

History of League of Women Voters of Tacoma

In the historical papers of the League of Women Voters of Tacoma, the following statement appears: "In 1924 Mrs. Overton Ellis received a letter from her friend, Carrie Chapman Catt, asking her to organize the State of Washington for the League of Women Voters".

Although written history is sketchy, indications are that a League did exist in the late '20s, and kept interest in civic affairs alive during the '30s and '40s. Early membership included "key women from every business and profession, sincere, well-informed and active".

By 1940 the League consisted of a group varying from 20 to 40 convening for monthly dinner meetings. Formal business was conducted at each meeting and speakers were top men and women in their fields (schools, city government, candidates, etc.).

The Tacoma League has taken action in the community from the very first. Since the middle '50s it has gained membership from the neighboring areas with the first unit outside the city limits of Tacoma being formed in 1958. At the present time the membership stands at approximately 200, with nearly one-half of the members living in communities adjacent to Tacoma. This mirrors the population shift in this area, as Tacoma itself has not gained in population while the surrounding community has gained by 48% in the past 10 years.

As suburban membership in the Tacoma League increased and units were formed in the rapidly developing fringe areas, some members began to feel the need for a means by which those in outlying areas could study and take action on purely local problems and not be limited to a program based solely on concerns of the City of Tacoma. It was also felt that city members would benefit from information on situations outside of the city. Suburban communities, some quite a distance from others, and many lacking in cohesion, were not recognizing themselves as integral parts of the metropolitan area. It was felt that League interest, information and action could be increased by including suburban concerns in its program. So strongly was this felt that in 1961-62 the League adopted the local item A SURVEY OF THE TACOMA METROPOLITAN AREA (services and agencies providing them). This study was continued and updated in 1962-63, culminating in publication of "A LOOK AT THE TACOMA AREA". This has been used for public distribution and is the first survey of its type made of the area. At the annual meeting in 1963, the metropolitan study was put on a C. R. basis and AIR AND WATER CONDITIONS IN THE TACOMA AREA was adopted as one of the local program items. The other local item for 1962-63 was a survey of six school districts in which League units are located. This item is to be continued for a second year.

*presented written in 1962 or 63*