

FRANCES NELSON, 1940-1941

The oldest League minutes on file detail a dinner meeting on September 19, 1940, with 45 members attending and Frances Nelson presiding. National League concerns focused on the Lend Lease bill. A state study involved the reorganization of school districts. Libraries and school issues were the focus of state items. Schools were also predominant among local concerns. Several of the meetings were held at the YWCA

One interesting action item reflects civil service practices at the time. Mrs. Fowler told of contacting the mayor and civil service commissioners, along with members of other women's groups, in regard to the civil service examinations to be held for the position of secretary to the Pension Board. The commissioners at first limited applicants to men. The efforts of the women persuaded the mayor to write a letter urging that women also be candidates. The result: the commissioners opened the position to both men and women.

MYRA FOWLER, 1941-1943

Meetings were moved to the College of Puget Sound commons and were changed to monthly rather than twice monthly due to the difficulties caused by the war. One of the program items at both state and local levels addressed concerns about the lack of satisfactory laws regulating child labor.

JUDGE BLANCHE FUNK MILLER, 1943-1944

Among the various speakers featured at League meetings was Mayor Cain, who discussed city planning, Professor Mauder from the University of Washington speaking on "Some Economic Aspects of the Post War World" and Mrs. Louise Taylor, who talked about the War Manpower Commission. Prior to the fall election, congressional candidates John Coffee and Warren Magnuson spoke. Three other speakers addressed local and national health issues.

CARLA PAKENHAM, 1945-1946

The crucial need for housing and the problems of returning veterans were the subjects of many meetings. Among national issues was a discussion of the control of atomic energy, a completely new problem. A February, 1946 meeting reports the first proposal for a city manager plan of government for Tacoma.

Many meetings over the span of the next few years were devoted to the United Nations.

EMILY SCHWEINLER, 1946-1947

Program adopted at the state level found the Tacoma League looking at the qualifications for juvenile court judges, juvenile laws, and studying the improvement of county government.

AMY MAGILL, 1948? (brief presidency)

A meeting was held about the need for more electric power in the northwest to bring new industries and furnish employment. Program items in 1949-1950 included juvenile protection and state taxation.

GRACE ROWE HARRISON, 1949-1950

The topic of a June, 1949 meeting was "Compulsory Health Insurance." Pros and cons were discussed. A physician said that doctors would be hampered by regulations, and that record-keeping would interfere with time for patient care.

League members reviewed the city charter and supported a council-manager form of government. At an August, 1949 meeting a formal motion was approved to circulate petitions to approve putting before the voters the matter of electing freeholders to write a new city charter.

National program suggestions that year included support for conservation of natural resources, and promotion of a national health insurance program.

HAZEL PFLUGMACHER, 1950

...presided at a February 25, 1950 meeting [note from Nancy: If this is all the information we have, do we believe she was, or acted as, a president? Keep in? Drop?]

HELEN L. SOHLBERG, 1950-1955

My term began "mid-term." The Tacoma League had been on the point of disbanding. State president Myra Fowler called a meeting at the home of Amy Magill, who was a past local president. We decided to try to put the League back together again. I became president and then served two successive terms of two terms each.

About this time, a number of Tacoma people including League members were looking at city government. They were unhappy about bad publicity concerning the city and its officials.

Mayor John Anderson appointed a committee of public citizens to study and make recommendations for Tacoma city government. The names of the persons on the committee were published. I noticed there were no women listed.

The next day after school I walked downtown from Stadium High School to talk to Mayor Anderson. I told him of my concern. He asked me for suggestions of women's names. I gave him some. He turned to me then and said, "What about you?" So I served; Dr. Hugh Tudor was chairman. You probably know the rest of the story — the City Manager government came into being.

? 2 years back?

In 1952 the cover of a national magazine named Tacoma as one of America's most vice ridden cities. On December 18, 1956 the same Look Magazine honored Tacoma among eleven cities in the nation to receive the title All American City. The Tacoma League was a co-sponsor of the effort to earn this award.

