

The Role of the League of Women Voters in Oregon

“More Power Than We Knew”

1920-2012



Recent League Milestones



2010

90th anniversary of the League of Women Voters

2012

100th anniversary of woman suffrage in Oregon

Changing with the times...

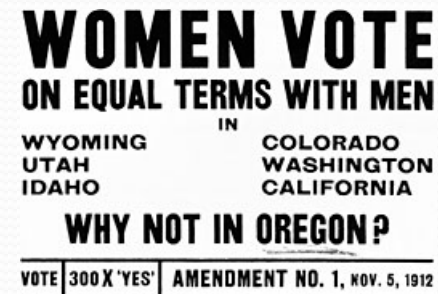


The long road to suffrage in Oregon

- 1871** Abigail Scott Duniway and Susan B. Anthony undertake lecture tour and petition campaign for equal rights
- 1872** Petition taken to Salem; suffrage bill fails
- 1873** Duniway forms Oregon State Equal Suffrage Association (OSES)
- 1884** First attempt to pass constitutional suffrage amendment fails



- 1900 *Oregonian* editor, Harvey Scott, opposes amendment; second attempt fails
- 1905 National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) meets in Portland
- 1906 Suffrage linked to temperance effort; third attempt fails
- 1908 Fourth attempt fails
- 1910 Fifth attempt fails



1912 *Suffrage amendment passes in Oregon!*

Before the League of Women Voters

- Oregon State Equal Suffrage Association (OSES)
- Oregon branch of the National Council of Women Voters: (organized in Tacoma in 1911, a NAWSA affiliate)
- Oregon Equal Suffrage Alliance, organized in 1915 by Dr. Esther Pohl Lovejoy
- Equal Suffrage League, University of Oregon
- Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (originally a NAWSA committee; became the National Woman's Party in 1916)

The rest of the country catches up

1916 Carrie Chapman Catt elected NAWSA president;
national effort replaces state-by-state approach

March, 1919 NAWSA call to convention invited:

“the women voters of the fifteen full suffrage states...to join their forces in a League of Women Voters, one of whose objects shall be to speed the suffrage campaign in our own and other countries.”

May, 1919 House passes 19th Amendment

June, 1919 Senate passes 19th Amendment

Last hurdle: ratification

Fall, 1919 Carrie Chapman Catt attends luncheon of Suffrage Alliance at Multnomah Hotel in Portland; urges support of new organization to educate and energize new electorate

Ratification efforts by Alliance:

- Letter-writing campaign
- Speaker's bureau
- Pressure on Governor Olcott to call special session
- Appeal to new *Oregonian* editor

January 12, 1920 Oregon ratifies 19th Amendment

Who's in charge?

League of Women Citizens

- Organized by Effie Simmons, delegate to 1920 NAWSA convention
- Goal: change organization's name and admit men
- Mrs. Charles Curry elected first president

Oregon League of Women Voters

- Incorporated by first president, Maria Hidden
- Later dissolved, but name still registered until 1935 legislative action

*Victory Luncheon
August 28, 1920
Crystal Room, Benson
Hotel, Portland*

- Mayor and rival leaders spoke to crowd of 300
- Tribute to Abigail Scott Duniway.
- “Radical” National Women’s Party members not made welcome
- Helen Ekin Starrett (attendee of first national suffrage convention in 1869) wrote song for the occasion.

Mrs. C.B. Simmons (Effie)

Honorary First President



The fledgling League

- First Leagues organized in Portland, Salem, Albany, Corvallis, Forest Grove, McMinnville, Marshfield, North Bend, Roseburg, Grants Pass, Medford
- Denounced as a “nonpartisan party, sure to cause dissension between men and women”
- Legislative goals considered “socialistic” and unpatriotic
- Ongoing question: stay educational or retain program committees (later called “departments”)

Topics of the 1920s

- Living conditions of the “foreign population”
- Tuberculosis control
- Aid to mothers and infants
- U. S. membership in the World Court
- Ratification of a national child labor amendment
- State judicial system
- Hydro-electric power
- Abolition of common law marriages

