

## History of the Wichita League of Women Voters

This history of the Wichita League of Women Voters was published in 1957. Organized in 1919 after a meeting of the National Women's Suffrage Association in St. Louis, Missouri, the pamphlet traces the activities of the Wichita League. It lists the charter members and how the league got its start in 1919 through the efforts of Mrs. C. H. (Jane) Brooks. The history provides an overview of the various issues of interest to the civic minded members of this organization. The last page contains a list of the presidents of the Wichita League of Women Voters.

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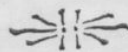


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HISTORY  
*of the*  
WICHITA  
League of Women Voters



1957

## History of the Wichita League of Women Voters



*Dedicated to the Memory of  
Mrs. C. H. Brooks*



## History of the Wichita League of Women Voters

"The officers and members of the Wichita League of Women Voters and of the Sedgwick County League of Women Voters both of Kansas, desire to record their great sorrow and sense of loss caused by the death of Jane M. Brooks . . . With the vision of the truly great, with the unceasing labor of a genius, with sweet understanding of humanity, and with unfailing determination that government can and must make secure to its citizens their inherent rights, she has left us both an example and inspiration to continue the purposes which were her life." . . . Tribute to Mrs. Brooks from a resolution spread upon records.

On March 28, 1919, a Voters' Conference of the National Women's Suffrage Association, called by the Committee on the League of Women Voters meeting in St. Louis, met and elected Mrs. Charles H. Brooks, wife of a prominent attorney of Wichita, Kansas, Chairman of the National League of Women Voters. It has been reported by Miss Marguerite M. Wells, later President of the National League of Women Voters, that on the day of the Conference the reason Jane Brooks was selected as first Chairman was because "she was attractive, able, and not tarred up as an old suffrage warhorse. The women looked around over the group and put the finger on Jane Brooks of Kansas." She was permanent Chairman of the National League of Women Voters until February 1920.

Jane Brooks came back to Wichita filled with high enthusiasm for the League of Women Voters. At the Convention it had been voted that Leagues of Women Voters could immediately be established where states had ratified the 19th Amendment. And so it was that on June 4th, 1919, Mrs. Brooks called together the women of Wichita and surrounding towns in Sedgwick County and organized the Sedgwick County League of Women Voters. She was unanimously elected its first President.

We can find no exact record of when the name was changed to the Wichita League of Women Voters, as the names The Sedgwick County League of Women Voters, The Wichita League of Women Voters, and The League of Women Voters are used interchangeably in the record until 1941.

The following women were among the charter members of the original Sedgwick County League of Women Voters:

Mrs. C. H. Brooks	Mrs. Josephine Banks
Mrs. J. Cooper King	Mrs. Henry Ware Allen
Mrs. David Walker	Mrs. J. E. Dierks
Mrs. Nanny Garrett	Mrs. J. W. Metz
Mrs. Will K. Jones	Mrs. Wm. Davidson
Mrs. Cyrus H. McCormick	Mrs. W. H. Lassen
Mrs. K. M. Holcomb	Mrs. O. A. Keach
Mrs. Dean Gordon	Miss Frances Graves
Mrs. Paul Hart	Mrs. H. D. Lester

Mrs. Victor Murdock

There were probably others whose chartermembership we cannot verify.

Of these charter members Mrs. H. D. Lester is the only one who has given loyal, continuous service to the League throughout all its years.

The League of Women Voters was a going concern in Wichita in September, 1919, when members were requested to pay dues of One Dollar per year.

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At one meeting it was announced that every third and fourth regular meeting would be held late in the afternoon to permit instructors in local colleges and universities to attend the League meetings.

In July, 1919, a League meeting was called to order to talk over the convention at St. Louis. In this year also the Public School Art Committee of the League presented to the schools of Sedgwick County some of the famous pictures of the world, according to the Eagle.

The first programs were in the field of Social Hygiene. Miss Frances Graves, Chairman of the committee, represented the Sedgwick County League at the World Conference of Women Physicians and presented her report to the League November 17, 1919. It was used later in the Citizenship Schools.

