

League of Women Voters of Indiana¹ 1920-2015

Founding 1920

The National American Woman Suffrage Association was dissolved, and League of Women Voters was founded on February 14, 1920, in Chicago. Mrs. Richard Edwards of Peru, then president of the Women's Franchise League of Indiana, was made treasurer of the national LWV and an office was established in Peru.

1920s

Mrs. A.H. Beardsley of Elkhart was elected the first president of LWV-Indiana. An office was established in Elkhart. The Franchise League had turned over 112 local organizations. The Indianapolis League was organized that same year. Early state issues were: equal guardianship of children, an eight-hour day for women in industry, school attendance/child labor law. The 1921 General Assembly considered 13 Constitutional amendments, but only the Citizens Amendment was passed by voters. LWV petitioned Gov. McCray to appoint qualified women to state boards. The first issue of *Woman Voter* was published in 1921. Standing committees included: International Cooperation to Prevent War, Social Hygiene, Child Welfare, Uniform Laws for Women, Efficiency in Government, Education, Living Costs, and Women in Industry. LWV-Indiana sent questionnaires to legislative candidates. "Know Your Country" research was a primary task for each local League. In 1924, the national LWV sponsored a get-out-the-vote campaign, and Indiana led all states with an 83% voter turnout. There were 28 local Leagues by 1927, and the state office moved to the Illinois Building (Illinois & Market St., Indianapolis), where it remained for more than 50 years. Collegiate Leagues were established at Butler University, Indiana University, Terre Haute State Normal, and Purdue University. Two major projects in 1929 were publication of a pamphlet on registration and a *Voters Handbook*

1930s

LWVIN supported a referendum to hold a state constitutional convention, but it was defeated. Candidate questionnaires requested views on voter registration, direct primary elections, and retention of the School Attendance Child Labor law. The 1932 Convention recommended that township government be abandoned and its functions assigned to county government. LWVIN program also included election law revision to provide for permanent registration of voters, to simplify election procedures, and to lower election costs. Leagues were established or reorganized in Gary, Culver, Kokomo, Hammond, Fort Wayne, Richmond, and Logansport. The League's *Indiana Voters Handbook* was widely used in public schools, libraries, adult education classes, and as a reference book for citizens. LWVIN worked on a system of public personnel management for state and local government, improvement of nomination methods, organization of county welfare units, ratification of the child labor amendment to the US Constitution, unemployment compensation, and the food and drug bill. Within LWVIN, the custom of presidents serving two consecutive two-year terms provided organizational continuity. Past LWVIN presidents were appointed to state committees. *Why We Need the Merit System*, a LWVIN publication, was sent to each legislator and otherwise widely distributed. The League's slogan was, "Efficiency depends upon qualifications, not affiliations."

1940s

Leagues were organized in East Chicago, Warsaw, South Bend, Crawfordsville, and Wabash. LWV advocated for merit employment by the state, with special emphasis on the penal system. The merit bill passed in the legislature. After the US entered World War II, LWVIN distributed 85,000 copies of the LWVUS broadsides as a basis for conversations and discussion groups.

State program included: Extension of the merit system in Indiana, reinstatement of adequate appropriations for effective administration of School Attendance Child Labor law, support of constitutional amendment permitting the "manager" plan for local units of government, reform of legislative procedures, improving election equipment, legislation protective of children, opposition to interstate trade barriers, and permitting non-profit hospitalization insurance. The state Chamber of Commerce began publishing its *Indiana Government* book, and LWVIN discontinued its *Voters Handbook*. In 1947, the LWVIN legislative team included 29 members from Indianapolis who attended every session of both House and Senate. Leaguers from outside Indianapolis also attended sessions. LWV worked to acquaint every member with the United Nations. An active Speakers' Bureau presented information about the UN. Thousands of copies of *The ABCs of Voting* were printed and distributed.

1950s²

Leagues were re-established in Ft. Wayne and begun in New Albany. The 1950 Convention adopted a study of local government. Indiana Congressional candidates were sent questionnaires and then invited as guests to a LWVIN Legislative Meeting. Each candidate sat with his prospective constituents and discussed League concerns. The state Legislative Committee held weekly briefings on the progress of LWV proposals. The LWV produced several kits, including a "Constitution Kit" which was widely used by high schools. In addition to a list of Continuing Responsibilities, the 1952 Convention adopted three items: revision of the Indiana Constitution, action to improve efficiency and economy in local government, and a study of the primary election process. Nationally, LWV joined *Life* magazine and NBC to sponsor the first televised US Presidential debates.'

1960s

LWVIN worked on such issues as school reorganization and merit selection of Judges. In the late 1960s, member Fay Williams was appointed to the LWVUS Board. She became chair of a National Citizens Education project which involved 51 local Leagues in a study of the election system in their communities and also established a legal project which worked to remove barriers within the electoral process.

1970s

The League was actively involved in the passage of the Equal Right Amendment and its ratification in Indiana. It worked with Sen. Birch Bayh to support passage of Title IX at the federal level. To LWV's relief, Indiana made merit selection common for judges' positions. At the State Fair, LWVIN sponsored a booth. There were 30 local LWV groups. Nationally, passage of clean air and clean water acts were important. Fay Williams worked with the Overseas Education Fund to develop economic projects in Africa and the Caribbean. Other members serving on the LWVUS Board or its committees were: Willie Campbell, Jean Tyler, Judy Head, Treva Cromwell, and Betty Williams.

1980s

Indiana and other Great Lakes states approved the 1985 Great Lakes Charter. LWVIN had studied Juvenile Justice and lobbied for its established position requiring that juvenile offenders be housed separately from adult prisoners.

1990s

LWV concerned itself with understanding such state and local issues as TIF districts and charter schools. LWV was at the forefront of championship for the National Voter Registration Act, widely known as "Motor Voter."

2000s

On the basis of its unfairness to vulnerable citizens, LWVIN took up resistance to Indiana's 2005 Voter ID law. At the US Supreme Court, the suit was lost because LWVIN was judged to lack standing as a plaintiff. The Indiana Supreme Court decided against the League in a separate issue (i.e., whether the new law illegally added requirements to the Constitution). The 2001 passage of the Great Lakes Compact created an 8-state legally binding interstate compact detailing how the states manage the use of the Great Lakes Basin's water supply. LWVUS helped pass the McCain-Feingold bill (Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act) in 2002. In 2007, the Kernan-Shepard Report motivated further LWVIN action.

2010s

Except for the study of an independent redistricting commission, LWVIN advocated for issues that the 2015 General Assembly rejected or neglected. However, the US Supreme Court handed down three LWV-approved decisions in 2015, affirming the legitimacy of marriage for all, healthcare for all, and independent redistricting commissions.

1 Facts about 1920-1952 come from *League of Women Voters of Indiana 1920-1952: Past is Prelude*, written by Katherine Croan Greenough and prepared by Donna Langfitt

2 The paucity of easily-accessed data after 1952 is testimony to the need for the Zimmer Fund to be activated and for a subsequent LWVIN history to be compiled.