

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MISSOURI



**Celebrating 100 Years
1919 to 2019**

History of the League of Women Voters of Missouri

(from *The First 40 Years 1919-1959: The League of Women Voters in St. Louis* by Avis Carlson)

Carrie Chapman Catt proclaimed, “Let us raise up a league of women voters – the name and form of organization to be determined by the voters themselves; a league that shall be non-partisan and non-sectarian in character and that shall be consecrated to three chief aims . . . finish the fight for woman’s suffrage; remove the remaining legal discriminations against women in codes and constitutions of the several states; and to make democracy so safe for the Nation and so safe for the world that every citizen may feel secure and great men will acknowledge the worthiness of the American Republic to lead.” Catt stated this as president of the American Women’s Suffrage Association at the Jubilee Convention at the Statler Hotel in St. Louis in March 1919.



The formal decision was made on March 27, 1919, that there would not be a “league of women voters,” but “**The** League of Women Voters.” Any state which had already adopted suffrage could become an affiliated member of the new organization by having at least one organization with 100 members who pay annually into the treasury of the national organization \$100 and another \$100 for each additional 500 members. This decision was important locally, because it meant that the state and several local Leagues were formed months before the National League.

At the Jubilee Convention, Mrs. C. H. Brooks of Wichita was elected National Chairman, to serve until the founding convention, which was to be held in Chicago in 1920. On the last morning of the Convention, Mrs. Catt summed up the program of the new League of Women Voters as being two-fold. One part was “education of citizens of the country.” The second part was a list of areas to work on:

- ◆ American Citizenship
- ◆ Protection of Women in Industry
- ◆ Child Welfare
- ◆ Improvement in Election Laws and Methods
- ◆ Social Hygiene
- ◆ Unification of Laws Concerning Civil Status of Women
- ◆ Food Supply and Demand
- ◆ Research Department

Thus was born the Voters Service Program.

The Missouri women convention attendees wasted no time as they met on Sunday, March 30, to plan the new organization. Edna Gellhorn was elected president of the interim Missouri League. Under her generalship funds for organization were soon provided: by May \$3,000 had been raised in Kansas City and \$6,000 in St. Louis with a quota of another \$6,000 assigned to the rest of the state.

The women also wasted no time in working to pass the 19th Amendment. A large delegation of yellow-sashed, yellow-parasoled women spoke on the steps of the St. Louis Post Office urging a special session of the legislature. In Kansas City and Sedalia large meetings were held. A group of women waited on the Governor in person and got important citizens from over the state to intercede with him.

Within five days they had word that a special session was set for July 2nd. On the evening of July 1st they held a “Ratification Dinner” in Jefferson City at which the governor and all legislators were guests. The next morning the victorious company fell into a spontaneous procession. With yellow sashes and banners flying and the famous yellow parasols bobbing gaily, they moved into the new Capitol building and listened breathlessly to the vote, almost unanimous in both houses. They were on hand the next day when Governor Frederick Gardner signed the Ratification Bill.



Next, the women organized a convention on October 16-18 in St. Louis to organize the League of Women Voters of Missouri. By October 1919, 120 Leagues had been set up over the state – though we must remember they were very different from the tightly knit groups we now know as Leagues. Thus, the October convention disbanded the Missouri Women Suffrage Association and formed the **Missouri League of Women Voters**. Edna Gellorn (pictured below and with her daughter Martha in the photo at the left) was named the first President.