The League and the American Association of University Women (Helen was president of the two organizations at the same time) succeeded in ousting a 43 year old commission form of government by replacing it with the council-manager form. A new diverse council included League member Clara Goering, as well as businessmen, a doctor, lawyer, professor, a women's garden club columnist and a title-holding professional wrestler.

In addition to their focus on city government reform, League members studied national program topics such as inflation, mutual security, conservation, and the United Nations. At the local level they also gave a great deal of attention to parks and schools.

In March of 1954 there appears for the first time a study named, "Redistricting and Reapportionment of Congressional Legislative Districts." This item would be the subject of an

ongoing effort over a period of many years, starting with the decision by delegates to the 1955 state League convention to write and promote an initiative to accomplish redistricting.

RUTH KORS, 1955-1957

What wonderful memories I have of the League. I joined in 1953 after my husband and I moved from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I needed to learn more about government and voting in my new state. It was a wonderful way to get away from babies and use my intellect! After I became a board member, Frances Garen and I drove to a League meeting in Eastern Washington and I told her that I was pregnant with my fifth child. She wondered if I still planned to be president, and I said, sure, no problem. On December 5th Joe was born. We held the board meetings in my home those days so the board members took turns holding the baby. It was great fun!

Caption for photo, if usable: Ruth proved that the growth and shifts in population warranted a reapportionment of legislative districts. To launch an initiative signature drive for reapportionment, she brought baby Joe in a stroller, the twins in a market basket, and two older children to a neighborhood supermarket to circulate petitions.

Leaguers were busy during these years. To support a yes vote at the polls for Initiative 199, in 1956, members dressed in old fashioned dresses and paraded in downtown Tacoma, South Tacoma and Lakewood. The initiative passed but was challenged. In 1957 the state board agreed that

if the issue went to court, the League would be among the defenders.

The local program agenda also continued with a study of county government called "Know Your County," and action supporting a Council Manager form of government in Tacoma. The League also worked for adequate school support, and for parks management by county and city governments. National study included water conservation and "Individual Liberties."

EVELYN ASPMAN, 1957-1959

The board discussed establishing an office; however, there was no enthusiasm for the project. National program items studied were foreign policy and water. Farsighted League members conducted a workshop focusing on northwest water resources, the Columbia River Basin and national water resources. On the state level the study emphasis was on juvenile protection. Interest in local issues was high: two meetings were devoted to the six year improvement plan for Tacoma. Other efforts went to "Know Your County" and city schools issues.

VIOLET GRAHAM, 1960-1961

The Tacoma League sent two representatives to the First Interstate Hearing on Water Pollution in Olympia. The Christian Science Monitor for January 20, 1962, lists the Tacoma Trade Survey as one of the many ways that the League of Women Voters helps light the way to new trade lanes. [Note to Virginia and Jean: Did more information come to light about this Trade Survey, in your research?]

The study of foreign policy continued as a national topic, while the study of water resources turned to a regional examination involving the Leagues of Oregon and Montana in addition to Washington. A booklet, "The Great Rivers of the West," was produced with leadership by Frances Garen, and received applause throughout the region. In January, 1962, the League began active signature gathering for Initiative 211, another effort at redistricting and reapportionment. Members found the Daffodil Parade to be a fertile ground for gathering signatures. At the local level, concerns of the Tacoma League included support of the council manager government, support for comprehensive planning, and the perennial need for adequate school financing.

ELLEN PINTO, 1961-1963

Editor's note: A committee formed to discuss the changing of the League's status from a "city" to an "area" League. The state League required that we answer such questions as how many square miles and what governmental jurisdictions would be included in the area, and what types of current agenda would be involved. [Nancy's note: Why an area League? We need more here; what was the board's argument in their application? Distribution of members? No. of units?]

The growing League obtained its own phone line, although the "office" remained in the home of the president.. Member dues were raised from four dollars to five dollar per year.

Action during this period included support of protection for delinquent and dependent juveniles, and continued support of the council manager government for Tacoma and comprehensive planning. A new study item was the property tax.

