

Appleton LWV History Archive Project

In the May 2003 LWV bulletin an article appeared, calling for League members to clean out their basements, closets, attics, etc., and donate any old League materials that they might have stored away to a permanent archival collection that would be established at the Appleton Public Library "in the next six months." Well, two years have gone by, and it's definitely time for an update!

When Marlys Fritzell received a call from the husband of a former League president, saying that he had several boxes of League material in his basement, and he wondered where he should take it, she realized that there was a need for a central place where League documents could be stored and be made available to anyone who was interested in using them. And that was the start of the project.

The Appleton Public Library very generously provided the League with space to store the donated materials, and space to work on the project. The library also expressed an interest in being the repository for the League material when the archive was finished. A committee was formed, and the members received some basic training in archival procedure. The response from League members was, literally, overwhelming. Everyone saw it as a wonderful opportunity to finally get rid of all those old boxes and files. The shelving space that the library had designated for us was jammed with big cartons from floor to ceiling.

The committee members began sorting and organizing the material – a process that took much longer than the original optimistic estimate of six months. The library has been very tolerant about our extended stay. The League records, which go back to our founding, are now organized chronologically and ready to be microfilmed. The library will store these records and also some early hand written records that should be preserved as historic documents.

Reading and sorting all the boxes and boxes of paper has been a wonderful nostalgic experience for the committee. The process has brought back many happy League memories, from the names of old League friends to the many studies of every local issue imaginable. It has been interesting to see the evolution of technology from a mimeographed bulletin to the present emailed one.

And most fascinating of all: there is a mystery surrounding the founding of the Appleton LWV. As you all know from the League trivia quiz that Karen deYoung and Corinne Goldgar put together in the April bulletin, our local League was founded in 1939. We have the minutes starting with the first meeting on May 15, 1939, and continuing on regularly thereafter. However, we also discovered a clipping from the Post-Crescent from October 26, 1929 saying that, "The decision to form an Appleton League of Women Voters was made at a meeting of about 30 women at the home of Miss Elizabeth Wilson." Six women are named as members of a provisional committee to organize the League. Later that month there is a reference in the P-C to Mrs. Wilson Naylor being a delegate of the newly organized Appleton League to the state LWV

convention. After that there are no further records until 1939. What happened to this tentative start? There is no mention of any earlier League in the records that begin in 1939. Only one of the six women named in the 1929 article appears in the 1939 records. Did the rest of them just get discouraged? Or move away from Appleton? Or die?

Maybe when our League held it's big 50th birthday celebration in 1989, we should actually have been celebrating our 60th. We need to get this straight because our 75th anniversary will be in 2014 – or maybe it will be our 85th!