

## Our History

### LWVK is a historic organization.

The League of Women Voters grew out of the long struggle to achieve the vote for women. The fight for equal suffrage was waged on two levels— state-by-state and at the federal level. Women worked in their home states to get legislatures to enact suffrage bills or to pass state constitutional amendments, and at the same time efforts were under way to pass a national constitutional amendment. During that time, Kansas women were part of the suffrage battle.

### The Suffrage Movement in Kansas

- 1859** Three feminists—Clarina Nichols, Mother Armstrong, and Mary Tenney Gray, attended the Wyandotte constitutional convention, representing Shawnee and Douglas County women's groups, to urge the inclusion of equal suffrage in the new state's constitution. They were not allowed to speak, but were granted the unprecedented right to acquire and possess property and to retain the equal custody of their children.
- 1861** The first Kansas state legislature gave women the right to vote in school elections.
- 1867** Woman suffrage and Negro suffrage were put on the ballot, in two separate referenda. This made Kansas the first state in the Union to consider woman suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony traveled the state campaigning for the ballot. Both proposals lost.
- 1868** In December, the federal woman suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress, by Senator S.C. Pomeroy of Kansas.
- 1869** A women's convention was held in Topeka to revive the cause.
- 1874** The Prohibition Party in Kansas endorsed woman suffrage.
- 1879** The first woman suffrage organization in Kansas, the Equal Suffrage Association (ESA), was established in Lincoln, Kansas.
- 1884** A statewide ESA was founded.
- 1885** A bill was introduced in Kansas to grant women municipal voting rights.
- 1887** Municipal suffrage was won in Kansas, allowing women to run for office in all city elections. On April 4, 1887, Susannah Medora Salter was elected mayor in Argonia, Kansas, in Sumner County, becoming the first woman mayor in the nation.
- 1888–89** Oskaloosa, Cottonwood Falls, Rossville, Elk Falls, and Baldwin elected women mayors.
- 1890–99** Canton, Edgerton, Iowa, Haddam, Pleasanton, Gaylord, Ellis, Jamestown, and Beattie chose women mayors.
- 1893** A constitutional amendment to grant woman suffrage in Kansas was again defeated.
- 1911** The Kansas suffrage amendment was resubmitted to the legislature and passed by a vote of 94 to 28.
- 1912** Kansas adopted a constitutional amendment granting women full suffrage.

At the final convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the League of Women Voters was born. In March 1919, Carrie Chapman Catt, the strategist who led the suffrage movement to its final victory, called for the formation of a league of women voters to "finish the fight." The occasion was the 50th Anniversary Jubilee Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, in St. Louis, Missouri.

Jane Brooks of Wichita, wife of a prominent attorney and president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association, was elected chairman of the national league of women voters, because, as a contemporary said, "She was attractive, able, and not tarred up as an old suffrage warhorse." She went home to Kansas and set about dissolving the KESA and establishing the first local League of Women Voters in the country.

The KESA held its last meeting on Wednesday, June 4, 1919, and laid the foundation for the Kansas League of Women Voters. In addition officers were elected for the Sedgwick County League of Women Voters. One week later, the first annual meeting of the Kansas League of Women Voters was held June 10-11, 1919, at the Hotel Lassen in Wichita. In January, 1920, the Kansas League held the "First School of Citizenship and Called Convention of the Kansas League of Women Voters," again at the Hotel Lassen. Leagues from Topeka, Enterprise, Hutchinson, Emporia, Manhattan, Wichita, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Winfield were represented. Kansas Governor Henry J. Allen spoke on "Land Tenantry and Industrial Courts" and the heads of 25 local women's organizations ranging from the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Kansas to the Thursday Afternoon Cooking Club served as "patronesses."

In February 1920, the National American Woman Suffrage Association held its Victory Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Knowing that the battle was won and that the suffrage amendment would be ratified later that year, the Association reconstituted itself as the League of Women Voters, which Catt called "a mighty experiment." Having won the vote, the women wanted to ensure that they were well-informed and would use it wisely.

