

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY HIGHLIGHTS LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS – ACTON AREA

The League of Women Voters was founded by Carrie Chapman Catt in 1920 during the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The convention was held just six months before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote after a 72-year struggle.

The League began as a "mighty political experiment" designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibilities as voters. It encouraged them to use their new power to participate in shaping public policy. From the beginning, the League was an activist, grassroots organization whose leaders believed that citizens should play a critical role in advocacy. It was then, and is now, a nonpartisan organization. League founders believed that maintaining a nonpartisan stance would protect the fledgling organization from becoming mired in the party politics of the day. However, League members were encouraged to be political themselves, by educating citizens about, and lobbying for, government and social reform legislation.

This holds true today. The League is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public. The League has a long, rich history that continues with each passing year.¹

In May 1959, the provisional League of Women Voters of Acton, which initially had 25 members, was officially acknowledged by the LWV of Massachusetts. After two years of membership growth resulting in 69 active members and the required publication of the *Know Your Town, Acton*, the LWV of the United States welcomed the Acton League on February 1, 1961 with this acknowledgement.

“It gives me great pleasure to inform you that the Board (LWVUS) has voted to recognize the League of Women Voters of Acton as a local League.

National Board comments on the report of your vigorous activities were without exception complimentary. There were words of praise for your growth in membership and membership participation and for the workmanlike (sic) way in which your Board has made and executed its program plans. The Board was particularly impressed by your excellent promotion and distribution of publications both to the membership and within the community.

The good work you have accomplished on the *Know Your Town* study and especially the fact that parts of it have been requested by the Acton School Committee and the PTA for their own use indicates that Acton League is making a real imprint on the community. Your regular representation at local meetings and hearings and the good relationship you enjoy with town officials is further evidence of excellent public relations.”

¹ www.lwv.org League of Women of the United States. Our History

In 1983, the LWV of Acton & Stow celebrated its 25th Anniversary at a party attended by many past and present League members along with local officials. In honor of this occasion, the Acton Board of Selectmen declared the week of October 29 as League of Women Voters Week. In addition, Acton member, Anne Ridley, compiled a history of the League's first 25 years (1959-1983) by recording its achievements in community service. In the concluding paragraph of this booklet, Anne Ridley contemplated the following:

“It is difficult to predict what will be written about our League in the next 25 years. But if those years are as productive and meaningful to the two communities and to the members individually as the past 25 have been to the hundreds of Leaguers who have brought about the achievements detailed in this short history, people will still be saying in 2009 that membership in the League of Women Voters does make a difference!”

The LWV– Acton Area has been an influential presence in its member communities for a total of 50 years. This history highlights its accomplishments from 1984 through most of 2009.

As the League finished its 25th year, the gavel was passed from **Carolyn Gray** to **Nancy Tavernier** who served as its 17th president for two years, 1984-1986. The Board of Directors included 16 members who met monthly in a conference room arrangement conducting League business in a corporate board room setting. It was also the year the League entered the electronic age by computerizing its financial records, membership forms, and publications. The Bulletin, however, continued to be produced using stencils and a mimeograph machine. Ten adventuresome Board members accepted the local TV station's invitation to learn the skills of Cable TV production which resulted in the League being a certified local access user. This capability opened many opportunities to spotlight the League's voter service and advocacy activities such as candidates' nights, forums and interviews with local officials. There were many issues and activities that were tackled in 1985 and 1986 including: a state study on corrections and the death penalty; a local study to place seat belts on school buses; a second local study to focus on town-wide communication; a school study by the Stow members was completed; the first Household Hazardous Waste Day was held with League support; the annual League crafts fair raised \$1500; local review of Town Meeting attendance; the marketing of Acton souvenir items such as t-shirts, night shirts, mugs and postcards; and the most unique activity of all, a fundraiser Ham and Bean supper prior to the start of the Annual Town Meeting as a nostalgia nod to the early historic town meetings.

