

History of the League of Women Voters

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League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS)

Since 1920 we have been an activist, grassroots organization whose leaders believed that voters should play a critical role in democracy. The League of Women Voters was founded by Carrie Chapman Catt in 1920 during the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The convention was held just six months before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote after a 72-year struggle.

The League began as a "mighty political experiment" designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibilities as voters. It encouraged them to use their new power to participate in shaping public policy. From the beginning, the League has been an activist, grassroots organization whose leaders believed that citizens should play a critical role in advocacy. It was then, and is now, a nonpartisan organization. League founders believed that maintaining a nonpartisan stance would protect the fledgling organization from becoming mired in the party politics of the day. However, League members were encouraged to be political themselves, by educating citizens about, and lobbying for, government and social reform legislation.



This holds true today. The League is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public. The League has a long, rich history, that continues with each passing year.

Other resources:

- LWVUS, "100 Years of LWV," <https://www.lwv.org/about-us/history>, accessed 2021-06-03
- Young, Louise M.; 1970; *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (Contributions in Criminology and Penology)
- Stuhler, Barbara; 2003; *For the Public Record: A Documentary History of the League of Women Voters*
- Cashin, Maria Hoyt; 2013; *Sustaining the League of Women Voters in America*
- Jefferson-Jenkins, Carolyn; 2020; *The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters*

League of Women Voters of Indiana (LWVIN)

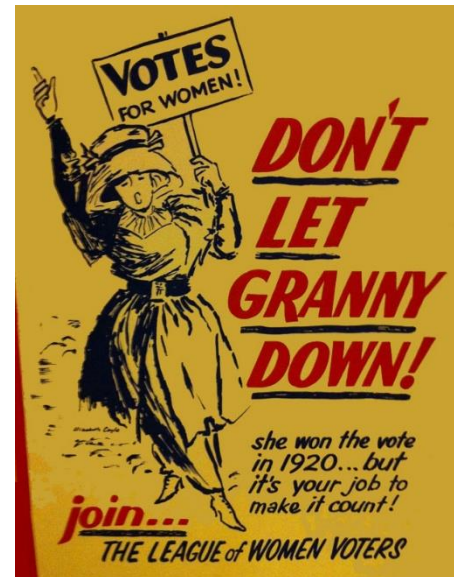
LWVIN was also organized in 1920, when 112 local chapters of the Indiana Franchise League folded into the LWVUS. Most of those local chapters disbanded or reorganized. There are now 23 local Leagues in Indiana, including Bloomington–Monroe County.

League of Women Voters of Bloomington–Monroe County (LWV-BMC)

LWV-BMC began as a Women's Franchise League in Bloomington in 1913. When the League of Women Voters was formed, the Bloomington Franchise League chose to join. Over the years, the League in Bloomington-Monroe County has been involved in educating the public and providing information on local government, registering and assisting voters, and specific ongoing projects, such as candidate forums, legislative updates, Keys to the Candidates, VOTE 411, and redistricting reform. Special issues through the years range from rat control and PCB cleanup early in our history to Indiana election laws, at-risk children, and voter suppression. LWV-BMC currently has 135 members.

Timeline of Accomplishments

"The Bloomington Branch of the Women's Franchise League was organized May, 1913. Nine ladies met at the office of Miss Carrie Slocumb and elected temporary officers. Mrs. A.J. Sebenthal was chosen President and Mrs. Chester A. Evans Secretary-Treasurer." So begins the history of the League of Women Voters of Bloomington–Monroe County as stated in the ledger of the Bloomington Women's Franchise League 1913-1919. This group and its national organization became the League of Women Voters in 1920.



Topics from meetings and publications during 1920s and 1930s:

- Women's personal need of interest in politics
- Laws of Indiana regarding women
- Economic basis for woman's suffrage
- Position of women in ancient Rome
- Tax reform in Indiana
- Causes of the present European war
- Ballot for women
- Experience of a lobbyist for the suffrage amendment
- Woman's suffrage: a world movement
- Women in industry
- Women in Indiana
- State government
- Machinery of elections
- Party organization
- Women wage earner
- Needed changes in the form and nature of the ballot

Topics addressed during the 1940s:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interstate trade barriers • State school system • Situation in the Far East • Lend/lease bill • Public Finance and Taxation • Defense aid • Equal Rights Amendment (October 13, 1941) • Public health and defense • Work relief and the WPA projects in Monroe County • State legislation, including the marriage law, school legislation, juvenile court bill, and registration law | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price control • Pan Americanism • Pure milk • New patriotism • Social security • Women in government • Foreign policy • UN and Dumbarton Oaks Conference • Organization of Monroe County Department of Public Welfare • Education in defense areas |
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Activities during the 1950s and 1960s:

The League often held special public meetings with state and national speakers and often distributed “broad­sides” to provide information about these and other issues. During the 1950s and 1960s, the League published a local government handbook, later entitled, “Here is Your Local Government.” The League continues to inform members and citizens about local, state, and national issues. It supported school reorganization and the establishment of the Utilities Service Board. The League worked diligently to monitor actions related to water resources including publication of “A Study of the Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Systems of Bloomington, Indiana,” which was updated in September 1965 with a small publication called, “On the Waterfront.”

