aldinger worked actively with the National Woman's Party militant efforts to secure national suffrage. She picketed outside the White House in May 1917 and was photographed doing so.<sup>180</sup> She was born in New York and graduated from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa.<sup>181</sup>

Aldinger was elected to the Lansing School Board in September 1916 and became school board president in 1921.<sup>182</sup> As school board president she became the first woman in Lansing to award high school diplomas.<sup>183</sup>

While president of MLWV Aldinger served as its representative to the Legislative Council of Michigan Women (LCMW).<sup>184</sup> That group represented influential women's groups in the state and attempted to maintain the earlier coalition force which brought

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<sup>178</sup>MLWV, **Statewide Conference of Women Voters**, pamphlet, December 6-7, 1922.

<sup>179</sup>MLWV, **Third Statewide Conference of Women Voters**, pamphlet, December 6, 1922.

<sup>180</sup>Ella Aldinger papers, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid, news clipping, n.d.

<sup>182</sup>Notice from Lansing City Clerk, September 1, 1916, Notice from Lansing City Clerk, September 1, 1920.

<sup>183</sup>Lansing High School Commencement Program, June 16, 1921; unidentified news clipping, June 17, 1921, Aldinger papers.

<sup>184</sup>Legislative Council of Michigan Women, **Report**, January 11, 1927, LCMW, Minutes, June 11, 1927; MLWV, **Bulletin #12**.

about suffrage. In addition to the League, other groups represented in the Council were: Business and Professional Women, Nurses Association, National Woman's Party, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the State Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>185</sup>

LCMW also worked, unsuccessfully, for passage of the Child Labor Amendment which they hoped would become the twentieth amendment to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>186</sup>

One by one, as differences arose such as those which occurred over the NWP proposed Equal Rights Amendment, groups began to drop away from LCMW diminishing its power.<sup>187</sup> Aldinger remained a force within LCMW after completing her MLWV presidency in 1923. She also continued her ties with the National Woman's Party.<sup>188</sup> The League of Women Voters on the other hand seemed to move away from militant feminist positions opposing the Equal Rights Amendment during the twenties.<sup>189</sup> State and national League emphasis moved away from feminist issues and focused upon non-partisan citizen governmental activity.

Aldinger turned over the reins of the young State League to Mrs. Craig C. Miller of Marshall in November, 1923.<sup>190</sup> Mrs. Miller, prior to her election to this State League position served as Secretary of the Michigan State Corrections Commission. During the twenties that Commission supervised the Industrial School for Boys in Lansing and the

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<sup>185</sup>LCMW, letterhead, June 10, 1925.

<sup>186</sup>LCMW, **Bulletin #1**, January 28, 1925.

<sup>187</sup>State Federation of Women's Clubs, letter, Ella Aldinger, December 5, 1927.

<sup>188</sup>letters, Ella Aldinger, papers.

<sup>189</sup>Cott, p. 122-29; Becker, p. 208-210.

<sup>190</sup>United Press, newspaper clipping, no identification, "Women Voters to Choose Mrs. Miller to Head Organization," November 1, 1923, no page, State League files.

Industrial School for Girls at Adrian.<sup>191</sup>

During the early twenties Miller also served as United States delegate to the International Suffrage Alliance conference at Rome, Italy.<sup>192</sup> Her interest in world conditions convinced Miller that the United States had a responsibility to assist other nations from chaos and to build world peace.<sup>193</sup>

Miller's final act as President was to chair the sixth annual Convention held at Kalamazoo in 1925. Delegates, who included Mrs. Henry Ford of Dearborn, met to discuss the Convention's central theme which was international relations and the world court.<sup>194</sup> That group heard Carrie Chapman Catt present a plea for American entry into the world court.<sup>195</sup>

At the November 1925 meeting Mrs. Miller relinquished the presidency to Mrs. Henry Sherrard of Detroit. Prior to her election Mrs. Sherrard participated actively in the Wayne County League and served as chair of the State League's Department on International Cooperation To Prevent War.<sup>196</sup>

Under Sherrard the State League continued to raise revenue through the sale of

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<sup>191</sup>"Marshall Woman On Commission," newspaper clipping, no identification, November 15, 1921, no page, State League files.