Nancy started her second year, 1985, by cleaning out hundreds of League files and organizing them for storage. The League's major focus was on local action addressing the sewer issue in Acton. The League took a local issue of wastewater disposal problems, applied local positions to it and went all out to help get sewers approved for South Acton. We held forums, TV shows, helped fund and produce an eight page newspaper that went to every household, and formed a coalition with other interested citizen groups. This was classic local action. The League not only helped win a major victory at Town Meeting but also gained great visibility and a true sense of accomplishment. Other League activities included standard Voter Service projects, the addition of artist Phyllis Hughes' "Main Street drawing" and the "I

sleep best in Acton” nightshirt for college students to the souvenir collection, and the publication of an updated edition of *Acton – Know Your Town*.

In May 1986, the gavel passed to the League’s 18th President, **Beatrice Perkins**, who willingly took on the Presidency for the second time in the League’s history after 20 years of reduced involvement due to outside employment. Because many members were employed full-time, a change in the organization was required in order to keep them engaged and active. Board Meetings and general membership meetings moved to the evening allowing members to work and still be active volunteers in the League. An important advancement was the acquisition of a used photo-copier which brought the League out of the dark ages of mimeograph machines and stencils. This allowed a revamping of the monthly Bulletin design making it a much more professional newsletter.

Local action focus for 1986-87 was a traffic management study, support for the Master Plan at Town Meeting, and a full review of all local League positions. Members also participated in two LWVUS studies: Meeting Basic Human Needs and Agricultural Policy. Good publicity kept the League visible in the community especially with continued Cable TV coverage of our events. The Membership committee was especially active in retaining members by contacting each member for feedback and input on the organization. At the end of the year, the League reported a total of 123 members. 1988 is the year the League first sponsored area high school students providing funds to send them to the Harvard Model Congress, a sponsorship that has continued every year since. League members accompanied the students and shared the experience as observers. The students reported back to the League at Annual Meeting and enthusiastically recounted the details of their experience.

Bea continued as President a second year with a focus on fund-raising. The annual League fair had become a juried crafts fair but was determined to be too much work for the few members involved and the Board voted to drop it. In its place, the League concentrated on selling souvenirs as a major fund-raising effort as well as the annual Finance Drive. League members participated in the LWVM Phonathon earning back 10% for our treasury from the proceeds of our calls. Members also helped the Town Clerk prepare voting machines in the Town Hall attic before each election, earning \$4 a machine. The League was in excellent financial health as Bea left office. Members also came to consensus on the local study of Traffic Management.

Micki Williams succeeded Bea as the League’s 19th President in May 1988 with members celebrating the League’s 30th anniversary at the Annual Meeting. After the National Convention in 1974 voted to allow men to become full voting members, male representation in the Acton League slowly grew to 14 in 1988, more than 10% of the league’s membership. The number included six Selectmen or ex-Selectmen and one former Town Moderator. Local action activities in 1989 included the implementation of the new local position on traffic management. Members met with the Acton Planning Director to present the League’s recommendations for improvements in planning, zoning, and traffic control. Members also convened a Town Meeting Study Committee to examine ways to streamline the meeting, make it more representative, improve attendance, and improve the level of information given to the attendees. At the League’s suggestion a teller system was instituted for Town Meeting. A study/action group was

formed to examine school budgeting procedures and the fiscal constraints of Prop 2 ½. This led to a decision by the Board to actively support a Prop 2 ½ override for Acton in the spring of 1989. Acton's first ever Override for \$690,000 passed easily. Being a national election year, the League was busy with voter registration and also with state races, hosting three public forums to inform voters about candidates and ballot questions.

Organizational changes began to reflect the drop off in volunteerism, no local study was proposed, souvenir sales were impacted by the cancellation of the annual Acton Jamboree, and someone was hired to type up the Bulletin and take it to an outside publisher. Luckily the League still raised over \$2000 during the Finance Drive.

The League's local action priority in 1990 was Recycling. This included forums on how to recycle, ongoing help with the Town's Household Hazardous Waste Day, and demonstrations on backyard composting. Members surveyed citizens to see how many participate in voluntary recycling, encouraged the schools to get involved in recycling, published a pamphlet on recycling opportunities at the Transfer Station in Acton, and initiated the addition of plastics and aluminum to the recycling collection. If Micki's term could be defined in one word, it was Action. Micki admitted the toughest part of being the voice of the League keeping her opinions to herself. Micki went on to serve at the State League level for many years and then became a strong member of the Acton School Committee.