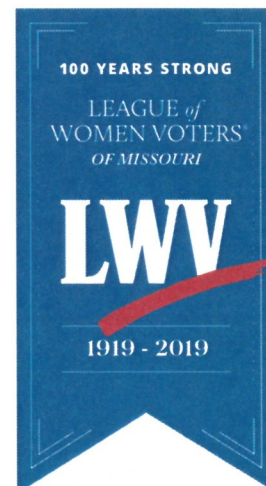
Honor Roll of State Presidents

1919-1921 Edna Fischel Gellhorn, St. Louis
 1921-1922 Mrs. Jesse M. Williams, Webster Groves
 1922-1923 Jane T. Hardy, Normandy
 1923-1925 Mrs. H. H. Muchall, University City
 1925-1927 Luella St. Clair Moss, Columbia
 1927-1929 Edna Fischel Gellhorn, St. Louis
 1929-1931 Mrs. Ralph Douglas, St. Joseph
 1931-1932 Mrs. T. W. Van Schoiack, St. Louis
 1932-1934 Mrs. E. F. Van Buskirk, Columbia
 1934-1936 Ida Hoxie, Kansas City
 1936-1941 Delphine M. Smith, St. Louis
 1941-1942 Jeanne C. Blythe, St. Louis
 1942-1943 Elizabeth Royce Gribble, Webster Groves
 1943-1944 Mary Osborne Bryant, University City
 1944-1945 Melissa Carroll, Kirkwood
 1945-1946 Irene Chubb, Webster Groves
 1946-1948 Harriett Griffith, Kirkwood
 1948-1950 Helen Stafford, Kirkwood
 1953-1955 Ann Prichard, Webster Groves
 1953-1956 Terry Fischer, St. Louis
 1955-1957 Marjorie Pharis, St. Louis
 1957-1961 Faye Seiler, Joplin
 1961-1963 Ann Niederlander, University City
 1963-1965 Esther Osborne, Kirkwood
 1965-1967 Frances Olenick, Webster Groves
 1967-1969 Ruth Hamilton, Central St. Louis County
 1969-1973 Ellen Walters, Webster Groves
 1973-1975 Yvonne Spies, North St. Louis County
 1975-1979 Mickey Hall, St. Louis
 1979-1981 Barbara Shull, St. Louis County
 1981-1985 Sydell Shayer, St. Louis County
 1985-1987 Lenore Loeb, St. Louis County
 1987-1990 Roseanne Newcomb, St. Louis County
 1990-1993 Elaine Blodgett, St. Charles Area
 1993-1997 Linda Claire McDaniel, St. Louis County



Edna Fischel Gellhorn

1997-1999 Carol Portman, St. Louis County
 1999-2003 Deborah Waite Howard, St. Louis
 2003-2007 Mary Merritt, Sedalia
 2007-2009 Jo Sapp, Columbia
 2009-2013 Lois Detrick, Springfield
 2013-2017 Elaine Blodgett, Columbia
 2017-2019 Kathleen Boswell, Sedalia
 2019-2021 Evelyn Maddox, Kansas City



The Enduring League Mission

It's exciting that this Fall Conference marks the beginning of our 101st year of the Missouri League of Voters. It was 100 years and 14 days ago, that our Missouri League was formally organized and the mission and members of LWV Missouri are as strong as ever as we embark on our Second Century.

Carrie Chapman Catt challenged those attending the national American Women's St. Louis' Jubilee Convention in March 1919 to continue to fight for women's right to vote; eliminate discrimination against women wherever they lived in the nation; and make democracy safe from threats so that all citizens would "feel secure." Her original mandate has remained foremost for 100 years.

Voter Services has remained foremost for 100 years, but the Missouri suffragists of 1919 would hardly recognize Missouri local leagues now.

- ◆ Men members fully participate throughout League life.
- ◆ Non-citizens are welcomed into League membership.
- ◆ League members come from all races and cultures and socio-economic groups.
- ◆ The carefully-developed public policies of the League number in the hundreds for our local communities as well as for State and National .



While at the LWV Council meeting in June, Evelyn toured the Capitol and admired the Portrait Monument honoring Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony for launching the women's suffrage movement.

LWVMO continues to transform. We envision members and members at large in all 109 counties in Missouri and vote411.org serving all counties; statewide election reform for easier registration and voting; successful court actions that defend against Photo ID requirements and mandate compliance with NVRA; and complete census counts in 2020 to be used for fair redistricting. Our 25-year old logo merchandising program continues to grow a national customer base and to be a major fundraiser to support our mission.

We are inspired by suffragists Alice Paul who took up the banner for what is today's Equal Rights Amendment and Ida B. Wells-Barnett who stood up to the rejection of white suffragists and became a national civil rights activist. Ida B. Wells fearlessly spoke truth to power, Alice Paul was the militant protagonist against the status quo, and LWV's Carrie Catt was the politician. They exemplify how diversity works to make democracy work. Whatever our background, culture, individual talents, vocation, occupation, or place in society, each League member brings to the League vitality and passion that keep the League of Women Voters new and renewing.

We honor all the Missouri women who worked for suffrage and all the women since who have worked to fulfill its promise. We stand on their shoulders and pledge to be faithful to the mission for everyone's full citizenship in the life of this state and this country, with social and legal equality for women and all others. The movement for democracy for everyone is, after all, "Hard won but not done!"

Evelyn Maddox, President
League of Women Voters of Missouri

History of LWVMO through Recollections from LWVMO Former Presidents

Sydell Shayer – President from 1981-1985

I joined the League in 1957. I have been active ever since. Although my League journey has been great, my four years as state president were special. It was special because so many significant milestones occurred. I took the position seriously. We had a lot of new initiatives. That's when we incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization in addition to our 501(c)(4) status. We started the Missouri League's first statewide fundraising effort, not too successful but it was a positive step. We filed a successful court case on legislative redistricting spearheaded by Linda McDaniel.

The state board was large, perhaps 18 members, meeting monthly in St. Louis for two days. Each issue chair was expert in her area of interest. We had one state board member who was so persistent in her lobbying that state legislators would run the other way when they saw her coming. Because we were very active in Jefferson City we rented a small office space in the Governor Hotel so board members could work and stay over when necessary. We had a paid lobbyist for a few years.