1919—The Beacon files (Dec. 6) record: "The League of Women Voters, that organization which has been furnishing free milk and fuel to needy families this winter has at a recent board meeting decided to include in their list the families of National Guardsmen who are in need." They also record: "The League of Women Voters is one of the women's very worth-while organizations."

1920—The "First School of Citizenship and Called Convention of the Kansas League of Women Voters" was held in Wichita at the Hotel Lassen January 19-24 inclusive. Speakers for these six days included Mrs. Geo. Gellhorn of St. Louis, an outstanding leader in the National League and that of St. Louis, Gov. Henry J. Allen of Kansas, professors from Friends University and Fairmount College (Wichita University), the University of Kansas, the State College, members of the legislature, Dr. Kilbourne of the State Board of Health, the Dean of Women of Kansas State College, and other outstanding men and women. This Citizenship School became the model for similar schools held throughout the country.

The League supported the League of Nations and membership in the World Court.

It was extremely active throughout the 20's. It made a special effort to reach every woman voter outside Wichita. It was emphasized that this was a county organization, not a Wichita League, and every woman voter should be a member. From Beacon files we read: "Within the Wichita district a series of registration teas will be held in the homes of members of League of Women Voters. Special effort will be made to have the teas in districts where the women have not registered in large numbers and have not been solicited to join the League."

Requirements for Leagues were very different in the early years than they are in the 1950's. One afternoon the Chairman of the Membership Committee and the local President motored to Clearwater and organized a League with elected officers.

In the fall of 1920 Mrs. Brooks and Mrs. Henry Ware Allen went to Washington, D.C. for the celebration of the Proclamation of the 19th Amendment, the Suffrage Amendment. On their return to Kansas they set about the organization of the following Leagues: Arkansas City, Winfield, Hutchinson, Wellington, Topeka, and Osage City as auxiliary to Topeka and Lawrence.

In October, 1920, plans were made for a Thank offering in commemoration of the work of Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, English-born, internationally known woman suffragist. Groups of women were at the polls Novem-



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ber 2, 1920, wearing bright yellow badges and carrying yellow boxes. The money collected was sent one half to a Foundation in Politics at Bryn Mawr and the other half to a Foundation in Preventive Medicine at Pennsylvania Medical College. Dr. Shaw's home was in Pennsylvania.

As soon as the 1920 election was over the League turned its attention to Public Health of Wichita and Sedgwick County.

A Halloween Ball was given under auspices of the League for benefit of the Free Milk and Ice Fund which was started by the League.

Bridge parties were held at Wichita Country Club and in beautiful homes throughout the city. The size of the house set the limit of tickets sold. \$500.00 was not an unusual sum realized from these parties and from rummage sales.

At the request of the National League, Mrs. Brooks appointed Mrs. J. Cooper King, Secretary to go to Nebraska to organize Leagues and to talk on the proposed change to a unicameral legislature. The bill passed and is still in effect.

A permanent Thrift Shop was established.

1921—A mass meeting with civic groups was held on "Good Roads." It was during this year in addition to all her League activities that Mrs. Brooks married off 3 daughters and a son.

1922—First candidates meeting was held. These have continued without interruption. Questionnaires to candidates were delivered personally by League members.

In one of these meetings in 1930 Judge Jeff Dickerson of the Probate Court was asked what qualifications he was looking for in a Matron for the Girls' Detention Home, there having been much dissatisfaction with the incumbent Matron. He replied: "I would like to have a woman with the heart of a Jane Addams, the spirit of Jeanne d' Arc, the wisdom of a Solomon, the strength of a Hercules, and what I get is a woman I can hire for eighty dollars per month."

1922—5-day Citizenship School, "Drama of American Citizenship offered by the Wichita League of Women Voters in collaboration with The American Bar Association Committee on American Citizenship." This was a series of five Sunday afternoon meetings held at the Orpheum Theatre. Some of the subjects discussed were Mothers' Pension, Child Welfare, Good Roads. This school inspired a follow-up study of Mothers' Pension and Child Welfare.

