

On June 3, 1947, a second meeting was held and officers of the fledgling organization were elected. Estelle Kummings was the first president. Annie Leavenworth was the first vice president. Leavenworth was notable as one of only two women who taught at Wabash College (then as now an all-male institution). Annie had begun teaching during World War I when male professors were scarce. She was very active in town as well as at the college in promoting League's civic engagement efforts.

The first activity of the new League was to create an Observer Corps. (The Observer Corps remains at the heart of League work and has brought a good deal of leadership to the fore over the years.) The first Observer Corps observed the city council and the Crawfordsville school board. Though Annie Leavenworth reported "quite a bit of hostility" when the observing began, they also reported that within a year the councilmen were fans and "couldn't remember what they did without them." (Today 20+ organizations' meetings in the county are attended and reported on by the Observer Corps.) In the late 1940s, only three people served on the Crawfordsville school board, all men. The new League began agitating for getting a woman on the school board. Thanks to League activity, the school board was increased to five members—where it remains to this day—and a woman was soon elected. Also in its first year of existence, the LWV made a house-to-house canvas in Crawfordsville to register voters.

The first national issue the Crawfordsville League studied was the United Nations. After studying the charter step-by-step, four Leaguers decided they wanted to see that fledgling organization for themselves. They were able to see the organization in action at Lake Success, New York, even before the construction of the UN building in New York City. There they witnessed both Eleanor Roosevelt and Andrei Gromyko in action and in conversation, merely two years after World War II, a powerful demonstration of cooperation between these soon-to-be Cold War enemies. Later the local League—and for several years--sent youth from the county to visit and be informed by the United Nations. These young people's lives were changed by this experience, reports Emmy Peebles who served as the youth group's leader.

Throughout this first year, LWV (which was first called the League of Montgomery County, then, for a few years, the LWV of Crawfordsville, then in 1967, back to League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, a name it retains today in 2016) was a provisional League. To become a full-fledged League, the organization had to be monitored by a state board member and had to make a study of local government and publish a booklet about this. They interviewed and collected data and published Know Your Town. (This vital work continues unbroken today as you'll see in the 2016 summary in the updating and publication of Focus on Montgomery County. (Nancy Bennett is the current editor.) In 1947, the dues were \$2.00. The LWV of Montgomery County became a full-fledged League in 1948

In 1951, the League had its first Candidates' Forum. In 1953 they began their first city and county planning efforts. Here today, 68 years later, these traditions continue unbroken and have given invaluable education to city and county residents.

Early Leaguers were instrumental in helping the county organize and carry out the state-mandated school reorganization plans of the early 1960s.

In the late 1960s this growing and highly regarded the League, after study, recommended that a Park and Recreation board be formed. (The Park and Rec board is now a key component in our city's operation). The local League worked also for a new jail and helped set up a housing authority to petition for low-income housing. LWV has worked for consolidation and cooperation of city and county governments. In 1971, Crawfordsville's Youth Service Bureau opened, something League, once it had studied and determined the need for, had worked hard to promote. (In 2016, the Youth Service Bureau, another current bastion of community strength,

celebrated its 45th anniversary.) LWV also was very active and successful at the state level to get judges off of party ballots.

Although LWV has worked successfully to reform the city's dump and trash hauling system here at home, and worked hard to obtain voting rights for residents of the District of Columbia at the national level, not every study and associated action has been successful. Deep in League memory in Crawfordsville (a decade and more after the fact) was working on the failed ERA Constitutional amendment at the time the Indiana legislature was considering it. As recalled by Gail Pebworth, this was an amazing effort. The Hoosiers for Equal Rights Amendment, or HERA, was a coalition led by LWV leader Judy Head along with Republican Women, Democratic Women, Women's Political Caucus, and Church Women United. Under their leadership, Indiana became the 35th state in the nation to ratify the ERA in 1977. (ERA needed 38 states to successfully amend the US Constitution.) Describing this as "a learning experience," Nancy Doemel said, "Who else went with me to the Convention Center one week when the ministers were cursing us from the escalators as they were standing on the up one backwards and calling us harlots?" (For future readers: the Equal Rights Amendment failed to pass the requisite number of state legislatures and did not become law.)

In summing up 40 years of League history in 1988, Wilma Shortz said, "So you might say that we have gone from getting Grade A milk in Crawfordsville to [helping] Crawfordsville redistrict!" She added, "I think that I have shown you that the League makes a difference. The difference has come from us. The League cannot be more than we are able and willing to do."

In closing, it is worth noting that many women and men who have begun working with League at the grassroots level as observers of a board or as a committee member for a project, have gone on to serve in official capacities and become community leaders. Because of LWV's method of being non-partisan and of studying all sides of an issue before action is recommended, city leaders, and leaders in other community organizations, have long looked toward League members for leadership, knowing that League recognizes fairness of approach and deep education provided by study of issues. Citizens today count on the LWVMC, the largest League in the state of Indiana, to provide them with necessary non-partisan information about candidates running for office, for voter information, and for dozens of other expertizes that come from watching and promoting democracy in action.

NOTE: The historical data recorded here was largely drawn from the document "In the Beginning" (CDPL document RL 322.4 Lea). This is a transcript of a conversation held on December 15, 1988, in order to record the Oral History of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, 1947-1987. The original transcript was prepared by Edith C. Dallinger.