During my term we grew to twenty-one Leagues. It was neat to meet members from all over the state. The state League was very good with communicating with the local Leagues. Every Friday Barbara Shull who preceded me as state president sent out the legislative bulletin brimming with news. She included up to the minute info on all legislation of League interest and hints on what members should do. She had an assist from Representative Sue Shear, a League member who brought the weekly journal to the office every Thursday.

There were so many firsts. We got our first computer to replace our monstrous off-set press. The LWVUS sponsored the Reagan-Mondale debate in KC and gave me the opportunity to shake hands with the President. As League president, I was invited to go on an Air Force tour in a C-135 transport plane to three states.

Little did I know that these efforts and contacts and friends I made would influence and enhance my life until today.

Linda McDaniel – President from 1993-1997

I was introduced to the League in 1960 but could not join; I was not old enough. I have been a member of several Leagues across the country including Tulsa, OK; Poughkeepsie, NY; Lawrence, KS, and St. Louis. I served as president in my local League in North St. Louis County and as Co-President of the Metro St. Louis League from 2009 to 2017. I served as both Vice President and President of the state League. Issues that I worked on include integration of Florissant and Berkeley school districts; state and federal redistricting lawsuits (which we won); a constitutional amendment on redistricting that passed; campaign finance; and health care. I also served as chair of a study on consensus issues.

In 1995, the LWVUS 75th Anniversary convention was to be in Chicago, the site of the League's first meeting in 1920. The League decided to have a special train from St. Louis to Chicago which was offered to all across the country. Many League members flew into St. Louis a day early to join in that train ride. It was a wonderful time. We all talked about a variety of issues and experiences, played games and walked up and down both cars to see old friends and make new ones.



Elaine Blodgett – President from 1990-93 and 2013-17

I joined League in 1975, looking for something adult and challenging to do. Linda McDaniel was the local president. The 70's and 80's were busy times for state league and locals. If there was an issue, we were on it. Many members went down to Jeff City to lobby. But, in the mid 80's many younger women with children in school went back to work and didn't have time for meetings and groups and that led to merging Leagues. We opened a St. Louis county office and had a state league office located in the back under a Laundromat. We later moved it to University City and then to Brentwood.

I joined the state league board in 1983 when Sydell Shayer was state president. I was amazed at how much work the state board did and some would be knitting or embroidering, too. I became Vice President in the late '80s. I also got a job with League office in late '89 managing what is now called the 'information service' for the local area. We had many volunteers and at election time many phones and increased hours. It could get wild. Then in February 1990, the president died of cancer. So, I was president. I had my desk and the state secretary, Carol, who worked 5 days a week, began to help me along. Other former state presidents from St. Louis also helped. It was like a full-time job.



Past Presidents Mary Merritt, Sydell Shayer, Deborah Waite Howard, Elaine Blodgett and Linda McDaniel.

One of the things I've been proud of over the years is making a commitment to change the League by adapting to the times and how women's interests, work and home lives were changing. I hope that we keep up the same energy as the first 100 years, and know that voting is always our first job.

Carol Portman, President from 1997-99

Carol joined the League in the mid-60's to learn about local schools. As a member of LWV of University City, she chaired the Juvenile Justice Committee that achieved consensus on this new issue. As voter registration chair for the St. Louis League, she was recognized for her dedication to helping new citizens register to vote. She wants to keep LWV history alive by praising our success in many areas and not letting members forget.



Mary Merritt gave Carol Portman the Harriett Woods award in 2007.

Debby Waite Howard – President from 1999-2003

While I was president, the state League was an *amici curiae* in a court case involving moving Blue Cross/Blue Shield not-for-profit assets from a for-profit company, RightChoice, to the not-for-profit Missouri Foundation for Health. The Blue Cross press release of January 6 states "The settlement had the support of more than 90 public interest groups representing more than one billion dollars from the sale of RightChoice shares." Rachael Farr Fitch was directly involved in and worked very hard to achieve the settlement.

The other big item during my term of office was comprehensive election procedure reform. A bill proposed by the Secretary of State in 2000 was not acted on, but the League advocated much more actively with the Secretary of State and the bill's sponsor in 2001. I testified at a news conference in Jefferson City among other activities. The bill was passed and the new laws provided better accessibility to the polling places, early voting, more oversight by the Secretary of State to prevent voter fraud and allowed election judges from outside the two political parties. Of course, many of the improvements were not enacted because of no funding.