It took two people to replace Micki Williams. For the first time the League elected Co-Presidents as its 20th Presidents. **Bea Perkins**, former two-time president, agreed to share the post with **Andrea Miller**, 1990-1992. The team approach to the Presidency was a great success and each brought her own strength to the position. A local study on the Acton Public Nursing Service began in the fall and culminated in a local consensus the following spring. In a somewhat related area of interest, the League participated in the LWVUS study on Health Care. Fundraising activities continued with a modification of the annual supper before Town Meeting, it became a spaghetti supper instead of ham and beans with well over 80 people attending. The dinner was a break-even event but it generated good will and a chance for the Town Meeting attendees to socialize before the business of the night. The LWVM Phonathon, the Finance Drive and the sale of Acton souvenirs continued to replenish the League coffers.

A highlight of the 1991-92 League years was the growth in membership with the addition of 19 members from Maynard who were interested in forming a unit of their own. This pushed the membership to 105. The Maynard group formed an observer corps and went to work on a *Know Your Town* booklet. They assisted in the sponsorship of two candidate forums in their town and students from Maynard High School were invited to participate in the Harvard Model Congress program.

Loretta Roscoe agreed to lead the League for 1992-93 as its 21st President bringing creative new ideas to the organization and the community. The League co-sponsored a six week seminar with the New England Foundation for the Humanities on Supreme Court decisions involving the Bill of Rights. This was enthusiastically welcomed by the community. The national health care study group also held an informational forum open to the public that was well attended. The League continued to staff a strong

observer corps who kept the members informed about six town boards. The Voter Service committee made a big push with a voter registration drive that brought 1070 new voters onto the rolls. They also organized candidate forums and an educational forum for Acton's second Prop 2 ½ Override ballot question.

Pam Collins was Loretta's 1st Vice President and they worked so well as a team, they agreed to be Co-Presidents for 1993-94. The membership at annual meeting set out goals for the League that Pam and Loretta helped accomplish. The League initiated a series of Town Finance Forums to help the members and the public understand the financial challenges faced by the area towns, these were well attended. Jo-Ann Berry formed a Child Care Survey Committee to do a need assessment for school-age child care programs, this focus brought several new members into the League. Acton members updated their *Know Your Town* while the Maynard members completed theirs for publication in 1994. Meeting the goal of increased League visibility was done through publicity and the hosting of a very successful Town Board Social. The major organizational change was changing the name to Acton Area League from LWV of Acton-Stow to reflect the reality of expanded coverage of the membership area to include Acton, Boxborough, Littleton, Maynard and Stow. The League saw a surprising lack of interest in local elections and cancelled its candidates' forum due to lack of attendance by the candidates, there were no contested races. Concurrently with the lack of interest in elections, the observer corps dwindled to three.

Jean Foley was elected to serve as the League's 22nd President, May 1994-1996. The League continued its local action focus on Domestic Violence sponsoring a forum that was well attended. The major expense of the year was the publication of the updated *Know Your Town* for Acton, funded from an escrow account. League fundraising efforts fell short of its goals reflecting a struggling economy and fewer opportunities to market Acton souvenirs which had become an important source of income. The League's Bylaws were carefully reviewed with many updates and changes presented to the Annual Meeting for approval. The League took on the task of reviewing and updating the Town Charter and presented a Charter revision package to the Board of Selectmen for their recommendation to the next Annual Town Meeting. The recommendations were modified to some degree but by the time the 1995 Town Meeting came, the proposed changes had become controversial and in the end the Town Meeting took no action. The League began to examine its role, with some members supporting voter service and educational activities while others wanting to see more issue and action oriented activities. An important Warrant meeting was held for the 1996 Town Meeting with presentations from advocates of the proposed NARA recreation area and the Library expansion. The League supported both and spoke in favor at Town Meeting urging support for the debt exclusion ballot questions needed to fund both projects. The League ended the year with 97 members, down slightly over the previous counts, with interest waning in Littleton and Stow but staying steady in Maynard.

