

The 5 page history of the LWV Metro Des Moines was taken from the LWV Iowa centennial book entitled "And They Persisted" written by LWV member, Linda Meloy;

on water quality, starting with a Water Fun Day at a local park where water-based activities for families included creek water testing, illustrations of flooding in a watershed, and demonstrations of the use of permeable pavement options. Then the League sponsored a formal water quality forum with representatives from agriculture and water conservation, along with a chemist and a news reporter.

In 2018, this League restored a League in nearby Mount Vernon by organizing it into a unit of the Linn County League. Individuals in various parts of Iowa have expressed interest in forming new Leagues, and Myrna Loehrlein of this League has offered her expertise to assist in the process. And Linn County Leaguers participated in Expungement Clinics, where they learned how to assist released felons in completing the forms needed to apply for restoration of voting rights.

#### *League of Women Voters of Metro Des Moines — Polk County*

**LWVIA Presidents:** Flora Dunlap 1919–20; Grace Brown 1920–21; Florence Prather Pierce 1921–22; Nellie G. Tomlinson 1922–23; Carrie Louise Daniels 1923–24; Ann Drake 1924–25; Julia B. Mayer 1925; Adelyn Hunt 1935–37; Louise Moon 1975–79; Joan Hartsock 1989–91; Mary Daily Lange 1997–99; Marla Sheffler 2005–07; Dr. Deborah Turner 2015–16, who served on the LWVUS Board 2016–2020 and was elected president June 2020, and is a 2013 inductee to the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame  
**Iowa Legislature:** Jo Ann Zimmerman, House 1983–87, lieutenant governor 1987–91, and 2005 inductee to the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame; Janet Petersen, House 2001–13 and Senate 2013–2021; and Marti Anderson, House 2013–19

**Lieutenant Governor:** Sally Pederson, 1999–2007, and 2004 inductee to the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame

This League, home of historic suffrage leaders and activities as well as central to the development of the state League, is our much-advantaged local League. Its proximity to the Statehouse provides easy access to legislators, government agencies, and lobbyists, and as part of the largest metropolitan area in the state, it has an enviable base of prospective members! In fact, for many years, the state League was fortunate enough to have a staffed office in Des Moines.

The Des Moines League was formed in 1920. The fledgling state League held its first convention in this central location in September of that year, almost one year after the organization of the Iowa State League on October 2, 1919. Much of the work done by this young League was the result of national priorities: women in industry, child welfare, independent citizenship for women with specific attention to property rights, compulsory education, and “social hygiene.” Social hygiene was

LWV Metro DsM  
history starts here



a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement to protect and improve the family as a social unit through control of venereal disease, regulation of prostitution and vice, and dissemination of "sexual education," which later became a field of study alongside that of social work and public health.

This League had the honor of hosting the 1923 National League of Women Voters Convention with these eminent speakers:

- Herbert Hoover, a native Iowan, who would become the thirty-first president of the United States in 1929;
- Sir Robert Cecil of London, a British lawyer and the architect of the United Nations (see Biographies Appendix); and
- The Honorable Florence Allen, first female judge on the Ohio Supreme Court, or any state supreme court for that matter, and one of the first two women to serve as a federal judge (see Biographies Appendix).



"Ding" Darling cartoon from 1923 honoring the National League of Women Voters Convention held in Des Moines. Permission granted by the University of Iowa Photo Archives and the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society.



The early Des Moines League also organized Citizenship Schools in the 1930s that included such topics as “The Role of Money,” “Agriculture, Business, and Industry,” “The Expanding Role of Government,” and “Unemployment Insurance.” These were not the basic “voter participation” topics espoused by the national League, nor were they presented by League members themselves, but by professionals, many with partisan identities. During this decade, this League also accepted partisan payment of some League expenses, which was and is counter to League principles. As a result, the national League sanctioned the Des Moines League in 1943, and the chapter disbanded.

The Des Moines League re-emerged in 1944 after the national League president visited to discuss the meaning and practice of nonpartisanship. In 1947, the League published and distributed fifty thousand copies of a citizens’ handbook titled “You are Democracy.” In 1948, members studied the council-manager form of government, helped achieve its passage by just 880 votes, and received a Lane Bryant Award for their tenacious efforts. They also produced a “Guide to Government in Polk County” for distribution to schools and adult education classes. The League updated and republished the guide in 1963, 1965, and 1967, and Des Moines public schools used it as a textbook for many years.