<sup>192</sup>"Women Voters to Choose.."

<sup>193</sup>"Mrs. Miller Honored," newspaper clipping, no identification, November 2, 1923, no page, State League files.

<sup>194</sup>"Social News-State Convention," newspaper clipping, no identification, November 11, 1923, State League Files.

<sup>195</sup>"Carrie Chapman Catt-picture caption," newspaper clipping, no identification, no date or page, State League files.

<sup>196</sup>United Press, "League of Women Voters," newspaper clipping, no identification, November 15, 1925, no page, State League files.

Good Citizenship Bonds. Prior to the December, 1927 gala fundraising banquet \$9000 of the \$10,000 needed was already pledged.<sup>197</sup> She remained active after her presidency attending the national convention in 1932 held in Detroit.<sup>198</sup>

Sherrard attended the National American Woman Suffrage Association Jubilee Convention in 1919 in Missouri as a delegate from Michigan. It was at this meeting that the National League of Women Voters was purposed.<sup>199</sup>

Mrs. Siegel (Dorothy) Judd of Grand Rapids followed Sherrard to the presidency serving from 1927 to 1929. She was actively involved in state government during her term and after, having direct involvement in permanent voter registration legislation and later Civil Service legislation. She served on the advisory committee which recommended creation of the state Civil Service Commission.<sup>200</sup> The Michigan Women's Hall of Fame recognized Mrs. Judd for her lifetime of service to her community and state. That service included appointments to state commissions from Governors Brucker, Fitzgerald, Murphy, Williams, and Romney. Three of these governors were Republicans and two were Democrats. Citizens of Grand Rapids elected her to serve as delegate to the State Constitutional Convention in 1961-62. She served numerous community organizations and worked lifelong for local, state, and national League activities. Judd

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<sup>197</sup>Dorothy Steffens, letter to William Comstock, December 1, 1927.

<sup>198</sup>**Bulletin, Michigan League of Women Voters**, Vol. X, May, June No 3, 1932. Focus on national convention.

<sup>199</sup>Photograph with caption, Detroit News Reference Department files, filed prior to June, 1919.

<sup>200</sup>Lansing Bureau, "Civil Service Plan Ordered." **The Detroit News**, October 14, 1935, p. 12.

described herself as the first League leader who had not been an active participant in the suffrage battle.<sup>201</sup>

The next president, Mrs. John T. (Florence) Lungerhausen of Mt. Clemens served from 1929-31. During her term of office she was involved in a serious automobile accident and incapacitated for a time, but resumed involvement and participated actively in the 1932 National Convention in Detroit.<sup>202</sup>

Mrs. Samuel B. (Genevieve) Moffet of Flint succeeded Mrs. Lungerhausen in 1931 and served until 1933. While State President she attended the National Convention held in Detroit in 1932 and wrote convention highlights for the MLWV Bulletin.<sup>203</sup> At the convention in which she left office State members were focusing on city budget cuts and the danger they posed to health and morale.<sup>204</sup> She remained an active force in the League operation after her term as president serving in a number of positions.

Mrs. Paul (Florence D.) Jones of Grand Rapids became the first State League president to serve four years serving from 1933 until 1937. Among other things she spoke at a Citizenship Training School held in Grosse Ile on June 8, 1934 sharing the podium with William Mc Farland, noted political scientist, and Ruth Whipple.<sup>205</sup> She

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<sup>201</sup>Dorothy Judd, biographical information compiled for application to Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, Gerald Elliott, "Dorothy Leonard Judd: 'Earnest In Serving,'" (Grand Rapids Press, September 5, 1978).

