Guide to the League of Women Voters Records, 1911-1979

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Guide to the League of Women Voters Records, 1911-1979

Collection number: MS 1268
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Descriptive Summary

Title: League of Women Voters Records,
Date (inclusive): 1911-1979
Collection number: MS 1268

Creator: League of Women Voters, 1921-
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San Francisco, California 94105-4014
Language: English.

Donor
League of Women Voters

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History

Following the triumphant campaign for California suffrage in 1911, many politically active women joined the California Civic League. Guided by a conscious design of drawing together on terms of equality representatives of as many social groups as possible for the specific purpose of study and service in the field of politics and civics, league members embarked on an aggressive reform program.

Impressed by their achievements, feminist Carrie Chapman Catt encouraged the California Civic League to merge with the recently formed League of Women Voters. The California women agreed to the merger, and in 1921 adopted the name California Civic League of Women Voters. (Their name was later changed in 1925 to the California League of Women Voters, and to the League of Women Voters of California in 1946.)

The new league stressed the need for non-partisan politics in order to prepare the new woman voter to be an efficient voting citizen. Reacting strongly to the aftermath of World War One and the Teapot Dome Scandals, the league directed their efforts toward international cooperation to prevent war, and needed legislation for effective government. Launching on a full program of political education, they conducted study sessions, offered lecture series, explained ballot selections, interviewed public officials and published the results.

Not as radical as the earlier suffrage organizations in either tactics or philosophy, the League nevertheless initiated an effective program by combining education and activism. Among their early successful efforts was the 1923 radification of the Child Labor Laws; the 1937 reorganization of California education; the 1937 fight for the right of women to sit on juries; and, the 1945 establishment of the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Since the 1940s the League has developed an increasingly sophisticated organization on the national, state and local level. While their voter education programs have received the most publicity, members have also been active gathering facts on issues, discussing them and consequently, reaching a League consensus. Once a position was agreed upon, it became part of the action program and was referred to as a Continuing Responsibility.

Previous to the 1970's feminist movement, the League was one of the few political organizations open only to women. The League was in the unique position to provide women with the opportunity to develop leadership skills, to gain organizational knowledge, and to maintain an extensive social network. Inheriting the strong tradition of female reformers of the last two centuries, the League is still considered a watchguard against political corruption.

Scope and Content

The League of Women Voters extensive collection consists of over fifty years of correspondence, minutes, reports, financial records, audio tapes and a documentary film. Included are League publications, printed materials and newspaper clippings depicting the development and achievements of the League throughout the 20th century.

The organizational records are grouped into three primary categories. The San Francisco Center or the League of Women Voters of San Francisco, consists of a history of the center, minutes, reports and various published articles. Local League records comprise a substantial portion of the collection, often including the original membership application. The Board reports, annual conventions and Continuing Responsibilities of the League of Women Voters of California make up the third major category.

The list of Continuing Responsibilities is an impressive list of the major social issues in California from the 1920's through the 1970's. Diverse campaigns for political reforms such as the 1932 founding of the California Institute for Women at Tehachapi; the 1940's fight for the revision of the State Constitution; the 1950's debates over United States participation in the United Nations; the 1960's struggle for fair housing, education and voter registration; and, the 1970's confrontation with urban pollution and city planning.
Well documented also are the voter education programs. Workshop notes, lecture series and printed materials are contained in the collection. There are also samplings of the manner in which the League questioned candidates on campaign issues; how they presented the ideas to the public; and, the process by which they tabulated voter trends.

The documentary film, We Will Not Do Nothing, is a capsulized view of how the League approaches issues from the initial process through the election itself. It is an account of the 1970 Hunter's Point initiative for improved education. Coupled with the printed materials, the film offers an additional perspective into the workings of the League and its relationship with the public.

General Information about the League, such as the by-laws, budgets and membership lists is also available. An interesting addition are the notes of the various committee members explaining methods of how to conduct meetings, draw out personalities and manage difficult situations. Much of the correspondence is concerned with strategies but there are occasional letters responding to the attacks directed at the League for some of its less popular stances.

This collection is extremely valuable for anyone interested in the history of the League of Women Voters, history of womens' organizations, civic reform of the 20th century and California history. A general knowledge of United States history would be helpful in order to place some of the events and issues into historical context. This is particularly true for such controversial issues as the United Nations and California's Proposition 14 in 1964.

MS 1269A
Brown, Edmund, 10/4/60 (TLS) 2/9/60 (TLS)
California Institute for Women at Tehachapi, 1932-1934
California--Politics and Government
Prisons--California
San Francisco--Government
Woman--Employment--California
Women in California

MS 1272
California--Politics and Government
Prisons--California
San Francisco--Government
Woman--Employment--California
Women in California

MS 1273
California--Politics and Government
Discrimination in Housing
Education--San Francisco
Feinstein, Dianne, 11/5/70 (TLS)
Moscone, George, 7/23/68 (TLS) 7/10/69 (TLS) 7/27/71 (TLS)
Murphy, George, 8/23/66 (TLS) 10/4/68 (TLS) 2/27/69 (TLS) 3/23/70 (TLS)
San Francisco--Public Schools
United Nations--San Francisco
Women in California

MS 1275
Acheson, Dean, 2/28/50 (TLS)
Alioto, Joseph, 5/14/68 (TLS)
Brown, Edmund, 9/11/59 (TLS) 9/19/60 (TLS)
Discrimination in Education
Discrimination in Housing
Education--San Francisco, 1960-1969
Hoover, Herbert, 3/4/59 (TLS)
Moscone, George, 11/14/64 (TLS) 3/26/68 (TLS) 9/24/71 [UNK]
San Francisco Center
San Francisco--Government
Shelley, John, 11/15/52 (TLS) 7/21/64 (TLS) 2/10/64 (TLS)
11/9/64 (TLS) 6/8/65 (TLS)
United Nations--San Francisco
Water Supply--San Francisco
Women in California

**MS 1276**
Johnson, Lady Bird, 6/12/65 (TLS)
Moscone, George, 5/8/70 (TLS) 5/28/71 (TLS)

**MS 3585**
California--Politics and Government
Discrimination in Housing
Education--San Francisco
San Francisco--Government
San Francisco--Public Schools
United Nations--San Francisco
Water Rights--San Francisco
Water Supply--San Francisco
Women in California

**Material Transferred**
An incomplete set of the *California State Bulletin* has been transferred to the Library's Periodical File.
The original photographs have been transferred to the photograph collection.