The Depression years

- Studies: tax limitations, teacher tenure, vocational education, immigration, disarmament, employment discrimination, state budget, school finance
- Women's issues: girl's industrial school, majority age of 21, premarital exams, jury duty equity, birth control, opposition to ERA (considered threat to minimum wage and working hours legislation)
- Opposition to misuse of Common School Funds

The war years

- Support of Lend-Lease
- Broadsides: “Agricultural Child Labor During War” and “Oregon’s Mental Hospitals Are a Disgrace”
- *Modernizing County Government* study
- “CAs”: Improving Oregon’s Tax System, Reforestation and Conservation, Coordination of Services for Delinquents and Pre-delinquents
- “CRs”: Meat and Milk Inspection, Juvenile Court Procedures, School Tax Equalization

A “subversive” organization

- 1947** Walt Disney called LWVUS a “Commie front organization” in HUAC testimony
- 1950s** Oregon League accused by American Legion and DAR of being un-American
- 1960s** Conservative groups in Oregon called League support of school district reorganization and UN a “step on the way toward world government”

Membership ebbs and flows

- 1930** 25 study groups
- 1948** 13 Leagues; 2,000 members (Portland had over 1,000 members, 4th largest in U.S.)
- 1957** 15 Leagues; 2,054 members (Portland had 1,400 members)
- 1961** 20 Leagues
- 1970** 16 Leagues; 2,060 members (Portland's membership declines to 518; others grew)
- 1981** 21 Leagues; 1,836 members (Portland's membership down to 297)
- 2011** 14 local Leagues; 1,047 members (186 Portland members)

Action—taking the long view

- 1953 Redistricting and revising the state Constitution
- 1955 Equitable distribution of educational resources, air quality
- 1959 Urban growth issues
- 1963 Oregon's tax system
- 1967 Opposition to sales tax
- 1970s Environmental quality, land use, energy, water policy, Roe v. Wade, ERA
- 1975 Campaign finance reform
- 1981 Statewide judicial system
- 1983 Support of sales tax
- 1987 Mental health services
- 1980s School funding

Landmark dates in Voter Service

- 1981 to 2000** Vote-by-mail instituted in Oregon
- 1991** Motor Voter implemented
- 1992** Telephone hot line set up for campaign advertising complaints
- 1998** 148,000 free *Voters' Guides* distributed
- 2000** 410,000 free *Voters' Guides* distributed
- 2000s** *Voters' Guide* expanded to Spanish, audio, large print, easy-to-read, Braille, and online versions
- 2002** Oregon Student Mock Election for middle and high schoolers
- 2009** "Video Voters' Guide" of Washington County League becomes statewide project
- 2010** Vote411.org enables personalized ballot information; online voter registration

Recent Studies

**Land Use in
Oregon (1995,
2002)**

**Election Laws and
Methods (1995,
2008)**

**K-12 School
District Financing
(1999)**

**Funding Oregon
(2004)**

**Oregon Parks
System (1999)**

**Farmworkers in
Oregon (2000)**

**Measure 11's Effect
on Juvenile
Justice (1994)**

**Oregon's
Initiative System
(2001)**

**Mental Health in
Oregon (2001)**

**Energy Policies
(2003)**

**Homeless Youth
(2006)**

**Oregon Judiciary
(2006)**

**Redistricting
(2007)**

**Water in Oregon
(2009, 2010)**

**Coastal Issues
(2012)**

League history highlights

- 1951** Change from annual to biennial state conventions
- 1974** Full membership for men
- 1980** Formation of LWVOREF
- 1980** Formation of CRRILO (dissolved in 2009)
- 1987** First LWVOR legislative lobbyist
- 1995** 75th anniversary gala event, Benson Hotel
- 1996** First website
- 2006** Partnership with SOS on *Voters' Guides*
- 2007** Election of LWVOR co-leaders
- 2008** LWVUS Convention, Portland