<sup>202</sup>**Bulletin Michigan League of Women Voters**, Vol. X.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>Esther Beck McIntyre, "Budget Paring Called A Peril," **Detroit News**, November 15, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>205</sup>postcard, Wayne County League of Women Voters, June 1, 1934. Mc Farland taught political science at the institution which later became Wayne State University. Whipple also an active Leaguer served as mayor of the city of Plymouth.

also served on the first State Civil Service Commission just as her term as president ended.

The next president was Mrs. Harry Applegate of Lansing. She served only one year from 1937-38. Then came: Mrs. Fred R. Johnson of Detroit, 1938-41; Mrs. James Starr 1941-43; Olive (Mrs. Frank) Haskins, 1943-45; Ruth (Mrs. Millard) Jacobsen, 1945-47; Lucille H. (Mrs. Richard) Ware, 1947-49; Jane (Mrs. Rensis) Likert, 1949-51; Louise Gilbert (Mrs. Stanley) Cain, 1951-53; Edna (Mrs. Clifton) Drury of East Lansing, 1953-55; Mabel Hessler (Mrs. Chester H.) Cable, 1955-57; Jean K. (Mrs. Berrien) Ketchum, 1957-59; Ruth Kestenbaum (Mrs. Howard) Lichterman of Huntington Woods, 1959-61; Fran or "Frannie" (Mrs. Thomas) Snelham of Birmingham, 1961-65; Margaret (Mrs. Robert) Foerch of Dearborn, 1965-69; Yvonne Atkinson, 1969-71; Beany (Mrs. Marvin) Tomber of Okemos, 1971-73; Maryalice Casey, 1973-75; Charlotte Powers (Mrs. Robert) Copp, 1975-79; Katherine Moore (Mrs. Edward) Cushman, 1979-81; Beverly (Mrs. William) Mc Aninch of Plymouth, 1981-85; Nancy (Mrs. Robert) White also of Plymouth, 1985-89; Fran Parker, 1989-93 and Connie Ferguson of Kalamazoo, 1993 to present.<sup>206</sup>

Each of these women brought with them strength, courage and style. Each had her

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<sup>206</sup>compiled by reviewing LWVMI archives at the Bentley Library and the files of The Detroit News Reference Department as well as the current holdings of LWVMI. The inconsistency in name identification is a reflection of the times in which these ladies served. During the early years full biographical material was easily obtainable. As the years progressed the ladies were more likely to be identified everywhere by their husbands names only, then during the fifties the use of both names became common, then in more recent years the husbands names seem to have disappeared from the material.