1922-24—The League shared an office room in the Hotel Lassen with the State League with Mrs. J. Cooper King as part-time secretary. Later part-time secretaries were Mrs. W. T. McArthur, daughter of Senator Clyde Reed, and Mrs. Kathleen Robertson Edmiston.

Monthly luncheons were inaugurated; also an Annual Membership Tea with speakers.

The League began the study of milk supply in Sedgwick County.

1922—Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt visited the League and spoke at a luncheon meeting of 400 women. It was her vision "to develop an informed citizenry which will enable women to use more intelligently the vote they have now won." This meeting was in direct contrast to her first visit

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to arouse these widely scattered Kansans to an interest in Woman's Suffrage.

In response to requests League material was placed in the public schools.

1923—A visit by Mrs. Maude Wood Park, President of the National League of Women Voters, gave inspiration and direction to this new organization.

1925-26-27—The study of milk supply and inspection in Sedgwick County and throughout the state was intensified.

A Fairmount College League of Women Voters was organized.

1925—The League now entered a period of discipline following the first five years which were largely years of experiment.

1926—All Leagues were emphasizing "First Voters" registration. Wichita joined in with a lively parade and street dance. This gala celebration brought in many registrants at booths set up on street corners.

Two-day Citizenship School at the Hotel Lassen with round tables on Child Labor and Sheppard Towner Act.

League began a study of Sterilization of the unfit, due to the situation at Beloit which had aroused a storm of public interest.

Dues raised from \$1.00 to \$2.00.

1927—The League worked against the Equal Rights Amendment and for the Child Labor amendment. Miss Belle Sherwin of Cleveland, Ohio, President of the National League of Women Voters, visited the local League. Luncheon and round table discussion for 200 was held at the Hotel Lassen.

Dr. John Edward Wolfe, City Physician and Health Officer, worked with the League during all the years he was in office: January 1927—February 1929 and from October 1933—September 1947. He worked tirelessly for a Standard Milk Ordinance and for the unification of the City-County Health Department, which was effected after his death.

Joint committees of the League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce and of the Sedgwick County Medical Society worked for the passage of a Standard Milk Ordinance.

The Tax Payers' League, a going organization in the early 1900's, was continually working against the League and ridiculing it. Another constant heckler at League meetings and especially at candidate meetings was Myra McHenry, a diminutive, vitriolic co-worker of Carrie Nation.

The history of the Wichita League is a part of the history of all the Kansas Leagues of the 20's because it was the Wichita women who organized and nurtured them.

For the first 25 years of its organization, the chief financial support of the League was from private contributions of approximately two dozen personal friends of Mrs. Brooks.

Miss Stella B. Haines, first woman legislator of Kansas, was a luncheon speaker.

League of Women Voters was organized at Friends University.



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1928—The permanent Thrift Shop and the Free Milk and Ice Fund, established in the early 20's, were now turned over to the Wichita Junior League.

College Leagues were organized in Emporia, Topeka and Lawrence.

1928-29—Registration booths were set up in downtown Wichita. Placards were displayed in many public places. The League led in a "Get out the vote" campaign. Especially trained League speakers were furnished many women's organizations. An innovation were flashing announcements on the screens of downtown theatres.

1929—The League studied City Manager form of government. Four study groups were listed.

From the Wichita Eagle, March 16, 1929—"A bronze tablet was erected in Washington, D. C. by the National League of Women Voters. One of the inscribed names was that of Jane M. Brooks, as 'one who had made an outstanding contribution to the League of Women Voters.'"

1930-40—Years of departmentalization.

1930—The League studied sterilization of the unfit at the state institution at Larned.

First radio program was given.

Study of local Detention Homes for boys and girls.

Dodge City League was organized October 14, 1930, and failed late in that year.

Organization of the following Leagues: Salina, Pratt, and Wellington. This was the beginning of the depression years and the loss of many Leagues, due largely to lack of leadership.