It was in the middle of a luncheon meeting at Steve's on Old Tacoma Way that the first rumors of President Kennedy's death circulated. Mrs. Pinto verified the fact and said we must carry on.

ALICE MATTERN, 1963

Shortly after being elected, the Matterns moved away from Tacoma and first vice-president Frances Garen became president. Alice remembers

FRANCES GAREN, 1963-1965

Frances recalls that it was customary to have the League office in the president's home. She had two phones in her office which would ring simultaneously day and night. Fran's husband became almost as adept as she in fielding questions on "his" phone. Near the end of Fran's term, however, the board authorized an office committee to rent and move into office space.

In early 1964 the League's change of status became official with approval by the National Board. The name of the League became the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County, reflecting its new area wide role. Locally, the League called for separation of

sanitary and storm sewers, and discussed whether Tacoma's Green River watershed should be open or closed to public use. During the fall election season, a Pow-Wow, chaired by Evelyn Kelly, was held in Puyallup. Congressional and legislative candidates appeared before a crowd of around 300, generating great publicity for the League.

The program calendar for that year also included the United Nations, fiscal issues, voters service, juvenile protection and continuing national water study.

DONNA PRICE, 1965-1969

Dues were raised from \$4.00 to \$5.00 per year. [Nancy's note: this was noted under Ellen Pinto's term; which is correct?] The League board authorized [see above] and moved into its first office, a suite at 621 Pacific Avenue. Rent was \$38 per month for 450 square feet. . The board authorized \$200 to equip the office for use

Local issues concerned air and water pollution. At the national level a position on redistricting and reapportionment was adopted saying that both houses of state legislatures should be apportioned substantially by population..

ABC television selected the Tacoma-Pierce County League to participate in reporting results of the general election. During the campaign season the League's speakers bureau of sixteen members filled 33 engagements, reaching 1300 citizens with information about ballot issues.

LAURA JOHNSON, 1969-1973

It was a turbulent time for the country and for the city. Slim Rasmussen was mayor of Tacoma, trying to create a strong mayor form of government. League had a position favoring council-manager government ; we were frequently at cross swords. In a recall election several council members were ousted.

Our studies at the local, state and national levels included: County government - a major study leading to agreement that there should be a change to a home rule system; state taxes, redistricting and the environment; and foreign policy. Although League had no national position on foreign policy, our thinking and discussion of that was influenced by students protesting the Vietnam War.

Approximately 200 active members all worked on some League project. Voter registration and the speakers bureau were major Voters Service projects.

The office was moved to 260 South 5th, Suite C, early in 1969.

THELMAGENE COLLINGS, 1973-1977

I served four years on the state LNWV board, as first vice-president, before serving as local League president. I helped draft Initiative 276, the state Public Disclosure Law, which passed with an overwhelming majority in 1972 after the statewide signature drive led by the League. We then (and still) lobbied the legislature to keep our law effective and adequately funded.

My four years as local president were mainly action. We worked hard to get county government changed. More hours than I care to remember were spent talking to our county commissioners -- no luck. Our League then started a petition drive to put on the next ballot the issue of selecting freeholders to write a home rule charter for Pierce County. The issue passed, but since voters

were not too enthused, the commissioners never acted. However, later there was a scandal in the county sheriff's office, and freeholders were elected and a new charter written.

Then there was the time our office was robbed. Ugh, what a mess! Someone stole about five dollars from our desk and messed up everything. The police dusted for fingerprints and then we had the honor of cleaning up the mess.

To this day, I love the League of Women Voters!! I know that we are all so proud to have worked with an organization that soon will celebrate a 75th birthday!

NANCY PEARSON, 1977-1979

On one of my first days as president of League an inquiry came from the Tacoma News Tribune about a position our board had just adopted calling for dissolution of the Metropolitan Park District. As a naive new leader I didn't know about being careful talking to a reporter, and the next day much more of our conversation appeared in print than I expected! But my embarrassment did not result in recall.