**Mrs. John T. Lungerhausen**  
former president



**Dorothy Judd**  
5th State League President



**Mrs. Edward Cushman**  
former president

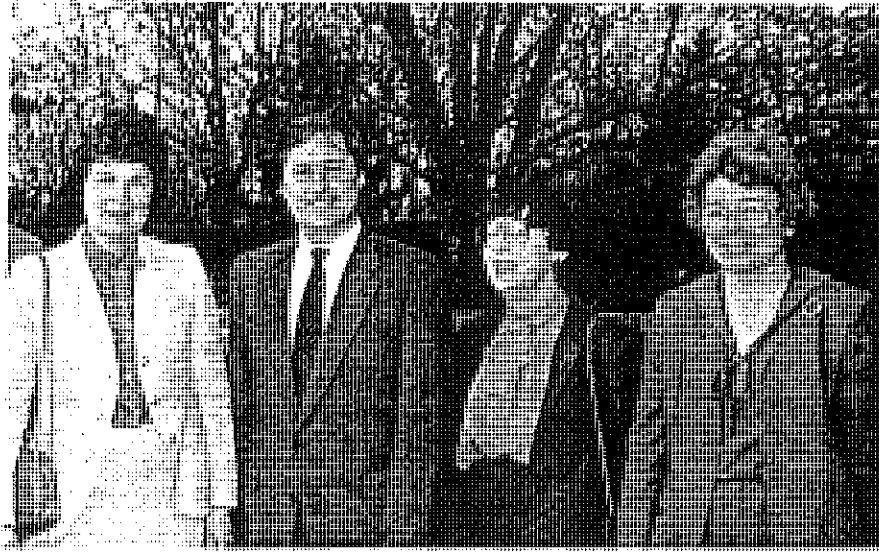


**Mrs. Robert Foerch**  
former president



**Mrs. Thomas Snelham**  
**former president**





**Former State League Presidents:  
Nancy White, Bev McAninch, and Fran Parker  
with Governor James Blanchard**



**Charlotte Copp  
Past President, LWVMI**



**Connie Ferguson  
President LWVMI**

own way of projecting objectives and imperatives into the work of the League. It is through their effort as well as through the efforts of the many other volunteers here unnamed that the League organization in Michigan has continued to develop and succeed.

## Chapter 8

### Visioning For The Future

Now the League enters the final quarter of its first century. Faced with its legacy of the past it continues to work for citizen education and an informed electorate. Societal changes may necessitate changes in format and style, but one can expect that the primary mission will remain unchanged.

Guidance for current action derives from proposed program. A look at the 1993-1995 **Agenda For Action** shows the immediate direction the organization will take. The program priorities include government, natural resources, and social policy. Government concerns focus on election laws, intergovernmental relations, taxation and budgeting. Natural resource concerns are the Great Lakes ecosystem, land use, pesticides, and solid waste management. Social policy/Human resource concerns remain children and youth, education (its structure, financing and goals and teacher certification), health care, the social services system, structure and funding of public libraries, and prisons.<sup>207</sup> The shopping list is long. The task awesome. In addition to the list above three new surveys and studies were adopted for the period. These relate to state mental health providers, a unicameral legislature, and the state's business tax structure.<sup>208</sup>

Where the organization will go in the future is the responsibility of each member. Members must decide where they would like to see it head and what they are willing to

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<sup>207</sup>**Agenda for Action**, League of Women Voters of Michigan.

<sup>208</sup>*Ibid.*

do to see it arrive there. Interested non-members also may want to consider what they envision the League's role to be in the future of the state and the nation and the what they can commit to make that vision become reality. The League is shaped by all of us, members and non-members alike. It can be no more or no less than each of us allows it to be. What will its future be? The vision becomes our own.

The November 1995 **Oakland Voter** contained a copy of a recent letter from Eleanor Revelle, LWVUS Program Planning Chair. In it Revelle announces the U.S. boards unprecedented step in proposing that the League work on a "comprehensive campaign to create a new political environment that will restore citizens to their rightful place at the center of our democracy."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Eleanor Revelle, Letter to League Members, appeared **Oakland Voter**, November, 1995, p 8.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

The objectives of this monograph were: to celebrate seventy-five years of achievement, to provide a historical background for the State League, to discover the reasons that the League was organized, to determine some results of this organization by focusing on visible effects on Michigan's governmental process, to look at the group's method of meeting its objectives, to look at its contribution to better government, to identify some leaders, and to provide a narrative history for the League of Women Voters of Michigan.

The research disclosed that the League in Michigan was founded as a direct result of the suffrage movement in this state and nationwide. It began as a tribute to suffrage leaders and as an organizational structure to provide citizen education first for its own newly enfranchised women and later for all citizens. The League was established as a result of the vision of Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffragists who wanted to create a citizen organization to provide a better government and nation for future generations.

Although the reasons the organization was established are clear the results are, sometimes, less so. League members exhibited early and continuing concern for a number of issues, moral and political. They developed a system of creating program goals through member participation and then worked within the governmental system to achieve their objectives. During the early years they worked successfully for voter

registration and ballot simplification, creation of the Civil Service System, grants in aid and education to bring about a decline in infant mortality, and child labor legislation. They provided the first non-partisan citizen education in the state and in the nation. They continued to work for betterment in government and in the nation's living conditions. The group worked toward all these goals collectively, but under the leadership of strong and competent individuals. In later years members continued to express concerns and take action on a wide variety of issues. They focused on natural resources, taxation, school finance reform, mental health care and facilities and much more.