When the gavel was passed to the 23rd President **Jo-Ann Berry**, there were major organizational changes on the horizon. Jo-Ann served as President for 3 years, 1997-1999. After much discussion about member dissatisfaction with the existing organizational structure, the board went to work to address the concerns. After help from the LWVM, the League chose to focus on two action areas: 1. A program

to reconnect the League by going back to its basic purpose and functions, and 2. Developing a structure to better reflect the multi-town membership making the League more effective. A subcommittee involving members from the member towns was formed to develop the new structural plan. The Board agreed to try the structure for two years and then evaluate its effectiveness. It basically divided the responsibility of the League into those covering area functions and others to those in the individual member towns. The reality of the change was challenging for the Nominating Committee to find coordinators for the member towns, only some of the towns were covered. The Maynard members voted to do a study of the Maynard Public Library and the Acton members produced a very successful public workshop on "How to run for office." The event was taped and the videotape was available in area libraries for potential candidates to view. The League increased its visibility by funding a banner to fly over Main St. reminding voters about elections and Town Meeting. It was a big hit until a major wind storm shredded it. At the end of 1997, League membership was at 103, including 16 male members, with a drop in Maynard and Stow and an increase in Littleton.

The major project in 1998 was the review and revision of all local League positions initiated by the merger of the Littleton League into the Acton Area League which necessitated incorporating the Littleton positions into the Acton positions. A committee with members from Acton, Stow, Boxboro and Littleton met throughout the year to make three findings. First, minor edits were made to bring some positions up-to-date. Second, it was recommended that nine out-of-date positions be retired. Third and most important, 12 positions were identified to be good candidates for area positions while seven positions remained stand alone town-specific positions. Members at the Annual Meeting adopted these recommendations and a new Local Program Positions booklet was prepared. As a follow up to the local study of after school programs, the League contributed \$900 to assist in the start up of an after school program held at the Junior High.

Jo-Ann's third year, 1999, was an extremely active Voter Service year. There were a total of six candidate forums covering state representative and senate races in the primary and general elections and contested races in local elections for Acton, Littleton and Stow. A regional forum for the state senate seat included Harvard, Bolton, Ayer and Shirley. This was also the debut year of the "Vote Today" signs that were put on private lawns and eventually, with Board of Selectmen permission, were put on public right of ways. Another Prop 2 ½ Override was proposed but the League decided to stay neutral. As part of the Local Program activities, a Business Climate Committee was formed to assess the Town's attitude toward businesses. Attracting and keeping businesses is a way of increasing the tax base as well as adding accessibility of goods and services. As Jo-Ann left office, membership was at a high of 108.

Long time League member **Ann Chang** agreed to serve as its 24th President, 1999-2001. The Board worked hard to rebuild the League's funds to enable them to launch new programs and activities. There were specific fundraising opportunities such as Oktoberfest and the Littleton Town Fair, new Acton souvenirs, the expansion of the finance drive, and increasing the fees charged for Bulletin ads to make the Bulletin self-supporting. These efforts all helped to improve the League's fiscal health and stability. Ann was a strong and dynamic leader who motivated members new and old to become or stay involved

in a major way. The warrant meetings were opened up to the general public helping residents become better informed about the important votes at Town Meeting. The League also held a Prop 2 ½ Override forum which was well attended. The Business Climate Committee continued to meet while doing research and informing the public with two programs on planning opportunities and constraints and economic development tools. Yet another update of *Know Your Town* was completed in time for the 2000 Town Meeting and copies sold there at a brisk pace. This edition included a new street map with major points of interest and a first-ever index. The observer corps was revived and given a special section in the Bulletin. League members came to consensus on the LWVM study of Special Education with the focus this year on the financing aspect.

