

League of Women Voters 1978

Note about this transcription: Transcription of a recorded conversation about the history of the League of Women Voters of Wilmette probably done sometime in 1978. Most speakers in this interview are unidentified. We have done our best to distinguish individual speakers, but in many cases, this transcript reflects only our best guess.

Track 1: League of Women Voters

Rhea Adler: Who was the earliest one here?

Member B: Florence. [Weinberg]

Rhea Adler: Was that you or?

Minna Gunther: 1932 you said.

Member D: Yeah, but go ahead.

Minna Gunther: No, you go ahead.

Member E: In '32, but that wasn't in Wilmette?

Rhea Adler: Yes, 1932.

Member E: '32?

Rhea Adler: Helen . . . well, wait a minute. . .

Member B: That would be Mrs. Grant.

[Multiple speakers]: No, no, no.

Robina Coates: She came later.

Member B: Oh, later. That's right.

Member G: She was later.

Rhea Adler: The first president of the League of Women Voters in 1924 was Mrs. Lloyd Ayers [nee Mabel Giddings]. How many of you knew her?

Robina Coates: No.

Rhea Adler: Oh, I did. She lived on Central Street where the National Tea parking lot now is.

Robina Coates: Oh, I do remember that.

Rhea Adler: Yes.

Robina Coates: Yes, I remember Mrs. Ayers now.

Rhea Adler: In 1925 Mrs. Charles P. Evans became president. Do you remember her?

[Multiple speakers]: Yes.

Member B: What year was that?

Rhea Adler: 1925. And for two years she was president.

Minna Gunther: I don't remember her as president.

Robina Coates: No, I don't either.

Rhea Adler: Well, she was.

Minna Gunther: She was an old-timer when I came along.

Rhea Adler: And then the third president—these were all Wilmette Women's Club Members who began the League.

Robina Coates: Oh yes.

Rhea Adler: 1927-29 Mrs. Shelby M. Singleton [Olive].

Robina Coates: Oh my, yes. I remember things that happened at Mrs. Singleton's house.

Rhea Adler: And where did she live?

Robina Coates: She was on Lake Avenue at the . . . was Seventeenth? Corner of Seventeenth and . . . ?

Rhea Adler: No. Eleventh.

Robina Coates: Eleventh. That was right. I remember, she wanted to sell part of her land, but they wouldn't let her do it because it wasn't big enough. But the thing that I remember is Helen Rye sneaking out for a smoke. [General laughter]. Nobody dared smoke in Mrs. Singleton's house.

Rhea Adler: That is where the Trinity Church parking lot now is.

Robina Coates: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

Member B: Oh yes.

Rhea Adler: Then, 1929-30—you notice they were one-year terms for most of them—Mrs. Ira Reynolds [Cora].

Robina Coates: Reynolds. Oh, yes.

[Multiple speakers]: I remember her.

Minna Gunther: 19-what? '30?

Rhea Adler: 1929-1930. And they had just come back from Washington. He had been in the Hoover administration in some capacity or other, but they returned to Wilmette, and he began his—I think he was a lawyer—his practice downtown. But she came from Galena, originally, she and her sister were school teachers from Galena.

Robina Coates: Oh yes, she would have been a school teacher.

Rhea Adler: And then Mrs. Harry Burnside [nee Gladys Allen].

Robina Coates: Oh yes. Mmm hmm.

Rhea Adler: And she was still alive the last I knew. I met her.

Rhea Adler: Is she gone now?

Robina Coates: I think I saw in *Wilmette Life* that sometime last year Helen Burnside died.

Rhea Adler: Oh, *Helen* Burnside. This is Mrs. *Harry* Burnside, a different Mrs. Burnside.

Member E: This is true.

Rhea Adler: Very different.

Robina Coates: Oh yes, there was another one. I was thinking of Helen Burnside.

Rhea Adler: I met her at Newberry Library one day, and she lives with a son in Chicago.

Robina Coates: Oh.

Rhea Adler: And then Mrs. C. L. Clark.

Robina Coates: Oh, I do remember her.

Member B: I don't remember her.

Robina Coates: I do remember Mrs. Clark.

Member B: What was her first name?

Rhea Adler: C. L. Clark. You know, I don't remember Mrs. Clark.

Member E: Did she live on Oakwood [?]?

Minna Gunther: You're thinking of Mrs. Baker.

Member [?]: Oh, Mrs. [John] Clark Baker [nee Hester Sproul].

Member B: Mrs. Clark Baker, that's whom I'm thinking of.

Robina Coates: Mrs. Clark Baker, that's the one I'm thinking of.

Rhea Adler: Then after her, in '33 and '34 was Mrs. John Behr.

Member E: Oh yes, I remember her.

Rhea Adler: From over in Kenilworth Gardens.

Member E: Yeah.