Throughout the 1920's, the Kansas League held "citizenship schools" in conjunction with their state conventions. Said Carrie Chapman Catt, "We have faith in women to vote right only when they know what is right. Women do not need to be told whom to vote for. They need to know the facts, facts the citizenship school will go a long way to give."

### **The League Works for Kansas**

- 1919** The Kansas League urged all local Leagues to appoint court visiting committees to monitor cases in which women and children were tried.
- 1920** The Kansas League supported the League of Nations and membership in the World Court
- 1922** Carrie Chapman Catt visited the Wichita and Topeka Leagues and spoke on the role of the U.S. in international affairs and world peace
- 1924** Standing committees included: child welfare, education, living costs, social hygiene, uniform laws, women in industry, international cooperation to prevent war, legislation, and efficiency in government.
- 1925** The state organization was incorporated as the League of Women Voters of Kansas.
- 1926** LWVK studied sterilization of the unfit, due to a situation at the Institution in Beloit which had aroused a storm of public interest.
- 1927** The League worked against the Equal Rights Amendment because the law was considered "too sweeping in scope and liable to varied interpretation, thus causing endless litigation." Supported the Child Labor amendment.
- 1931** LWVK pushed the enactment of the Standard Milk Ordinance.
- 1932** The League successfully campaigned against the ratification of a proposed amendment to the State Constitution to limit taxes on real and personal property. Studied adequate financing for state libraries.
- 1956** The League discovered millions of Kansas taxpayer dollars on deposit in Kansas banks earning no interest. League action resulted in substantial benefits to the taxpayer by mandating interest on revenue deposits.
- 1965** The state League studied county government in Kansas. Many local Leagues had studied their local county governments, but found local officials unable to make changes due to a lack of authority at the county level. The state study enabled LWVK to lobby for changes in state law to bring about the changes our members supported.
- 1966** The *year of the tornado*—a tornado destroyed the LWVK office and many materials were lost.
- 1967** At the suggestion of Alf Landon, the League's state convention invited the heads of all the farm organizations, the executive secretary of the AFL-CIO, the state Chamber of

- Commerce, the Kansas members of the national Chamber of Commerce, and Senator Carlson, to speak on the same platform at the same time about the President's trade legislation in Washington, which it was feared would not be approved without the help of Kansans and other delegations from the mid-west. As Landon said, "that broke the issue wide open in Kansas," and in the end, all the Kansas delegation voted for the Kennedy tariff legislation and influenced members of congress from other mid-western states.
- 1972** Delegates to national convention vote to support the Equal Rights Amendment.
- 1974** LWVK began working to preserve part of our state's natural heritage in a Tallgrass Prairie Park. Membership in the organization was opened to men.
- 1984** League members in Kansas joined with colleagues from the Missouri side of the state line to assist in hosting the Presidential Debate between President Reagan and former Vice President Walter Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri, sponsored by the national organization.
- 1988** LWVK and the Secretary of State formed the "Committee of '92" (the year reapportionment of the state's congressional districts would be finalized) to promote a constitutional amendment to permit Kansas to use the Federal census rather than the expensive and less reliable state census.
- 1989** LWVK adopted a Voter Advocacy Project which obtained data from 4,317 Kansas.
- 1990** "Why Don't Americans Vote" was a symposium co-sponsored by LWVK and the University of Kansas.
- 1993** The League inaugurated the ongoing Paraguay Project, cooperating with citizens of that country to exchange strategies and resources for strengthening democracy. The National Voter Registration Act ("Motor Voter") was signed into law by President Clinton. Kansas Leaguers and members across the U.S. had worked hard to support this legislation.
- 1996** LWVK cooperated with the Secretary of State, Department of Education, and Kids Voting to provide voters guides for Kansas students.
- 2000** LWVK took a position in support of a living wage.
- 2001** LWVK announced its position on the privatization of children's service by the state of Kansas, following two years of monitoring the changes and two years of study.

***Working together...for Kansas***

---

[Home/Study and Action/About the League](#)  
[Voter Service & Citizen Information/Current Issues](#)

League of Women Voters of Kansas  
618 S. Kansas Ave., Suite B1, Topeka 66603  
785-234-5152  
[lwvks@aol.com](mailto:lwvks@aol.com)