The League sponsored tours of the two public buildings slated for renovations and replacements, the High School and the Police Station. Ultimately both construction projects were approved by voters at the Town Meeting and the Elections although the Police Station replacement came later. The major Voter Service activity was getting out the vote for the High School debt exclusion for voters in both Acton and Boxborough to approve in a Special Election. The League sent a town-wide postcard mailing to all registered voters reminding them to vote. The result was a 44% voter turnout and an overwhelming vote in favor of the debt exclusion. A two year local study was adopted on the subject of Growth Management Tools and was introduced at the Opening Meeting with a discussion of "Growth versus the Environment." As Ann left office, the membership count was the highest in 5 years, 115, up 10% over the previous year. The LWVM gave the League an award and a discount on Per Member Payments for this accomplishment. Unfortunately, the Maynard unit all but disappeared with only one member left at the end of 2001.

Our longest serving Stow member, **Kathy Borofsky**, joined with **Ruth Kohls** to assume the 25th Presidency as Co-Presidents for 2001-03. One of the priority action items selected by Annual Meeting was to examine the problem of risky behaviors in area youth. The League took an active role in Health Education evaluation serving on the Superintendent's Advisory Council and supporting the newly formed Community Alliance for Youth (CAFY). This involvement led to the co-sponsorship of the first-ever Wellness Day program for all Acton-Boxborough 7th graders held at Merrimac College. It involved a full day of workshops and lectures for students and their parents. The other priority action item was yet another evaluation of Town Meeting, the League has done and continues to do these reviews throughout our history. This effort was the result of a poorly attended town meeting in 2001. League members prepared a survey to be distributed to attendees at the next Town Meeting to solicit suggestions for improvement. One of the changes recommended by the League was for the Moderator to schedule a Pre-Town Meeting for presenters to review the slides and set standards for presentations. This has continued to be a solid improvement. The local study committee working on "Growth Management Tools" completed its work with consensus allowing the League to support the local adoption of the Community Preservation Act as a way to purchase Open Space. Voter Service activities focused on local elections with a new twist, co-sponsorship with other groups. Acton's forum was co-sponsored by The Beacon and a reporter sat with the President to ask questions of the candidates. Stow's forum was co-sponsored with the Stow Women's Club and Stow Business Association while the Littleton forum was shared with the Littleton Women's Club. These were all well attended.

In the second year of Kathy and Ruth's term, the League put on quite a show called the Simulated Town Meeting held in March 2003, three weeks before a major Override Election was to take place in Acton. This was a combined event with local action and voter service, always a sensitive partnership. The voter education piece helped the League line up speakers who dealt with the budget process from both sides of the issue, those who believed we needed more revenue from an override, and those who thought the Town should live within its means without an override. The Town Moderator moderated the event simulating a regular Town Meeting format. No votes were taken but over 200 people attended, including students, and many lauded the League for this event. After this forum, the League Board voted to support the override and send out a town-wide mailing stating its position as well as letters to the editor. The Override passed in the Annual election. The Simulated Town Meeting idea was submitted to the LWVM as part of the biennial Convention planning. Our League received the Lotte E. Scharfman Award for Innovative Voter Service in part for this unique voter service activity. Since this was a state and national election year, Voter Service was kept busy on many fronts. The League sponsored a Pre-Primary forum for the new state representative seat on a very hot night in Boxboro with over 100 people in attendance. The League also held a well-attended Pre-Election forum for the candidates of the 5th Congressional District, the State Senate, and two State Representative seats. Marge Kennedy began to write one of a kind doggerel for the League's Annual Meeting summarizing the year in verse and printing it in the Annual Reports for each year.

In June 2003, Co-Presidents **Betsy Comstock** and **Paulina Knibbe** became the 26th Presidents, 2003-05, ushering in a dramatic change in the leadership structure. The Nominating Committee developed a new structure intended to correct the problems of too few members doing too much work and Board meetings that were too long. Instead of a Board of Directors and President(s), a Steering Committee was formed that consisted of Co-Chairs, Treasurer, Secretary and Chairs of five Standing Committees. Responsibility for much of the ongoing work of the League was delegated to the Standing Committees: Finance, Voter Service, Organization, Communication, and Program and Action. This was meant to insure that a small team, not one person, would do the work. After the first year, an evaluation was made by the Steering Committee resulting in further refinements such as creating four Issue and Action Teams: Environment, Social Policy, Government and Education. It is possible that this new structure was responsible for the infectious energy and enthusiasm in the League that brought about high participation with 73 of 109 members participating in some way throughout the year. The Nominating Committee was commended for their foresight and willingness to find a larger number of people to serve than normal.