Rhea Adler: Then Mrs. Harry Burnside came back and did another year as president.

Robina Coates: She was president when I joined.

Rhea Adler: Yes.

Robina Coates: Helen Rye took me in hand, about . . .

Rhea Adler: That was '34 and '35.

Robina Coates: I was taken by the hand.

Rhea Adler: Helen took me, too.

Robina Coates: Mmm hmm.

Rhea Adler: Then, in '35 to '37 Mrs. Murdo Ross, and that's where Kenilworth comes in.

Robina Coates: Yeah.

Member B: I didn't know she was in Kenilworth.

Robina Coates: Don't you remember?

Member B: Yes, I know who Mrs. Murdo Ross is . . .

Rhea Adler: Yes. She's gone now, but she had been president of the League.
And then following her was Mrs. Fredrick Merrifield, Katherine.

Minna Gunther: That's when I came in.

Rhea Adler: Yeah.

Member E: Is that when there was a big blow up on the jury?

Rhea Adler: That was when women . . .

Member [?]: No, that was much later.

Member E: Oh yeah, that was in '38. [1939]

Rhea Adler: Well, before Katherine was president, women were . . . given jury duty.

Member E: Excused.

Rhea Adler: No, they . . .

Member E: She served on the first panel . . .

Rhea Adler: That's right. She did.

Minna Gunther: But that was long after she . . .

Member E: That was after we moved here.

Robina Coates: Oh, that was after . . .

Member E: But there were some League people who were so angry at her they never talked to her after that.

Track 2: League of Women Voters

Minna Gunther: Oh, well, now, because I remember. . .

Member E: She was on the first women's jury, and she got it all mixed up.

Member B: She changed her vote.

Member E: Huh?

Member B: She changed her vote.

Member [?]: That's right.

Minna Gunther: Do you remember a program that we had in the League, a jury trial? And we had Judge Harry Fisher up, because I helped arrange this, and we had, I think my husband was one of the lawyers, somebody else was opposing, and we selected people from the audience for a jury, and it was to boost the granting of this privilege of serving on a jury to women. And that was a program that must have come after Kathy.

Robina Coates: Oh, I'm sure it was after Kathy.

Member B: Yes, I'm sure it was, too.

Rhea Adler: Well, this is something we have to get . . .

Member E: Maybe they decided that you needed to be educated so it wouldn't happen again.

Member [?]: No, no. That came much later.

Member B: I think it was just before [indistinct] was president because we were still in Chicago, and I remember reading—not knowing I was coming to Wilmette the next year—reading about this person on the jury and what she had said, you know, how it confused everything. And then, when we did come out, it was just when Katherine had gone out. And when I came, Helen Rye was . . .

Member E: She was responsible for nearly all of you joining the League.

Rhea Adler: Well, actually. . .

Member B: Well, I belonged in Chicago. And then I came here and they said I was one in a million because I asked to join.

Minna Gunther: I remember the whole story with the changing of the mind.

Rhea Adler: Well, yes. Now it comes back to me, too. That she changed . . .

Member E: Well, she said she had a very sick child at home, and Alba [?] said, you know, Johnny wasn't that sick that she had to come home. They were to be locked up for the night or something.

Member B: No.

Member E: And then there was all that suspicion that Northwestern got to her.

Member B: And Katherine felt sorry for her because of the doctor's training. Wasn't a woman on the jury pregnant?

Rhea Adler: Yes.

Minna Gunther: Well, that had nothing to do with it.

Member E: Mmm mmm.

Member [?]: Her changing her mind . . .

Member E: She used Johnny as an excuse . . .

Rhea Adler: What year was she president? '37 through '39.

Member B: '37 through '39. Well, this is all written up in *Time* now.*

[*VOID TRIAL AFTER WOMAN JUROR'S CHANGE OF MIND; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1963); Nov 2, 1939; pg. 16]

Member [?]: Yes.

Member [?]: The suspicion was that Northwestern had gotten to her. Because it was right near the [indistinct]. And Northwestern had chaired . . . or . . . Northwestern was supposed to have gotten on the phone. Yeah.

Minna Gunther: But that was not the reason that she changed her mind. She changed her mind because this woman, who had been in a sanitarium, she knew could be lucid in the afternoon even though she was not in the morning. And the people on the jury pressured her to change. She was holding out for it, for her point of view, and Mrs. Fisher and others said, "You can't be the only one against this

verdict". And she allowed herself to be pressured into it. Then she went home that night, and she called up Henry Brandt, and she said, "Do I have to stand by my verdict?" And he said, "No, you'll be polled, and you can say whether it's your verdict or not." And that's what happened.

Member B: Ohhh, so that's what happened.

Minna Gunther: She said, "It wasn't my verdict." And, of course, the papers said:

"You let women on the jury, and they change their mind."

