

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DECATUR
HISTORY 1922 - 1976

22 ✓ The long fight for "Votes for Women" ended in 1920 with the 19th Amendment to
✓ the Constitution of the United States. The ^NNational League of Women Voters was
✓ organized in February, 1920, to educate the new women ^{voters}citizens and to work for
vt. "needed legislation." In October of the same year, a state League was organized ✓
in Illinois. The group of wives, mothers and distinguished professional women
who started the Illinois League had no pattern of organization, no money, no
standards of work, no public understanding of their purpose, but they had some
✓ active opposition from women who wished to see all political education in the
hands of the parties.

Local records (newspaper clippings) indicate that a "Macon County League of
Women Voters" was organized in December, 1923, with fifty-five members. A
meeting was held in Kaeuper Hall of Millikin University with Mrs. J. T. Ramsey,
✓ State Organizer, and Miss Edith Rockwood, state Executive Secretary, after months
of local effort by Mrs. G. A. Wright, Miss Amanda Elliott and others. Officers
selected at the meeting were:

President	- Mrs. Matlin Craig
Vice President	- Miss Beatrice Atlass
Recording Secretary	- Mrs. Robert Sylvester
Corresponding Secretary	- Mrs. Della Hubbard
Treasurer	- Mrs. Grover Poole
Directors	- Mrs. George A. Wright
	Mrs. Eugenie Bacon
	Mrs. G. E. Chamberlain
	Mrs. E. Myrtle Edwards
	Miss Eugenia Allen - all of Decatur
	Mrs. D. W. Earl of Forsyth
	Mrs. Carl Hoover of Macon
	Mrs. David Downing of Niantic
	Mrs. Hayden Veech of Long Creek

Miss Beatrice Atlass succeeded Mrs. Craig when she became ill, but resigned in
September, 1924. Mrs. P. W. Wipperman took over until the December election.

In December, 1924, new officers were elected in a meeting at the YWCA. they

were:

President	- Mrs. Ray Evans
Vice President	- Mrs. Ed Smith
Recording Secretary	- Mrs. R. F. Sylvester
Corresponding Secretary	- Mrs. H. R. Baker
Treasurer	- Mrs. Grover Poole

At this meeting
the State League of Women Voters presented the Macon County League with a large wool flag on a standard at this meeting as a reward for having sold the largest number of "Get Out the Vote" bulletins in the state.

✓ Mrs. Myrtle Edwards spoke at the meeting and indicated that the issues the League was interested in at the time were:

At the national level - entrance into the World Court.

At the state level -

- ratification of the National Child Labor Amendment and cooperation with the government in the promotion of the hygiene of maternity and infancy;
- shortening the working day for women in industry;
- the Australian ballot, and shortening the ballot by removal of the presidential electors;
- appropriations for the farm colony for women offenders of the law;
- establishment of women on the jury service;
- general merit system in Civil Service;
- repeal of the state law placing the power of quarantine and examination for venereal disease in the courts;
- non-partisan election system in local elections and election of the judiciary.

There is a gap in the records until April of 1927 when Mrs. G. F. Miller was elected president of the Macon County League of Women Voters at a meeting held in the YWCA. Other officers were:

Vice President	- Miss Patricia Hunt
Secretary	- Mrs. G. I. Dovalt
Treasurer	- Mrs. W. A. Ivey

Miss Emily Taft of the state League office spoke to the group on that day.

Mrs. Miller resigned in March, 1928, because of illness. Miss Patricia Hunt

took office then, along with:

Vice President	- Mrs. G. I. Covalt
Corresponding Secretary	- Mrs. Cora B. Ryman
Recording Secretary	- Mrs. J. E. Brookshier
Treasurer	- Mrs. O. H. Quickel
Directors	- Mrs. James O'Hara Mrs. G. F. Miller

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✓ In April of 1929, Mrs. Covalt succeeded Miss Hunt as ^PPresident at a business meeting held in City Hall. Mrs. Dow Harvey of the state League was the speaker and talked of the problem of the one-room school. At that time, the state government was paying school districts \$10 for each child in attendance. Other officers elected were:

Vice President	- Mrs. Cora B. Ryman
Recording Secretary	- Mrs. Mays Duncan
Treasurer	- Mrs. Winifred E. Drennan

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✓ In March of 1930, the business meeting was held in the Supervisors' room of the ^CCourt House. Plans were made to celebrate on March 27th the tenth anniversary of the national organization. Officers elected were:

President	- Mrs. G. I. Covalt
Vice President	- Mrs. Cora B. Ryman
Secretary	- Mrs. Mays Duncan
Treasurer	- Mrs. Winifred E. Drennan.