Mary Merritt - President from 2003-2007

Mary Merritt mostly remembers that she spent a lot of time in her car as she made it to each local League for a meeting or event each year. She also went to Jefferson City several times to meet with Secretary of State Robin Carnahan as part of the Public Advocacy for Voter Protection (PAVP) grant work that started during her terms. She is especially pleased that Harrah's Casino gave LWVMO a large grant to support voter education in the form of our Voters' Guides. While the donation may have been a bit controversial, it was one of the largest gifts we have ever received from a non-League source.

Lois Detrick – President from 2009-2013

When I was elected state president, I needed to know and understand the strengths and challenges of our eight Leagues around the state and how the state board might better serve them. It was enlightening to this comparative newcomer to Missouri to experience the difficulties of such distance between Leagues and regarding communication with them. The warm welcome and appreciation for the effort to come all the way to their towns made the trips worth it.



Mary Merritt and Kathleen Boswell



Then there was the infamous “Claire McCaskill video.” National LWV was closely following environmental actions in Congress. It happened that two well-known senators, one in Massachusetts and Claire McCaskill in Missouri, had voted against an important environmental bill. National determined the way to let the senators know their votes “had consequences” was to make videos to be broadcast on TV decrying their votes. When the ads began appearing in the senators’ respective states, we were horrified! Perhaps because of the influence of Senator McCaskill’s mother, who had been a League member, she generally voted in line with LWV positions. She was highly appreciated by our membership. The longer it played on TV, the more upset we became. We felt our reputation as a nonpartisan body was being negated. It ended up

with the national president coming to Missouri to calm things down. She was not successful. It took a long time for those hard feelings to abate. National has not to our knowledge used that strategy again.

It was great to work with a board of intelligent, capable, and dedicated women. Again, a heartfelt thanks to one and all who served with me.

Kathleen Boswell – President from 2017-2019

Kathleen Boswell feels very honored to have been president during the beginning of the 100th year of the League. After the whirlwind of work on the 2016 election cycle, she thought it was safe to go to Scotland for a month in June, but she was wrong. She is so appreciative of her VP Marilyn McLeod for being the face of LWVMO during that time. Thankfully, with the Internet she could stay in touch with what was going on and participate even from “across the pond.” The portrayals of Missouri ladies who worked for suffrage and the fashion show that were part of the state convention in May 2019 were a highlight of the year for her.

**As we kick off the League's
second 100 years,
we have BIG PLANS!**

- ★ **Growing in Members and Momentum**
- ★ **Making Democracy Work**
- ★ **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**
- ★ **People Powered Fair Maps**
- ★ **Statewide expansion of Vote411.org**



**PEOPLE
POWERED** 
FAIR MAPS™

**MAKING
DEMOCRACY WORK**

LWVMO Celebrates 100 Years!

In October 2019, the League of Women Voters celebrated its 100th Anniversary. In July, Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft presented LWVMO with Governor Parson's Proclamation honoring the 100th anniversary of Missouri's passage of the 19th Amendment. League members have been marching in suffragist outfits in local parades and at the Missouri State Fair.



LWV Local Leagues in Missouri in 2019

- ★ SEMO (Cape Girardeau)
- ★ Columbia – Boone County
- ★ Kansas City/Jackson, Clay and Platte Counties
- ★ Mexico – Audrain County
- ★ Metro St. Louis
- ★ Moberly – Randolph County
- ★ Sedalia – Pettis County
- ★ SWMO (Springfield/Greene, Webster and Christian Counties)

Two new Leagues are now being formed:

- ★ Joplin area
- ★ Tri Lakes (Branson/Taney and Stone Counties)

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MISSOURI

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Officers

President: Evelyn Maddox (Kansas City/
Jackson, Clay & Platte Counties)

Vice President: Marilyn McLeod
(Columbia)

Secretary: Louise Wilkerson (St. Louis)

Treasurer: Vacant

Directors

Kathleen Boswell (Sedalia)

Marge Bramer (Springfield)

Nancy Copenhaver (Moberly)

Joan Gentry (Southwest)

Nancy J. Miller (St. Louis)

Carol Schreiber (Columbia)

Sharon Swon (Mexico)

Historian: Linda McDaniel

Parliamentarian: Debby Howard

Nominating Committee

Pauline Testerman (Kansas City)

Elaine Blodgett (Columbia)

Lorraine Sandstrom (Southwest)

Executive Director: Jean Dugan

Office Assistant: Chantal Hoffsten

LWVUS Board Liaison: Karen Nicholson

CALENDAR

2019

October 16-18: Centennial of the League
of Women Voters of Missouri

November 13: Centennial of St. Louis League,
Gala banquet at the Sheldon Concert Hall, 6-8:30
pm. Tickets at lwvstl.org/events.

December 7: Centennial Celebration of the
Columbia LWV, Broadway Christian Church

December 11: Centennial of Founding of
Columbia League

2020

February 14: League of Women Voters of the
United States was formally organized in Chicago.