The major local action focus was the study and concentration on Integrated Pest Management with an active committee that published a brochure on IPM and held a well-attended forum. Jo-Ann Berry, as a member of the school committee, developed a curriculum on local government geared toward 5th graders with an emphasis on how Acton's Town Meeting functions. This Mock Town Meeting activity is done annually with the 5th graders in Acton simulating a typical Town Meeting using an assigned issue to debate and vote up or down. Paulina initiated an experiment with a series of Conversations on topics of current interest hosting one each on the Patriot Act, Globalization, and Same Sex Marriage. It was a

very successful way to provide opportunities for members to look at larger issues. The League had a strong year for income due to the receipt of donations from members, a \$500 grant from Quick Cuts, and brisk souvenir sales thanks to the marketing by Judy Wolff. There was also a generous donation by a member for \$1000 to help underwrite the cost of the IPM publication.

Betsy and Paulina completed their two year term with an extremely productive year. There were five candidate forums, two public forums, a regional study on State Education Funding, a Conversation about the 9/11 Commission report, a LWVM study on Voter Systems, all of which involved the participation of 82 of 110 members. The new Issue and Action Team structure was very successful, each operating independently and at their own pace. The Education Team assisted with the Mock Town Meeting curriculum and reported on proposed changes in Health Education curriculum. The Environmental Team held a forum on water quality and protection. The Government Team worked on the Voting Systems study and the 5th grade Mock Town Meeting. The Social Policy Team focused on the proposed amendment to the MA Constitution to ban same sex marriage and was pleased to see the amendment withdrawn. Other areas of interest were affordable housing, health care, and domestic violence. The Teams were asked to provide suggestions for local program planning for priorities that they were willing to work on in the next year. A Bylaws Committee rewrote the League bylaws to reflect the organizational changes and had them approved at the Annual Meeting. The Voter Service Committee was kept busy with hotly contested races on the state and local levels and voter registration also. The Observer Corps began to decline but loyal observers like Barbara Chick and Ann Chang never wavered. The League began to maintain an up to date website at its own address with the help of League member Bill Ames and the resources at Boston College. League finances continue to be healthy without the need to transfer any reserves from the Fidelity account.

Paulina Knibbe was having so much fun as Co-Chair, she decided to stay on for a third year joining **Suzanne Shanahan** as the 27th Presidents, 2005-06. The new steering committee structure was instrumental in developing new leadership since the work load was spread among many. The Steering Committee worked to encourage the growth of the non-Acton towns in the League. Grouping members from the other towns into town specific units was a way to facilitate activities which serve those communities with the chairs of those units included as members of the Steering Committee. The League participated in the LWVM's online Student Essay project by publicizing it in the schools and providing judges. There were two students from Acton who received Honorable Mention Awards. Voter Service was especially busy with five candidate nights in four towns – including three in one week. Total membership in the League remained at about 108 each year for many years. Membership has been stable but has not grown especially in the non-Acton towns.

A new socializing/discussion idea instantly became very popular. It was called "First Tuesday" where members meet informally at the Continental Café in West Acton for free-form, anything-goes, discussions. "Chat and Cheer" continued to be hosted by Pat Clifford as an opportunity for League members to celebrate the holiday season with friends. The area State legislators were invited to attend and share their thoughts and concerns about current issues facing the State. Each year members donate non-perishable items to the Acton Food Pantry. The Environment Team held a successful forum in

Boxborough on Trash Disposal Issues. They also created a guide to local recycling, reuse, and source reduction with the title "STUFF: What to Do with It When You're Done with It". The guide was very well received and widely distributed. The Government Team completed one major project in conjunction with the Voter Service Committee, they created and delivered a new version of *Know Your Town – Acton* in the form of a Powerpoint presentation and presented it twice as a free course at Community Ed. Topics focused on by the Social Policy Team included: domestic violence; diversity and immigration; same sex marriage rights; affordable housing on the local level; health and mental health care, and the corrections system.

