

## League of Women Voters | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

### *LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS*

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THE CRUSADE for women's rights probably dates back to Eve.

We do know, at least, that ancient history confirms the masculine attitude of superiority, for, in 205 B.C., the Romans passed a law prohibiting women from driving chariots.

It was only after a spirited women's-rights campaign, which continued for about a quarter of a century, that the "licenses" were restored.

To the inevitable question most men ask, "Why only women voters'?"

League members are glad to explain that the League is an outgrowth of the women's suffrage movement and its first aim was to be a citizenship school for the new women voters.

Realizing that it should not underestimate the power of women, the League expanded its purpose to the standard of today, to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.

The Nutley League was organized in 1924, just four years after the ratification of the 19th Amendment giving the women the vote and four years after the League of Women Voters on a national level evolved from the suffragette movement.

Year after year since it was founded, the League has informed the voters about candidates and issues, has acted as a clearinghouse for questions and answers on registration and voting, made basic studies on governmental problems on all levels and been a persistent force for reform on a few major issues.

The League considers problems on three levels - local, state and national. Often a problem in one area is the direct result of a situation in another, so that many related aspects must be studied in order to view properly the whole picture.

It is usually found that local study items arouse the greatest interest among League members as well as the townspeople.

This is probably due to the greater opportunity to know and study the situation at first hand, and because the information is not readily found elsewhere.

Vitally interested in education, the League, on a Nutley level, has repeatedly

chosen the school system as a subject for study.

In 1924 the League was concerned with the need for a new High School building. At that time a public meeting was held to publicize a survey made by Columbia University showing that a new school was necessary.

More recently, again after sufficient study had convinced members of the need, the League worked for the new Radcliffe School and the Junior High addition.

In 1957 the Nutley unit began its most ambitious school project thus far, which culminated in the publishing of the "Know Your School" handbook.

In all, 76 League members participated in the project which involved countless interviews with school personnel and others connected with the school system as well as a great deal of research, promotion, and actual selling of the book.

Annually for the school board election, and every four years for the Town Commission election, the League prints and distributes information about the candidates and arranges for their appearance at a public meeting.

Because of the non-partisan policy of the League, the group has never sponsored a candidate, but was instrumental, along with the Woman's Club, in starting the Woman's Campaign Committee which annually selects a woman to run for the school board.

Schools, while important, have not been the League's only Nutley interest. In the Spring of 1949 the League published a "Know Your Town" book and over 1,000 copies were distributed throughout Nutley.

*The Nutley Sun*, commenting on the book, said, "Filling a void, the book has won the approbation of town officials. In it, for the first time, will be included the major town codes governing health, building, fire prevention and zoning.

"In a commercial section, there is to be a listing by classification of town businesses and industry. The history traces back an unbroken chain of events during 345 years since the original land grant by the Yantacaw Indians to the Dutch Colonists."

Much of the League program of work repeats itself as new members join the organization or new situations cause it to reevaluate its thinking.

About 10 years ago, a study was made of the council-manager type of government as compared to the Nutley commission form and this year members have chosen to study this subject again.

The commission meetings, as well as school board meetings and special hearings, are regularly attended by League members as observers.

The League of Women Voters takes a stand on an issue only after sufficient study and arrival at consensus by a majority of its membership.

Other Nutley problems which have been studied over the years are town planning, recreation, parks, housing, tax assessing and the need for reassessment.

The League of Women Voters is one of the few public-interest groups working in the field of state government. This is the area which seems to attract the least general interest, yet which is greatly in need of modernization.

Following the League policy of working from a solid basis of facts, Nutley League members have visited many state institutions over the years.

The "go and see" trips have included tours of N.J. colleges, the N.J. School for the Deaf, the North Jersey Training School for Retarded Girls and the State Legislature in action.

With 83 other N.J. Leagues, the Nutley unit is concerned with many state problems. On the state level, as on the others, the women study, then take appropriate action. Government officials, aware of this pattern, respect their stands.

For many years the League studied the election laws and urged certain reforms. The permanent voters registration is due in part to persistent League effort.

The passing of the water referendum last Fall spelled real progress to the League in its long fight for an adequate water program for New Jersey.

There were many other civic groups active in the struggle to get a new, up-to-date State Constitution, but the League was among the first and most persistent.

After all, the women remembered that it took from 1848 to 1920 to get a federal amendment to give them a vote!

The adoption of the new Constitution in 1948 was a milestone in the League's history.

Somewhat less known, but vitally important was the Reorganization of the New Jersey Health Department in 1951. This too represented tangible progress in League aims.

In recent years the state level concerns have been with the problems of education on all levels and its companion problem, taxes.

Almost continuous study of New Jersey's tax structure has convinced the women that the home owner now pays a disproportionate amount of taxes and they recommend a broad base, graduated personal income tax.

They believe this to be the fairest, most practical method of taxation.

Perhaps through the years, the League of Women Voters has been best known

for its voter service efforts.

The constant desire has been to stimulate the voter and give him an opportunity to know the candidates and understand the issues.

To this end, the League holds candidates' meetings, gets out non-partisan election information, nails up "Vote" signs, runs taxi service to the polls, and baby sits on election day ... all on a non-partisan basis.

Although both major parties have registration drives, the League feels the need for a non-partisan effort.