Michigan League presidents featured highlight those leaders of the early and later state organization who led to achievement of the League's goals. It is clear from the structure and makeup of this organization that every effort always was made to encourage participation at every level. It may be this strong dependence on grassroots control which has prior to this made a straightforward narrative history of the organization unnecessary or undesirable. The structure demands a different sort of history, but a history nonetheless, which talks of achievements and objectives more than individuals.

The narrative history showed achievements and the meeting of objectives. It revealed a tradition of commitment to better government nationally, statewide, and locally, a commitment to betterment in education, improvement in conditions for children and the less fortunate, and in more recent years to our environment and natural resources. Success in child labor legislation, voter registration, and Civil Service reform are only a few of the many long term State League positions and goals. The League has a long string of successes, but prefers to throw itself into the next battle without taking

much time to acknowledge its victories. As the fourth quarter of a century of League activity begins, it is time to emphasize successes. This emphasis may lead to a revitalization and recommitment for the future.

The League grew out of a strong tradition of support for the rights of women. It has continued for three-quarters of a century by maintaining its belief in the principles of equality for all and a democratic form of government. The original premises upon which the League was built are as likely to succeed today as they were seventy-five years ago. While it has faced frustrations over the years it has also faced success. It can not be known whether the face of the nation or the state would be significantly different if the League had not been established. The principles of citizen participation are integral to the American democratic form of government. Some critics say that the League has become too much a part of the establishment to harness the citizen protest and energy which continue to exist. Perhaps it has enough spark remaining to recognize the potential for involvement of new, diverse members. As the League moves into the final quarter of its first century, it will be interesting to see how today's leaders choose to face the challenges placed before them. Part of the responsibility for carrying on the legacy of the seventy-five year history of the League of Women Voters and the seventy-five year suffrage history which preceeded it, as well as perhaps, the history of all womankind, can be placed on the doorstep of the organization which became "the only woman's group dedicated to the political education of woman."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Unidentified clipping, Belle Brotherton Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, October 24, 1921.

*About the Author*

Diane Margaret Dunn Rockall was born in 1945 in Detroit, Michigan, the eldest of two children of John and Shirley (Book) Dunn. She attended Detroit Public Schools graduating from Cody High School in 1963. She received a B.A. in Journalism in 1970, an M.L.S. in Library Science in 1977 and an M.A. in history in 1995 all from Wayne State University.

In 1983 Diane and her husband Arthur (Rocky) moved to Northville where they continue to reside and maintain active civic and social involvement since retirement.

For twenty-three years Diane worked for The Detroit News and was Reference Department Head at the time of her March 1987 early retirement. Since retirement the Rockalls have traveled extensively throughout the world.

Diane has been President and active committee member of the Michigan Chapter of the Special Libraries Association; President and other positions for the Wayne State University Library Science Alumni Association; President, Regional Vice President, Recording Secretary, and Program Chair for Women of Wayne; active in the Northville-Novis branch of the American Association of University Women, Northville Historical Society, and Northville Women's Club in the past ten years. During this period she also served as President of the League of Women Voters of Northville, Plymouth, Canton (NPC) which had also been the Northville, Plymouth, Canton, Novi (NPCN)



group and has since ceased to exist.

She co-authored a community walking tour book entitled **Step By Step Through Northville** and a User's Guide for The Detroit News Reference Department. She also writes a regular column for **The Northville Record** entitled "Mill Race Matters."

Additional post retirement activities have included Project Directorship for the Northville Oral History Project and a then LWV-NPCN Groundwater Education in Michigan (GEM) grant as well as serving as part of the Northville Historical Society Archival Committee which is currently creating a community archive. She serves on the Northville Board of Review.

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