During the summer of 1977 our volunteers worked hard getting petition signatures for the reform of county government. It wasn't until over a year later, however, when the sheriff and others were indicted on corruption charges, that the county commissioners called for an election of freeholders to write a new charter. At that time our League helped form a coalition of local 'good government' groups and individuals, named CAFE, to educate voters about the freeholder process and county government.

Other local education and action during my term included: A study and public forum on community Indian issues and history; a study and update on the Nisqually Delta which included a walking tour of a proposed shipping facility at DuPont; a review of local water resources with a bus tour to the Green River wells and diversion facility; following land use proposals and advocating a comprehensive plan for Pierce County.

National studies covered agricultural lands, the Urban Crisis and energy issues. This was also the time we pushed hard for ratification of the national Equal Rights Amendment. Our League sold ERA T-shirts and sent \$1170 in proceeds to the national office to support the campaign.

Our League hosted the state LWV Council at the Doric Hotel in 1978. The next year we helped on a statewide initiative petition drive for a "bottle bill", then campaigned for its passage by voters (but the measure failed).

So many opportunities for League during this term, both in member education and action! It was a fun time, a fulfilling time for me personally, and it was all possible because of a great group of board leaders and volunteers.

KRISTIN SERGIENKO 1979-1981

The historical facts of my term are recorded elsewhere. Although recollections may not conform to reality, I will reminisce rather than research. I could fill my space with the names of those whose commitment to good government and citizen participation enabled League to speak with a strong and clear voice.

The emphasis on local (and 'local-local') program demanded an enthusiastic and energetic board, and I was always thankful for their unflinching humor and generosity with time and talent. Not only did we have a dedicated board, we could count on our units to serve in various capacities: from catering our annual meeting to functioning as a resource committee.

I think I accepted the nomination as League president to escape the bookkeeping complexities that strained my abilities during the previous term as Treasurer!

The highlight of these years for our local League and for me personally was the election of Freeholders to write a home rule charter; the subsequent adoption of that charter and the establishment of a new Pierce County government. It was a sobering and exciting responsibility to testify before the Board of Freeholders and share with them the accumulated wisdom of League's years of study, discussions and consensus. We had worked with diligence and persistence to assure that moment, and we would continue full-bore until the charter was adopted and elections held. My first League responsibility had been the county portfolio, so I was thrilled to see that our years of study and action had been instrumental in effecting fundamental change.

Some of our actions were somewhat less stirring. We left our storefront office at 315 S. 11th with its interesting window displays and moved to 702 Broadway to what was then the Red Cross Building. Our printing was done at nominal cost and we enjoyed access to their large conference room. This served not only for board meetings, but for general meetings with lunch served in order to encourage attendance. Practically and financially this proved to be a good move and permitted some innovative programming.

It was a challenging two years. In addition to the focus on county government, League's park study brought critically needed attention to Northwest Trek.

By then I felt I had taken on a full-time job -- and I'm sure the Voters Service Chair shared my sentiments. Calls for help were answered and the rewards and results were commensurate with the efforts expended. It was a great experience.

CYNTHIA HAMMER AND GAYLE RIEBER, CO-PRESIDENTS 1981-1983

In reminiscing about our presidency, we remembered that we were the first to job-share this position in the Tacoma League. One took charge of 'inside' affairs such as units and office operations; the other took on 'outside' affairs such as voters service and issues. The next year we switched. We installed a separate phone answering machine with a voters service message on it. And we secured corporate funding for the printing of "They Represent You" (TRY).

We remembered our Great Adventure in Voters Service -- a pre-primary candidate forum for Port of Tacoma candidates. It was held on a boat as it cruised Commencement Bay and the waterways. Some 18 candidates were running for two open positions that year. They were interviewed on TV while Leaguers aboard watched and ate from the buffet table. Quite dramatic it was, especially when thunder showers, lightning and wind forced the program inside and under cover. But the trip ended with a rainbow over the tideflats!