Highlights from the 1970s:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observed local government meetings • Registered voters for elections • Helped with Nationwide Survey of Attitudes Toward the UN • Revised and printed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guide to Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana ○ Here is Your Local Government ○ The annual Monroe County Governmental Officials List | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on state-wide poor relief study • Monitored ratification of the ERA • Held open meeting on the national energy problem • Compiled “Keys to the Candidates,” which was published before each election in the Herald-Telephone [later renamed the Herald Times] |
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Highlights from the 1980s:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported election results from each precinct to the Herald Times • Published Lake Monroe and Watershed Area (1980) • Participated in Bloomington 4th of July parades • Held public meetings for residents to meet their Representatives and Senators in the Indiana General Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied Literacy Problems and Possible Solutions in Monroe County • Studied Indiana Election Laws and suggested changes • Gave voting machine demonstrations • Established the Observer Corps, which attended and monitored meetings of many local governmental boards and commissions |
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- Held informational meeting on Election Laws, PCBs, General Assistance, Literacy and Planning, and Zoning in Monroe County
- Held televised debates with 8th and 9th District Congressional candidates

Activities in the 1990s

Throughout the 1990s the League monitored developments in the above areas, with special attention to the cleanup of PCBs, plans for the Hoosier National Forest, and various issues related to Lake Monroe. In 1991 the League published “A Study of Young At-Risk Children in Monroe County, Indiana 1991.” *More information is being compiled.*

Activities in the 2000s

Information is being compiled.

Activities in the 2010s

Information is being compiled.

Activities in the 2020s

Information is being compiled.

Past Presidents

2018-21: Ann Birch	1963-65: Mrs. John Fraser Hart
2015-18: Kate Cruikshank	1961-63: Mrs. Shelby Gerking (Lou)
2013-14: Doris Wittenburg	1959-61: Mrs. Byrum Carter
2011-12: Ann Wrenn & Linda Shanks	1957-59: Mrs. Robert W. Thompson
2010: Ann Wrenn	1955-57: Mrs. Chase C. Mooney
2009: Sally Hegeman & Ann Wrenn	1953-55: Mrs. Henry Oliver
2007-08: Sally Hegeman	1953: Mrs. Reynold Carlson
2005-06: Pat Harris	1951-52: Mrs. Walkefield
2003-04: Sally Hegeman & Bertina Rudman	1949-51: Mrs. Ralph Cleland
2000-02: Joyce Pace	1947-49: Mrs. Austin Clifford
1999: Co-VPs Joyce Pace & Bertina Rudman	1946: Mrs. Alfred Lindesmith
1997-98: Doris Wittenburg	1945: Mrs. Wolcott Telfer
1991-96: Nancy Lumbley	1944: Mrs. Wolcott Telfer
1990: Kathryn Brown & Linda Stafford	1943: Mrs. S. T. Burns
1988-89: Nancy Boerner	1943: Mrs. Barnes
1986-87: Nancy Ross	1942: Mrs. Burns
1985: Marge Faber	1941: Mrs. A. J. Roger
1983-85: Pam Lohmann	1937-39: Mrs. R. W. Holmstead
1981-83: Iris Kiesling	1935-37: Mrs. C.J. Sembower
1979-81: Bertina Rudman	1920-1934: unknown
1977-79: Alice Deppe	1919: Mrs. Chester Evans
1975-77: Kathy Dilcher	1918: Mrs. Chester Evans
1973-75: Anne Rippy	1917: Mrs. James A. Woodburn
1971-73: Mrs. Paul Mahlberg (Marilyn)	1916: Mrs. J.A. Woodburn
1969-71: Mrs. Laurence Brown	1915: Mrs. J. B. Wilson
1967-69: Mrs. Donald Gray	1914: Mrs. Frank Aydelotte
1965-67: Mrs. Ray Crittenden (Kathie)	1913: Mrs. A. J. Subenthal

Member Reminiscences

Pat Harris, a member and past president of LWV-BMC and onetime LWVIN state board member, compiled interviews or written commentary from several longtime members of our League. Interviews were conducted from late 2009 through March 2010.

[Marge Faber](#)

[Bertina Rudman](#)

[Natalie Wrubel](#)