[General laughter].

Rhea Adler: Well, Mrs. Henry Brandt [nee Edith Atwater] followed Mrs. Fredrick Merrifield as the president of the League from '39 to '41. And then, Mrs. . .

Minna Gunther: I was secretary under Edith Brandt. I remember that.

Rhea Adler: And then Mrs. Fred Rye followed Mrs. Brandt. '41 and '43. And then Mary Goodhue, who had retired as secretary to the dean of the law school at Northwestern became president.

Member [?]: And I was secretary under her, too. [Laughs]. From time to time, I was secretary. [General laughter].

Rhea Adler: Well, like me with child welfare. Katherine and I passed that literature back and forth for . . .

Robina Coates: I thought I was child welfare. . .

Member G: But then, I got that.

[Laughs].

Robina Coates: I was vice president one time or program chair or something. I've forgotten what.

Rhea Adler: Then, Mrs. Henry Drucker followed. [photograph Dec. 1939, p.12]

Minna Gunther: Mary.

Rhea Adler: Mary Drucker.

Member E: I remember her.

Rhea Adler: 1945-47. It was when she was president, and we had our meetings at her house, that Magda Fodor made her famous Hungarian . . .

Member G: That's right.

Rhea Adler: . . . chicken rolls.

Member [?]: Chicken rolls!

Member G: . . . hospitality . . .

Robina Coates: Magda, you and I were famous for cooking, I believe.

[General laughter].

Robina Coates: We made the coffee. And our [indistinct] were wonderful.

Rhea Adler: Well, they were good. Unusually good.

Member G: . . . who had cooked and made at home, how she was working there . . . [laughs].

Rhea Adler: And then Mrs. Howard Reeder [nee Helen MacAllister] came after Mrs. Henry Drucker.

Member E: I remember her.

Rhea Adler: And most of us were on her board.

Robina Coates: Oh yes.

Member G: I was.

Member E: I wasn't. See, I'm the fifth wheel of this group.

[Indistinct exchange.]

Member E: I was on the finance committee one time. To figure out the budget.

Robina Coates: That's very interesting, very important.

Member E: Big job.

Track 3: League of Women Voters

Rhea Adler: Then, Mrs. Louis Hirsh. 1949 to '51.

Member E: I remember her.

Robina Coates: What ever happened to her?

Minna Gunther: Dorothy? Oh, she lives across from . . .

Member [?]: Old Orchard. [possibly Plaza del Lago in Wilmette]

Member E: Old Orchard. Spanish apartments.

Minna Gunther: Spanish apartments. And she works.

Member E: Louis died.

Minna Gunther: She has a full . . . you knew that her husband died.

Robina Coates: Yes, I knew that her husband died.

Minna Gunther: She had been working up at the township office. She works full time now.

Member E: It's interesting about her son. Do you know what his job is?

Minna Gunther: Her son is, I think, head of research for the Energy . . .

Member E: Nuclear energy.

Minna Gunther: He works in the Atomic Energy Office.

Member [?]: Yeah, Atomic Energy or something.

Member E: Way high up.

Member [?]: And he is the director of research or some such thing. He has a very responsible job.

Rhea Adler: Then following her was Mrs. Todd Wheeler. And that was a two-year term.

Member E: She was always so soft spoken.

Member G: Who was that?

Rhea Adler: Laura Wheeler.

Member G: I still can't hear you people. Please, tell me . . .

Rhea Adler: Laura Wheeler.

Member G: Laura Wheeler, that's it.

Rhea Adler: And then, Mrs. Wayne A. R. Leis [?].

Member [?]: Oh, yes.

Member [?]: Helen.

Member E: For a very short period.

Rhea Adler: '53 to '55. And then Mrs. Ted [Theodore] Beadle followed her.

Minna Gunther: And picked up the pieces! [Laughs].

[General laughter].

Rhea Adler: And Mrs. Paul Karr, from '57 to '59.

Minna Gunther: I must tell you that there was an orientation meeting one time, and it was at Jo [Josephine] Fraenkel's house. And Mary Karr and Jo Fraenkel came into the League at that time. Well, Jo Fraenkel had been the president of the Winnetka League and also on the state board, and Mary, of course, was president.

Rhea Adler: Yes, yes.

Minna Gunther: It was very interesting.

Member E: Yeah.

Rhea Adler: And then Mrs. William E. [Laverne] Gobble from '59 to '61. And Mrs. Joseph L. Shapiro [?] from '61 to '63.

Rhea Adler: She moved to New York.

Member [?]: To New York.

Member [?]: She lives near . . .

Member [?]: Scarsdale.

Rhea Adler: Right, right. And then Mrs. Carleton M. Garrison [Jayne], '63 to '65. Now, that's as far as this old League program goes, which dates back to '65.