They have written hundreds of letters each year to new voters (just turned 21) and contacted new Nutley residents. The members paste signs on their cars and man registration booths.

They feel they are, in part, responsible for the high percentage of registered voters in Nutley.

The "National" League is no more than the sum total of all members of local Leagues; when a woman joins the League she joins the League of Women Voters of the United States.

A position on a national governmental issue is no more than the consensus of member thinking as expressed through the local Leagues.

The national program is that chosen in national convention by delegates from local leagues and members work on the national program as they work on local and state league programs in their local leagues.

Testimony before Congressional committees, however, usually is given by a representative of the League of Women Voters of the United States, who speaks for the League as a whole.

In the past three months, four national officials of the League have testified seven times, before four Senate Committees and three Committees of the House.

Also in recent months, four articles from the "National Voter" have been inserted in "The Congressional Record." The League's position on the loyalty - security program also appeared in "The Congressional Record." All this indicates the respect and weight Congressmen give to League opinion.

In 1955 the Nutley League held 22 community-wide neighborhood meetings on "Individual Liberty" and shared with almost 300 people the search for a satisfactory balance between individual liberty and the public interest in respect to Congressional Investigations.

Through these "Neighborhood Forums" several hundred Freedom Agenda booklets dealing with some phases of individual liberty were distributed.

In recognition of this community project, a project undertaken by local

leagues throughout the United States, the Nutley League received a citation from the National Freedom Agenda Committee which read: "For your success in stimulating the citizens of your community to a greater understanding of our American Heritage, our freedoms, rights and responsibilities."

As a part of this project an essay contest on the Bill of Rights was sponsored in the Junior and Senior High Schools. On the Bill of Rights Day, December 15, the President of the Nutley League awarded prizes won in this contest, and later the two top winners were taken on a tour of historic Philadelphia.

The League's interest in foreign policy stems from the time it was still the Suffrage Association, when it went on record for a League of Nations before The League of Nations was born in 1919.

In the second year of growth the National League formed a committee on International Cooperation to Prevent Wars.

Thus "study and action" in the foreign policy field has been a National League item ever since, and has been adopted year after year at the biennial conventions of the National League by its members, becoming an integral part of the Nutley League program.

Examples of this work by the League in Nutley started in 1945 when neighborhood meetings all over town, sponsored by the League, held intensive discussions of the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals for a United Nations in order to reach many citizens and impress on them the fact that an important decision by the government was about to be made, and that each one could play a part in the making of it.

The backing and strengthening of the UN has been a primary item of League work ever since. The National League keeps an official observer at the UN meetings in New York who gives reports from her on-the-spot observations.

UN trips are frequently planned and taken by the Nutley League members and include children.

In the celebration of UN week each fall, the League cooperates with the other organizations in town and many League members take part in this program.

The League's interest in international trade, with study of the effects of high tariffs, world trade organizations and the role of the United States in promoting freer trade relations among nations, has been carried into action many times over the years when Congress has had trade legislation to vote upon.

The League has been consistent in taking a stand for freer trade relations and informed Congress of its opinion in such cases as "Reciprocal Trade Renewal Act," GAAT and the ITO.

Locally, during 1955-57, members of the Nutley League, with the other Leagues in Essex County, made a survey of 75 North Jersey manufacturers to

determine the effect of foreign trade on their business.

The results were tabulated, and copies were given to the manufacturers and interested businessmen who took part in it as well as to Congress.

In 1956, because of the Hungarian and Suez crises, the National League initiated a "Focus on the Future" program. In Nutley, a series of neighborhood workshops was planned for community discussion with the League in the attempt to understand the international background leading to such crises, and what the United States foreign policy should be in looking toward the future.

Five workshops were carried out during January in spite of stormy weather, with representatives from 16 town organizations joining with us.

In Spring of 1959, three community workshops were held to gather background material and knowledge for further study and discussion the coming year.

Outside speakers were engaged to present up-to-date facts in three areas of the world: Western Europe, the Communist Countries and Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Also at the April luncheon, the speaker presented the background and implications of a divided Germany.

Although a real study and work organization, the League mixes much social pleasure along with its seriousness. It has always had two enjoyable events of this type on its calendar - the April annual luncheon and the June garden party which were held until 1950 when they were given up in favor of a dessert-coffee evening meeting for the annual election of officers and adoption of a local program.

The home of Mrs. Faris Feland, in The Enclosure, with its beautiful show-place gardens, was the scene of the garden party many years and it was there in 1949 that the first president, Mrs. Russell Phillips, and the charter members, Mrs. Edwin Sharp, Mrs. Feland and Mrs. Olive Sanford were feted.

Mrs. Sanford, for her long association with the League, was awarded an honorary life-membership in January, 1955. Mrs. Sanford was the second president of the Nutley League, serving for three years before taking over the N.J. State League presidency.

She is also known for her active civic interest, her work in the N.J. State Board of Education, and her long residency in Nutley.

Each League is supported financially by the civic-minded citizens of its town. The total membership of more than 127,000 form over 1,080 local Leagues located in all 50 states of the Union.

The League appeals to young mothers anxious to know what's going on

beyond the line of drying diapers, to grandmothers who find their appetite for study and action constantly revitalized as well as to all active civic workers.

Membership is open to any citizen interested in preserving democracy and offers rich rewards in knowledge of government and in deep and lasting friendships.