

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

On October 9, 1922, some 50 women met in the Women's Building on the University of Illinois campus to found the League of Women Voters of Champaign County. They elected officers and made plans for monthly meetings. At the first meeting the topic was a proposed new state constitution for Illinois. The following month Senator Lottie O'Neil, the first woman elected to the Illinois General Assembly, "spoke briefly and pointedly of a woman's place in politics."

When the Champaign County League celebrated its 70th anniversary in 1992 it had nine fifty-year members to help look back on its many accomplishments.

In 1946 the League had studied the issue of sanitary landfills and approached the City Council to advise that such a landfill was needed in Champaign. According to retired Champaign City attorney Gail Fisher, "because of the League and only because of the League," the City Council undertook a study and did establish a sanitary landfill in the County.

Also in the 1940s, the Champaign County League prepared a community report on the status of African-Americans in Champaign County. This report served as a catalyst for many community programs and endeavors to bring more equality of opportunity for African-Americans in the County.

A 1964 League study of county land use problems and a report entitled "From Blight to Beauty" about unguided and rapid growth led to the founding of the Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to improving the environment in Champaign County. The Champaign County League has prepared other significant reports for the community on issues such as drainage districts, children's issues, and our local Courts. In the early 1990s, the League received a grant from the Illinois Department of Energy to sponsor a recycling project at a local apartment complex.

Thanks to a bequest from Rena Ullmann, we financially and actively support and encourage student membership in the League. One of our first student members was instrumental in the current LWVUS support of student memberships.

Two of our members have served as President of the State League. Others have been invited to the White House for conferences on libraries and the environment. In 1993 a member was invited to participate in a three-day national conference on the Future of the Courts and her way was paid by the American Bar Association. She used her experience there to organize a one-day conference in 1995 on the future of the Champaign County Courts.

The League of Women Voters of Champaign joined the online world quite early (before "the web") when our first project was coming to the new "Classic Prairienet" in 1995 where we provided electronic access to our yearly publication, "A Directory of Who's Who in Government". In January 1997, a homepage was set up for LWVCC on Prairienet with links to LWVIL and LWVUS, to other Prairienet pages and to places of interest as we discovered them. "Who's Who" and our monthly newsletters, "The Voter" were posted there, too. As the internet has grown, so has LWVCC.

For information about voting or the League write to us at P.O. Box 201, Urbana, IL 61803-0201.

The Champaign County League remains committed to taking a lead in identifying and working on measures that are important to our community.