Suzanne Shanahan continued in 2006 with a new Co-Chair, former President **Jo-Ann Berry**, who was the first League President who ever served for three consecutive years, and as a team they became the 28th Presidents, serving until 2007. A new activity for this year was the Contemporary Issues Speaker Series, lead by Paulina Knibbe. It was a successful effort to bring speakers on diverse topics to Acton and has added to the learning opportunities of interested people in the area. A major effort was the League's observation of the November 2006 election in Acton as the Town tried a single voting location at the Junior High School. Many members participated in gathering data throughout the day as this new system was a cause for concern for many people and it was felt that the League was in the unique position to gather the data, analyze it, and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen regarding voting locations for the future. The League's ultimate recommendation was to go back to the three traditional polling locations as issues such as competing traffic for school and voters seemed to be too much of a challenge and discouraged some people from voting.

The League continued to hold Candidates Nights for local elections in member towns in the spring, advertise elections with the Vote Tuesday signs, and disseminate voter registration information at some town and school events. A variety of program types kept the League visible with open community forums, League-only discussions, program planning meetings, and the Fifth Grade Town Meeting project. There was something for everyone, including the very popular "First Tuesday" gatherings. This year marked the debut of the electronic Bulletin, a dramatic step forward when compared with the stencils and mimeograph production of 10 years ago. Members adapted well to this change although not all members used email. This also had a significant change in focus for the Finance Drive. In past years the funds collected from this drive were used to offset the cost of producing and mailing 200 copies of the monthly Bulletin. With the advent of the Bulletin electronic version, the monies are used toward the funding of some programs and activities. Customers who contribute \$75 or more to have a copy of their business cards reproduced in the Bulletin had the option of a link to their website and also to receive their copy by email. In addition there are nine issues each year instead of eight as in the past.

The Issues Teams continued to function smoothly, some with more members than others. The Education Team sponsored a well attended and well received daytime gathering of League members and students who participated in the Harvard Model Congress program. The *Beacon* enthusiastically embraced the idea of publishing a periodic column written by the Environment Team. A Healthy Home Party discussing the dangers of potential toxins that could be found at home was held in February and was attended by 40 people. The Government Team hosted a forum on the Open Meeting Law, inviting all elected and appointed officials in each of our member towns. The Social Policy Team co-sponsored a

public forum in November with the Acton Board of Health on emergency preparedness entitled “Pandemic Preparedness: The Bird Flu and You”. The team collaborated with No Place for Hate and the Acton Boxborough United Way to reach out to the Brazilian community, understand their specific issues and challenges, and help them find solutions themselves.

In June 2007, the League continued the leadership team system with a new Co-Chair moving up to share the post with the previous year’s Co-Chair while her Co-Chair stepped down after serving two years. The new team **Jo-Ann Berry** and **Marilyn Peterson**, served as the 29th Presidents, 2007-08. The 2007-2008 League year got off to an early start with the resignation of Martin Meehan, our 5th District Representative to Congress. Our League, in collaboration with the Leagues of Concord-Carlisle, Sudbury, Andover, North Andover, Chelmsford, Haverhill, Westford and Harvard, sponsored four regional Candidates’ Nights – two for the primary and two for the election. The League participated in two State studies, one on Affordable Housing and the other on Fiscal Policy, and a National study on Immigration. The State League tried a new approach for reaching consensus by holding regional consensus meetings on Affordable Housing. As a result of a strategic planning meeting to get input from members on what they would like to see the League offer for new activities, a monthly Book Club was inaugurated by Membership Co-Chairs Nancy Duggan and Nancy Savage meeting at the Willow Book Store Café. There was a lot of excitement and enthusiasm for this League activity. The Jen Haan Memorial Contemporary Issues Speaker Series continued to be a successful community-wide event. This was its second year with three interesting and engaging speakers on the topics of illegal immigration, current challenges to democracy in the United States, and regional economic development and green chemistry.