Beginning study and support of Reciprocal Trade Treaties.

We worked for better health services in the City and County including venereal disease control, classes for expectant mothers and also for their new infants and young children.

1931—The enactment, February 24, and continuing study of the Standard Milk Ordinance. This outstanding accomplishment drew published reports from the Washington press and Women's Home Companion.

In the fall Miss Isobel Noble organized a study group in her home. For eight years this group met bi-monthly in homes of various members under her efficient leadership.

1932-33-34—A study of the need for Meat Inspectors' ordinance.

1932—Successfully campaigned against ratification of a proposed amendment to State Constitution to limit taxes on real and personal property.

Study of state libraries with the aim to obtain adequate finances for them and for field workers.

1934-36—League action resulted in opposition to the Neutrality Acts and the Non-Intervention Acts.

1935-47—Continued work for the unification of City-County Health Department in cooperation with Dr. Wolfe, City Physician.

1936—17th Annual Meeting of Kansas League of Women Voters; our guest was Mrs. Quincy Wright, Chicago, Board member of National League of Women Voters in Foreign Policy.



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The Meat Inspectors' Ordinance was passed by City Commissioners.

1937—Cooperated with AAUW and YWCA in a complete housing survey and supported Public Housing for low income groups.

1938-40—Much time was given to the new Civil Service law and a workable merit system for Kansas.

1939—20th Annual Meeting—guest was Mrs. Walter T. Fisher, Treasurer, National League.

1940-45—War Years.

1941-45—The League's peculiar responsibility during these war years was in carrying out a "Let the People Know" campaign on the subjects of war, price control, anti-inflation, use of man-power, and subsidies.

It held an essay contest, subject—"Inflation," open to 1500 students of the three Wichita high schools. League members personally donated the prize: a \$25 Victory Bond.

The League began its annual sale of League Calendars.

In addition to national Broad-sides, the Chairman of the Speakers' Bureau, Mrs. C. M. Andrews, wrote local Broad-sides on "Need for Communicable Diseases Hospital," "Subsidies," and "Price Control." All these Broad-sides were widely used as program material in organizations in the city, including Beech and Cessna, and especially trained League speakers were in demand. Skits on "Trade Relations" and "Isolationists" were given over KFH and KFBÍ by League Women.

1942-44—Intensive study was followed by a city-wide campaign on its Broad-side: "Wichita should buy water distribution system now"\* Public meetings were sponsored by the League.

\*(Accepted by the city at a regular election after its purchase authorized in 1956, 14 years after the League's campaign. )

23rd Annual Meeting—guest was Mrs. J. Hardin Smith, Board member, National League of Women Voters.

1945—August, 1945, death of Mrs. Chas. H. Brooks. Purchase by the League of a bronze memorial plaque bearing her name.

The League accepted a gift of \$300 from the Brooks family in memory of Mrs. Brooks, the object of which was to further League education.

1946—Visit of Anna Lord Strauss, President of the National League of Women Voters, with a dinner meeting for 300 at the Allis Hotel. Miss Strauss wrote the Guest Editorial for the Beacon.

The League began a period of extended cooperation with the County Medical Association in a series of newspaper articles and radio talks on "Need for a communicable diseases hospital."

A series of radio broadcasts on Lend Lease was given.

1947—Study and support of the Marshall Plan, with available speakers.

Housing was a continued study. Economic survey of the northeast part of city.

The League launched a local monthly bulletin.

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1948—The League held its first Finance Campaign. \$500.00 budget.

A special committee was appointed to investigate and report to the membership on the abrupt dismissal of the City Librarian.

1949—Study of voting machines, and a series of workshops was held on the U. N.

Publication of "Know Your Town" pamphlet which was widely distributed throughout the city.

1950—Emphasis was put on Voters Service: birthday party for 21-year-olds, with cooperation of JC's "Light a Light for Freedom" campaign.