Cynthia remembers doing a public service announcement on Channel 13. The studio was so cold that her nose was dripping -- noticeably (to her, anyway) -- when she saw the spot later on TV.

We agreed that League leadership pushed us to do public things that we wouldn't have done without the support that League gave us. And we are still friends!

JILL BARKLEY, CO-PRESIDENT 1983-1985

"The League is like a continuing education to me," Jill said in an interview in The Tacoma News Tribune, February 10, 1985. Although she had tried several other volunteer activities, she turned to the issue-oriented League. "[It] just provided an opportunity to be more knowledgeable in areas that I was more interested in."

When Jill was elected co-president, she turned from tasks such as promoting unit growth and editing the newsletter to a focus on making the organization work well for the members who

volunteer their time for it. "I really have a lot of respect for these people. Their time is worth money."

Jill recognized that the League's complexion was changing -- membership campaigns now were designed to appeal to men, to other segments of the community, and to the increasing numbers of women with jobs. But the emphasis on non-partisanship remains and is one of the League's strongest attractions, she felt. And the study process followed by action based on member agreement continues to earn respect for the League. "If people ask me if the League is liberal, conservative, study-oriented or activist, the answer is 'yes' to everything," Barkley said.

Jill noted that League's studies during her tenure included hazardous waste, water quality, global security, the Pierce County jail, local human resources, local parks, child care, and reproductive choices. As her term ended, the membership was gearing up for a study of the effectiveness of the county charter, Pierce County's economic growth and a comprehensive plan for county land use.

OLIVIA WATT, CO-PRESIDENT 1983-1985

In an adjoining story appearing in the same newspaper, Olivia noted that the whole process of League -- to examine a specific issue, bringing members' insights to bear on facts prepared by a research committee, and forming a consensus opinion -- is serious business. She observed, "that has worked for us and against the League. On the one hand, women are attracted because of the opportunities it gives them to stay in touch with current events and issues. On the other hand, our group was not organized for fun and pleasure but rather for bettering our political and governmental environment. So people motivated to join a social organization will not be drawn to our membership. League is a serious group."

Further, Watt was quoted, "It's [League membership] satisfying for the members. As they get older, they have a place where they feel needed. They know that they are doing something useful, and they develop friendships."

Olivia admired the League's consistent stand over the years on national and global issues, and was particularly interested in League's support for international cooperation, the United Nations, and arms control. She expressed concern, however, with the Tacoma-Pierce County League's lack of attention to urban problems or the social problems of disadvantaged people. She admired the League as an organization of thinking people, but regretted that the membership tends to be white, middle-class and college-educated. She wished to have us network more with minority women, and address concerns of all women in the community.

LINDA TANZ, 1985-1987

One of the many lessons participation in League teaches is that issues take a long time to resolve! In my term we fought a number of fine fights but didn't win many battles!

We supported a ballot measure to preserve the farmland in the Puyallup valley from development, but it failed. We continued pushing for a county comprehensive land use plan, but nothing happened (until much later). We advocated merging the county and metropolitan park districts; there was no action.

In the City of Tacoma, we supported pay equity when a study showed job classifications primarily filled by women were paid significantly less than those filled by men, but the study stayed on the shelf.

We produced and sponsored a monthly TV show on Channel 11 called "The Curious Constituent", and although it aired at am on Sundays,

State level issues included a study of children's services that pointed out the need for adequate and stable funding for the needs of children at risk, and we're still fighting for

dollars; an initiative campaign for campaign finance reform, which failed at the polls; and an attempt to initiate state tax reform, with no success.

For fun, while also getting the League's business done, we had a series of dessert fund-raisers at The Annie Wright School; we hosted a state convention, held at the Tacoma Dome Hotel; we decorated the office; and we had parties to commemorate League's birthday, to host potential members, and every quarter for our members to share current issues over lunch.

For me, serving as president was a fantastic experience – Thank you!

