



League of Women Voters of Central Berkshire Records

1959-2001

9 boxes (4 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS478

Collection overview

First founded as a chapter for Pittsfield and later for all of central Berkshire county, this local league is one of many Massachusetts chapters of the national non-partisan political organization, League of Women Voters, that influences public policy through education and advocacy by registering voters, organizing candidate forums, publishing voting guides, and disseminating general information on the legislative process and the functioning of government on the local, state, and federal levels.

The bulk of the collection documents the activities and topics of interest to members of the League of Women Voters of Central Berkshire during the last three decades of their work before disbanding in 2001. The chapter consistently served to educate the public on voter registration, the voting process, and on the functioning of local and state government. Other issues of importance included child care and rights, prison reform, clean water, and health care.

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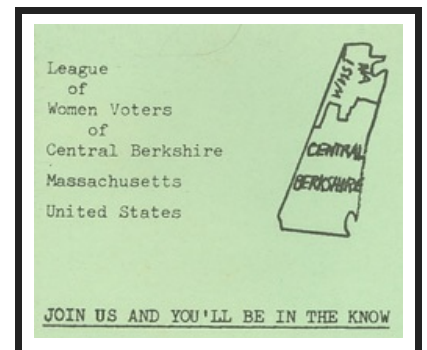
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Background on League of Women Voters of Central Berkshire

Established during the early 1960s, the League of Women Voters of Central Berkshire started out as a league chapter for the town of Pittsfield. Meeting with members of the Boston League of Women Voters in 1927 at the Tally Ho Inn, Mrs. George W. Edman and Mrs. Sheridan R. Cate paved the way to create a local league in Pittsfield. Three years later the group nominated its first slate of leaders, electing Mrs. Brace W. Paddock as president, Mrs. Norman C. Hull as vice-president in charge of finance, and Mrs. Edman as vice-president of publicity on January 19, 1931. By the time the league held its first annual meeting members had already identified issues to focus their initial educational efforts and advocacy on including efficiency in government, child welfare, education, legal status, international relations to prevent war and legislation.



LWVCB brochure

Throughout the 1940s the League targeted housing problems in Pittsfield; their 1941 housing study committee

reported: "Pittsfield has no slum clearance project ... no housing authority to condemn dangerous and indecent slum dwellings, no factual survey of local housing conditions, no organized citizens' housing association." The League's interest in housing did not waver and together with residents of the city and Mayor James Fallon a preliminary committee was formed which later resulted in the formation of a permanent citizen's housing association. During the 1950s-1960s the LWV of Pittsfield continued to study and inform the public on issues ranging from the impact of foreign trade on the local economy to the operation of Massachusetts state government.

By the 1960s membership in the LWV of Pittsfield expanded beyond the city lines reaching out in every direction to towns in the surrounding area. Instead of sponsoring a fourth league in the county (chapters existed already in Williamstown and North Adams) Leaguers decided to expand the Pittsfield chapter to encompass all of central Berkshire. During the next few decades the newly expanded League led significant campaigns on a number of key issues: voter registration, prison reform, child care, and clean drinking water.

After decades of successfully fulfilling the League's mission as a nonpartisan political organization dedicated to encouraging active participation of citizens in government and influencing public policy through education and advocacy, the Central Berkshire chapter disbanded in 2001.

Scope of collection

The records of the central Berkshire county League of Women document the group's efforts to encourage the public to participate in government as well as their efforts to educate the community about key issues of local importance from the 1970s until the chapter disbanded in 2001. Through a variety of media, including newspaper articles, meeting minutes, and newsletters, this collection provides a rich body of materials useful for evaluating the various issues of significance to Leaguers over the course of three decades and the resulting public policy that helped shape the social and political climate of central Berkshire.

An example of one local issue in which the support of the LWVCB played an important role was the Washington Mountain Brook watershed project. As the demand for a new supply of clean water for the towns of Lee and Lenox increased it became clear that drilling for new wells would not be the answer, since the possibility of PCB contamination was high. The towns endorsed the Washington Mountain Brook watershed project as the best solution for the water shortage. Concerned about the potential environmental impact of the watershed project, the LWVCB examined the case carefully and determined that given the likelihood of contaminated ground water sources the WMB project was the only viable alternative for a new water supply. The Massachusetts Audubon Society reviewed the same data and concurred; the Conservation Law Foundation of New England, Inc., however, disagreed and filed a lawsuit to stop construction. The LWVCB teamed up with the We Need Water Now Committee, formed by concerned citizens of Lee and Lenox, to intervene in the lawsuit in an effort to have it withdrawn altogether. Ultimately, the groups' combined efforts played a critical role in achieving the approval necessary to move forward with the construction.

Series descriptions

Series 1: Administration

2.5 linear ft.

This series contains materials associated with the LWVBC's daily activities, including meeting minutes, membership files, financial records, and newsletters. Together these materials offer insight into the chapter's structure and function as well as its methods for reaching the public. Also included are printed materials and correspondence from the state and national Leagues that convey the broader agendas proposed by the parent organization.

Series 2: Issue Campaigns

1.5 linear ft.

Subject files within this series identify the political, social, and cultural issues in which members of the League were involved. Topics of primary focus include voter registration drives, prison and election reform, elder health care, children's rights, clean water, and education.

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Series 2: Issue Campaigns

1968-2000

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Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired in November 2004.

Processing Information

Processed by Lori Satter, 2008.

Related Material

For materials related to the history of the League of Women Voters, see:

- **League of Women Voters of Amherst Records, 1939-2001**

Language:

English

Copyright and Use([More information](#))

Cite as: League of Women Voters of Berkshire County (MS 478). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Berkshire County (Mass.)--Politics and government.
- Drinking water--Massachusetts
- Education--Massachusetts
- Massachusetts--Politics and government--1951-
- Prisons--Massachusetts
- Water--Pollution--Massachusetts

Contributors

- League of Women Voters of Central Berkshire **[main entry]**

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