The Environmental Team encouraged Acton residents to switch to compact fluorescent (CF) light bulbs. The Social Policy Team had speakers on Restorative Justice and Domestic Violence. Members also followed the effort to create a social worker position in town government, which was approved via citizen petition at Town Meeting in April. The *Know Your Town – Acton* show was presented at the Chinese Language School to an audience of about 30. The audience was interested and asked good questions. Watching the broadcast debates of the presidential primaries this year prompted some of the Voter Service Committee members to think about how the debates could be improved. They launched a “Raising the Standards” effort to encourage Leagues to evaluate the debates and put pressure on the campaigns and the media to bring more informative, fair candidate debates to the public.

A new Co-Chair **Marge Kennedy** joined **Marilyn Peterson** to serve as the 30th Presidents, 2008-09, ushering in the League’s 50th year at a time when both membership and finances were healthy. The major activity of this year was a review of Town Meeting and how it could be improved, something the League has done numerous times in its history and an appropriate focus for its 50th year. After a disappointing Town Meeting in April 2008, the League recognized the need for changes in the Town Meeting process to address lagging attendance and the inefficient flow of the meeting. The Government team was called upon to study Town Meeting and make suggestions for changes. This study was the highest priority for local action in the 2008-2009 League year. Committee members visited Town Meetings in other towns to observe their practices; developed a survey that was distributed at the Special Town Meeting where 1500 voters were present; Incorporated the survey responses and Town

Meeting observations into the “Making Town Meeting Work Better” booklet; reviewed the observations and suggested changes with the Town Moderator, Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen and town staff; held a public hearing on December 11 to introduce the Town Meeting Booklet to voters; and monitored the implementation of the suggested changes at the Acton Town Meeting in April 2009. The changes were well received by the Town Meeting attendees. It will not be the last time the League has to perform this review if our history with this issue is an indicator. The League’s booklet and report won the Lotte E. Scharfman Award at the LWVMA Convention.

The League co-sponsored a Volunteer Town Board Job Fair in Acton with the Volunteer Coordinating Committee. Representatives of 19 committees and boards made brief presentations outlining their responsibilities and the skills and interests required for membership. The League also continued its speaker series for a third year, engaging the audience on three different topics: the Supreme Court, Media and Politics and Climate Change. The Book Group continues to be a popular event, meeting monthly at Willow Books in Acton. The group focuses on current non-fiction literature. The 2008 fall election involved hotly contested national and state races in our towns. Local elections in the spring of 2009 also involved many contested seats. Voter Service was involved in planning and hosting Candidates Forums in Acton and Stow in both the fall and spring.

The League continued to assist the Acton Public Schools with the 5th Grade Mock Town Meeting activity. The students are given a mock warrant, which includes three articles on trash disposal for the town. By the time of each meeting, the students have studied their warrants, learned how Town Meeting works, had discussions at home and thought about how they want to vote and what they want to say to their fellow meeting members. This benefits not only the students but informed their parents about the local democratic process. The Social Policy Team participated in the Acton Leadership Summit held in November organized by the United Way Outreach Committee and Lauren Rosenzweig from the Board of Selectmen. This forum brought together local officials and representatives from agencies and organizations to discuss services for local residents, particularly important as the economic situation worsens. The Environmental Team went unstaffed for the year but many of its former members continue to advocate for the Greening of the town through other organizations and efforts. After many years of selling the beloved framed prints of Acton Center by Carlisle artist Phyllis Hughes, the League depleted its inventory, these prints brought significant income to the League over the years.

As we reflect back on the past 25 years, and the 25 before that, we cannot help but be astonished at the impact our League has had on the Town as a whole and the local government in particular. The League’s contributions have not been without controversy but were well worth the tough fights to accomplish them. Who knows what challenges lie ahead for us in the next 25 years? We may not know that but we do know the League will be in the forefront of positive change.

Nancy Tavernier
October 2009