HARRIET AMATO, 1987-1989

The 'highs' for me as president of the League were working with the best board of directors and the finest organization on the planet; attending state and national League conventions; being associated with an organization revered for its high principles and in company with the most intelligent, dedicated, knowledgeable, gutsy group of people.

Our program at the national level included a study on Meeting Basic Human Needs and another that began examining Health Care Reform. We participated in a nation-wide drinking water survey. At the state level during these two years we worked on three initiatives: I-97 for toxic waste cleanup, I-99 to have a presidential primary, and I-the Children's Initiative. We also studied Puget Sound port districts.

Locally we were involved with The Centennial Project, Youth 2000, pay equity issues, strategic planning for Tacoma public schools, and Safe Streets. Our members also studied citizen participation in the county's local governments and examined education in Pierce County jails. In addition to all that, we moved the office up the hill, to 747 St. Helens!

Looking back on my tenure, I can honestly say it was exciting, fun and a lot of work, intellectually and emotionally stimulating and a lot of work! Richly rewarding and exhilarating and a lot of work! To sum up, being a League president is a lot of work, but the perks are well worth every minute. League is an organization that works. You all still make my spirit sing.

CHERYL MILLER, 1989-1991

I well remember the occasion when I was inveigled into being president of the League. The nominating committee, of which I was a member, had met for lunch to finalize the slate of officers for the coming year. All positions had been filled except for that of president. As I was lifting a forkful of food to my mouth, Anne Homan turned to me and said, "And you, Cheryl, you'll make an excellent president." I was flattered and honored. I had a wonderful, supportive board. We took an introspective look at where we were and where we wanted to go. All volunteer groups such as the League were facing the same problems. Funds were drying up and it was difficult to interest younger women who, for the most part, had both families and jobs to fill their time. We cut expenses to the bone, initiated quarterly budget projections, and examined carefully the dollar cost of doing business. In the summer of 1990 we were given a one month notice that it would be necessary to move the location of our office! We moved to our present location after negotiating a five year lease.

Our sponsorship of a televised candidates' forum in conjunction with Viacom Cable TV was a first, and set a precedent for future years. Transportation issues involving both short range and long range planning were the subjects of many meetings. Land use planning was an action item for the 1988-89 year, as was support for the state Children's Initiative and the pro-choice Initiative 120. A general meeting about education was titled "Programs That Work," and a public meeting was held that examined "The Pierce County Charter: Are Changes Needed?" Anne Homan represented League on a county committee

to select new voting machines. The League's influence was felt in the community in many ways.

KATHLEEN SOMMERS, 1991-1993

The 1991 election season was especially active. We supported local ballot issues on the county's Foothills Trail and to approve new voting machines. Anne Homan kept busy explaining and promoting the voting machines through demonstrations at the Tacoma Mall and at library branches. Candidate forums were conducted on cable television, the League's Fair Campaign Practices Code was sent to all candidates and made available to the media, and with the sponsorship of local businesses we placed the Voters Bill of Rights in the Tacoma News Tribune.

The League was awarded the Distinguished Citizens Award by the Municipal League, in recognition for public service in the community. To help inform citizens about regional transportation needs, we sponsored a public meeting called 'Transportation for Tomorrow' and we organized and facilitated another public forum as part of a state sponsored project to develop an energy strategy. Within the League an interest group formed around environmental issues, meeting monthly but separately from units.

During my term we also participated in state studies on Child Support and Custody, and on Port Governance. State initiatives on which the League took action were I-582 on campaign finance reform, I-141 for state health care reform, I-547 on growth management, and the controversial I-553 to adopt term limits for members of Congress.

A National League study and consensus on health care was completed; we prepared for the 1992 elections with a program called "Take Back the System"; and we continued pushing for federal campaign finance reform. We joined Leagues throughout the country in an exercise named Crossroads to discuss ways to modernize the League and develop a vision for its future.

League members had a lot of fun at the various social and fund-raising events: theater parties, appraisals, and open houses. I met lots of interesting people I probably would not have met except through League. Being president of such a prestigious organization is both fun and humbling.