Member B: Jeanne Bonyng She came right after her.

Rhea Adler: Oh yes.

Member B: She came right after her.

Rhea Adler: That I can't tell you.

Robina Coates: I left the League around . . .

Rhea Adler: I was on Jane Garrison's board, but I left the League shortly after that.

Robina Coates: Well that was when I became a Trustee, you see, in '57.

Rhea Adler: Well, this is '65. This is '65. Jeanne Bonyng, I think may . . . now, you two people were in the . . .

Member [?]: Yeah, we stayed on. Jeanne Bonyng. . .

Minna Gunther: You mean on the Board, because I'm still a member of the League.

Robina Coates: Oh, are you? I'm not.

Rhea Adler: You two. I think you two are the only ones.

Robina Coates: I haven't been in the League for years.

Minna Gunther: I had to retire from the board when I was elected to the Library Board.

Member [?]: Yes.

Robina Coates: Now, I left, I'm pretty sure, in '56 or '57.

Member [?]: That's right, you were a Village Trustee.

Member B: Yeah, Streets and Alleys.

Member [?]: Streets and Alleys? [Laughs].

Robina Coates: Streets and Alleys, that was me. [Laughs].

Rhea Adler: Lena [?] was Streets and Alleys because she had this alley out here, behind Howard School [?].

Member [?]: Now, who was on the School Board?

Minna Gunther: Helen Reeder was on the School Board.

Member [?]: Helen Reeder was on the School Board.

Minna Gunther: Helen Reeder was on the School Board. Who else?

Member B: For quite a while.

Member [?]: Esther Bower [nee Esther Dunshee] . Mary Blitzer [?] was. Mary Drucker was. And Helen Rye.

Rhea Adler: Helen Rye was . . .

Robina Coates: I followed Helen Rye, and Helen Reeder followed me.

Minna Gunther: On the School Board?

Member [?]: On the School Board. Yeah.

Minna Gunther: Mary Drucker was on. Yeah.

Robina Coates: Mary Drucker was on before I was, I think.

Member B: Why wasn't Mrs. Drucker . . . ?

Rhea Adler: And Mrs. Peg [Margaret] Hildreth was an old Board member.

Member E: She was the first person to call on me . . .

Rhea Adler: I believe she was also the first woman on the School Board.

Robina Coates: Oh, on the School Board, maybe.

Rhea Adler: Esther Bower was the first woman to be a Trustee.

Robina Coates: I was the second, and then my friend Thelma [Brook] Simon followed me, for which I was cast out because I wouldn't take a second term.

Member [?]: Oh well.

Robina Coates: Oh boy.

Rhea Adler: Those were the days.

Track 4: League of Women Voters

Rhea Adler: The thing I most vividly re. . .

Member G: Esther Bower never was a president?

Member [?]: No.

Rhea Adler: Esther Bower?

Member G: Yes.

Rhea Adler: No, no. She was a practicing lawyer in the Loop for most of those years.

Member G: But she was on the Board, though.

Robina Coates: Oh, yes.

Rhea Adler: Oh yes, she was on the Village Board.

Member G: No, but I mean, on the League.

Rhea Adler: The big board. Yes. Legal Status of Women before Florence Weinberg, probably. [Laughs].

[Multiple speakers]: Probably. [Laughs].

Member B: Do you remember when she was ill, and she had herself carried on a stretcher?

Member E: Ambulance. Took an ambulance from Evanston Hospital.

Rhea Adler: To the voting booth.

Member B: To the voting booth.

Member E: Well, always before, she and Lloyd Brown had canceled out each other's votes. And Lloyd Brown was in the hospital, too. And Esther didn't tell Lloyd.

[General laughter].

Member E: One time, she wasn't going to have her vote canceled.

Member [?]: Oh, isn't that marvelous?

Rhea Adler: It sounds like my husband and I.

Member E: And Lloyd Brown was so mad!

Minna Gunther: She was quite a character for the meek little woman that she seemed to be. She was a fiery Liberal.

Member [?]: She was no meek little woman.

Member E: You're right she wasn't.

Minna Gunther: No, she was a Liberal!

Rhea Adler: And her daughter, Betty Burke [?] has many tales to tell about her.

Member E: I know a cute one that Gracie [E. Grace] Stewart told me. When the Lord was deciding it was time for her to fly off, she'd always talk about, now this would be a good day for that adventure. Mount my cloud and off I go! I'm going to meet Roosevelt, Gandhi, all these people, and Gracie would look at me and say: She never mentioned her husband [Lorin A. Bower]. [General laughter].

Member E: All these people she was going to meet. She never said she was going to meet her husband.

[General laughter].

[End of recording].

Transcription by Amanda Barnett, 11 March 2009

Corrections by Muriel Cohen and Kathy Klawans of the LWV