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The record of this early League ends in 1931 with the election of:

President	- Mrs. Mays Duncan
Vice President	- Mrs. C. M. Borchers
Secretary	- Mrs. O. H. Quickel
Treasurer	- Mrs. Leo Michl

Several of the women were to travel to Springfield in the next week to hear discussion of bills which had been endorsed by the League. The issues they were interested in at that time were the Massachusetts ballot, child welfare bill, / motor drivers' license fee^s, and the eight-hour day for women. The group voted to forward greetings to Mrs. Paul Douglas, the former Emily Taft.

In September, 1931, the Decatur Herald reported that the League of Women Voters was completing plans to revive the study groups, which had been

✓ discontinued two years previously, with a study ^{of} taxation. In the same month, the League and the Civics division of the Women's Club sponsored meetings with Miss Louisa K. Fast of New York City speaking on "Disarmament." No further references to Decatur's first League of Women Voters ^(of Macon County) could be found.

✓ In ~~1945~~, ^{in 1945} According to Mrs. James Leigh, another group of Decatur women met to determine how to form a unit of the League of Women Voters. In remarks made on September 21, 1966, the 20th anniversary of this second Decatur League, ^{in Decatur} Mrs. Leigh said:

✓ "One of the man-sized problems facing us in our first year was getting a dynamic person for president. We wanted someone who was well known in the community but not someone who represented any particular social or economic sector. During the war years Decatur had what was known as the Victory Canning Center. It was part of the general conservation movement of those years along with the Victory Clothing Center and the many Victory Gardens. Families in all walks of life brought fruits and vegetables to the Canning Center for processing for a small fee. Miss Blossom Redmon was the Center's very successful and popular director. She knew hundreds of families, she could organize, she had an excellent sense of humor and she was interested vitally in the work being done by the Leagues elsewhere. - It was difficult to persuade her to be our first president but we managed."

✓ Mrs. Walter T. Fisher, state League President, Mrs. Orville Foreman, state Vice President, in charge of legislation, and Miss Julia Macpherson, state Organization Secretary, helped with this second League organization in Decatur.

Following that 1945 meeting, in April, 1946, the Decatur League of Women Voters elected officers at a meeting at the YWCA:

President	- Miss Blossom Redmon
Vice President	- Mrs. Paul Temple
Secretary	- Mrs. Jesse Birks
Treasurer	- Mrs. John Kuhns
Director	- Mrs. David Wood

Twenty-six members paid dues and became charter members on the spot. Those members were:

Mrs. Mary Andrews
Miss Barbara Bailey
Mrs. R. J. Baker
Mrs. L. V. Crouch
Mrs. Douglas Johnson
Mrs. Lawrence E. Knuth
Mrs. John C. Kuhns
Mrs. James Leigh
Mrs. Charles Lippert, Jr.
Miss Anne H. McFarlane
Mrs. R. C. McMillan
Mrs. C. Dale Patrick
Mrs. A. D. Pierson
Mrs. George Read
Mrs. John Rehtin
Miss Blosson Redmon
Mrs. Lewis Reynolds
Mrs. Clifford E. Smith
Miss Barbara Stauber
Mrs. R. B. Stauber
Miss Elizabeth Stiller
Mrs. Paul Temple
Mrs. Forest Womack
Mrs. David G. Wood
Miss Margaret Wood
Miss Marian Wood

✓ The women were divided into three study groups, with Mrs. George Read as chairman ✓
of a group meeting mornings; Mrs. Charles Lippert as chairman of a group meeting
afternoons and Mrs. James C. Leigh as chairman of an evening group. They planned
to meet every other week to study issues of importance, with the entire
membership ^{meeting} together three times a year. ✓