Luncheon meetings—guests: Mrs. Waldo E. Stevens, Tulsa, Mrs. Martin Rowe, Mrs. Orville Foreman, Directors, National Board.

1950-51—Budget \$1250.00.

Continued study of voting machines.

Study of structure of School Board.

Study of Court of Domestic Relations.

8 study units meeting twice monthly in operation.

1951—"Operation Car-Tag Line" where 30,000 were registered in 6 weeks and "Operation Courthouse" where 1400 were registered in one night.

Brooks memorial plaque placed on permanent file in City Library.

Dues raised from \$3.00 to \$3.50.

State League of Women Voters Annual Meeting; skit, "The Old Gray Mare," showing need for new State Constitution.

1951-52—Budget \$2550.00.

1952—This was the year of the "Candidates Fair" where 70 candidates were introduced.

Study of Soil and Water Conservation. Open meeting presenting Mr. Elmer Peterson, Associate Editor of Daily Oklahoman.

Seven unit groups meeting twice monthly.

The League was active in the field of education: viz. facilities, finances, and citizen participation; city budget in relation to efficient administration.

Continued study and support of Court of Domestic Relations.

Fourteen League speakers were made available to clubs and organizations.

Bi-weekly radio programs held popular appeal.

Sale 500 League Calendars.

"The Citizen's View of 1952." The League of Women Voters and Life Magazine in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company sponsored "Special Convention Forum," one of a series of non-partisan meetings held across the nation in selected cities.

1952-53—Budget \$3145.00.

1953—"Public Affairs Dinner" with State Legislators reporting to the community.

Supported United Nations and UNESCO.

Continued study and action on Soil and Water Conservation and on



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educational problems of the city, including radio series "This Is Your Town."

1954-56—Study of more efficient government in relation to city and county planning.

Continued study of water needs and supply in Wichita.

7 units meeting twice monthly.

Study of methods of selecting Presidential Candidates.

Continued support of Court of Domestic Relations.

1955-56—Study of organization and functions of county government.

Continued study of water problems.

Dues raised from \$3.50 to \$5.00.

The League called a one-day School of Political Effectiveness at the Broadview Hotel, set up on a workshop basis, with state-wide League membership, and speakers on local, state and national levels. 300 guests were at the dinner meeting.

\* \* \*

Now in its 39th year, the League is still following its purpose of arousing women to their responsibility as citizens, to "help themselves and others to use their vote wisely."

It has justified itself through its hard-won position of civic responsibility and regard. It will continue to work for it.

### Collaborators:

Mrs. C. M. Andrews

Mrs. Willard Brooks

Mrs. Fred Hinkle

Mrs. H. D. Lester

## History of the Wichita League of Women Voters

PRESIDENTS  
of  
THE WICHITA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Mrs. C. H. Brooks .....	1919-1921
Mrs. Robert Campbell .....	1921-1922
Mrs. Chas. Geo. Mills .....	1922-1923
Mrs. David Walker .....	1923-1924
Mrs. Pierce Atwater .....	1924-1926
Mrs. H. D. Lester .....	1926-1928
Mrs. Glen Bakkum .....	1928-1930
Mrs. John A. Schumacher .....	1930-1931
Mrs. E. R. Masters .....	1931-1934
Mrs. R. S. Meeker .....	1934-1936
Mrs. W. T. McArthur .....	1936-1937
Mrs. L. C. Hay .....	1937-1937
Mrs. Bert Hedges .....	1937-1938
Mrs. R. A. Whortan .....	1938-1940
Mrs. Oliver Witterman .....	1940-1942
Mrs. E. C. Rainey .....	1942-1943
Mrs. C. H. Brooks .....	1943-1944-1945
Mrs. Alexander Burch .....	1945
Mrs. Frank Bangs .....	1945-1946-1948
Mrs. Fred Aley .....	1948-1950
Mrs. Paul V. Smith .....	1950-1952
Mrs. Lawrence Vin Zant .....	1952-1954
Mrs. Alfred Griffith .....	1954-1956
Mrs. Clarence Unrau .....	1956-19...