At the first meeting of the new Board a decision was made to study
legislation concerning the control of the atomic bomb, to be followed by studies
of the United Nations Organization, and the problem of food for Europe and the
hungry of the world. As local study projects, public health, housing and schools
were mentioned. Mrs. Leigh, in her ^{Twentieth} ~~20th~~ anniversary remarks, said: ✓

"One of our first discussions was about the feasibility of Atomic
Control. (We're still fretting about it.) Another discussion
centered on a local issue, whether the Decatur School Special

Charter was good or bad. (We still have school problems.) In 1947, our records show that Judge Greenias, Robert Witker, former Secretary of the Community Chest, and the Rev. Crothers of the Westminster Church presented a panel discussion on Local Institutions and Welfare Conditions - again we're still working and still interested."

Throughout 1946, these additional "charter" members joined the new League:

In May

Mrs. Jesse B. Birks
Mrs. E. C. Hamill
Mrs. William Hatfield
Mrs. J. D. MacKeechie
Mrs. James Moore
Mrs. Madeline Babcock Smith
Mrs. I. A. Wallins

In June

Mrs. A. H. Berg
Mrs. B. L. Fryxell
Mrs. Gerald Harwood
Mrs. C. M. Jack
Mrs. H. J. Pettee

In July

Mrs. Robert Lewis
Mrs. Robert Olanick
Mrs. Miss Ethel Parkinson
Mrs. Robert A. Wood

In September

Mrs. H. Wayne Hill

In October

Mrs. Horace Garman
Mrs. S. E. Greenfield
Mrs. Jack Greider
Mrs. Walter Myers
Mrs. Maurice Sly
Mrs. Elbert Smith
Mrs. M. J. Wright
Mrs. William Beatty
Mrs. Hanley F. Brock
Miss Gladys C. Galligar
Mrs. David Greider
Mrs. Everett McConnell

In November

Mrs. J. A. Hartley
Mrs. Frederick D. Leach
Nellie Jo Sager

In December

Mrs. J. A. Melrose
Miss Christine P'Simer
Mrs. Eric Stern

In January, 1947

Mrs. Walter McLaughlin
Mrs. M. H. Goldman

In 1953, at the suggestion of the National League, the name of the local organization was changed from League of Women Voters of Macon County to League of Women Voters of Decatur, since, under League rules, a county league could not take action below the county level. The local league always had been, and continued to be, interested in local issues, as well as county, state and national issues.

The early principles of the League, set forth in 1920, have not changed:

✓ "The League of Women Voters would always welcome women of all political parties. It would never tell the individual voter what candidate to support, but would try to supply facts on which to base a decision. By agreement of its members, after study and discussion, the league would take stands on specific issues and work for measures which it believed were in the public interest. It would be a service organization to all citizens, not confining its benefits to its members."

- from Forty Years of Faith and Works (LWV/ILL, 1960)

Women who have served as president of the Decatur League, the second in Macon County, are:

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Miss Blossom Redmon
Mrs. Malvin Goldman
Mrs. George Kuhn
Mrs. Floyd Birt
Mrs. Clifford Smith
Mrs. John Donovan
Mrs. H. W. Gibson
Mrs. L. L. Colvis
Mrs. Neal Doubleday
Mrs. Henry Bachrach
Mrs. Thomas L. Hurst
Mrs. Clifford Smith
Mrs. W. H. Tilley
Mrs. Keith Westenhaver
Mrs. Robert C. Schade ~~SCHE~~
Mrs. Robert W. Ohlsen
Mrs. Charles J. Meyerson

This material was prepared during the presidency of Mrs. Kenneth Brown in 1976. Governmental issues of interest to the League of Women Voters in 1976 cover a wide range. A re-examination of the United Nations Organization is proposed at the national level, as is an evaluation of sources of energy and the government's role in meeting future needs. Leagues in Illinois have just completed a study of the current level of state services in the child welfare field. The Decatur League is undertaking a new study of School District #61. In addition, in our bicentennial year, all Leagues are still working for ratification of the Twenty-Seventh Amendment to the Constitution which would

ensure that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."