The League conducted a city-wide survey of minority employment in certain jobs at the request of the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights. League members interviewed 1,100 individuals and found that 92 percent favored employment based solely on ability and not race. And, Leaguer Louise Noun chaired a home rule study, which the *Iowa League of Municipalities Magazine* published in 1952. In 1957, the Carrie Chapman Catt Memorial Fund awarded this League the Freedom Agenda Award for initiating and teaching adult education classes using the seven Freedom Agenda booklets on American heritage, freedoms, and rights and responsibilities of citizens. And in 1959, this League faced down a challenge to the council-manager form of government. The referendum to continue with this arrangement won by 11,452 votes—an example of Leaguers staying in for the long haul!

Studies conducted in the 1950s included fair employment practices, the handling of juvenile offenders in detention homes and police departments, and recreation needs and facilities.

And then came the “rocking ’60s!” The League created and presented to various civic groups a slide show (before videos and PowerPoints) titled “What about our 14,000 Sub-Standard Homes?” The *Des Moines Register*, called by many around the state THE Iowa paper, reported about the Des Moines League:



Outside of government agencies, no other organization has been more instrumental in keeping the issue of low-rent housing alive since 1961 when the Des Moines voters defeated a low-rent housing proposal.

The League continued to campaign for low-income housing, and the Des Moines Jaycee-ettes presented Leaguer Edna Brody with a Woman of the Year award for her volunteer efforts in that arena. In 1968, the League supported the city's request to use Section 23 of the Federal Housing Act to provide housing for low-income families—persistence pays off!

Collaboration with other organizations grew in the 1970s when the Des Moines League was one of six organizations represented on the Section 208 Waste Water Study's Citizen Advisory Committee. During this decade, a growing number of League members were appointed to city and county boards and commissions. More than 200 people from businesses, government, and the public attended a Metropolitan Government Conference at Drake University. The Jaycee-ettes presented another Woman of the Year award to Leaguer Nadean Hamilton. Metro Des Moines, the new name for this League, participated in ABC's election night reporting, which provided national exposure for this Heartland League. The League facilitated a meeting on the social, economic, and racial concerns of the inner city for the Des Moines Housing Council, an outgrowth of the League's Housing Task Force. The League received a state League Action Award for this initiative and its work on housing issues. In addition, in their spare time, this League successfully advocated for a new Polk County Jail.

In the 1980s, Des Moines Leaguers monitored the Polk County Land Preservation and Use Committee during its inventory of land-use changes since 1952. This League also distributed twenty-five thousand "I-Save" energy audit pamphlets to elementary schools in Des Moines and the surrounding area. And, Leaguers conducted a study of governmental services in the metro area in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce of Polk County, the Des Moines Tax Association, and the AFL-CIO; it was published and distributed to area libraries.

Mary Daily Lange of Des Moines was LWVIA president from 1997 to 1999, and her vast experience with restorative justice not only guided her local League but the state League's Juvenile Justice Committee. She emphasized the grit it takes to get things done, sharing her own family history—her maternal grandmother marched for suffrage in Kentucky, and she and Mrs. Lange's mother "were not afraid to state their opinions and always worked to make needed changes in their communities."

In 2001, the League organized a public event titled "People, Politics,



and Money,” with speaker Rick Kozin of the Iowa Alliance for Campaign Finance Reform. And in 2002–03, LWVDM led the Youth Vote Coalition Project, one of just twelve cities in the nation chosen that year to do so. Youth Vote provides a nonpartisan guide for implementation in a community, with the aim of increasing political awareness and civic participation of youth.

More recently, the Des Moines League studied domestic violence, and members presented a domestic violence simulation titled “A Walk in Her Shoes.” League members also facilitated teenagers’ participation in the teen dating violence and abuse prevention curriculum “Love Doesn’t Have to Hurt: Perspectives on Domestic Violence,” and organized community discussion groups featuring the book *Black and Blue*.

The League organized a public education event in 2012 on the Iowa Merit Selection System for Appointing Judges, which fosters fair and impartial courts for our state. Then-Chief Justice Mark Cady gave the presentation.

This local League participated in a 2015 *Des Moines Register* promotion called “Give a Damn Des Moines! Vote!” The series of events aimed at young professionals encouraged them to register to vote, participate in caucuses, and go to the polls. The venue for the events was a popular “watering hole” downtown, the Des Moines Social Club, with bands, art, videos, and food trucks. That same year, longtime League member Jean Basinger received the ACLU of Iowa Louise Noun Award for her leadership of Iowa Women Prisoners and Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants, as well as her involvement in other restorative justice initiatives and organizations. And, to be in the mainstream of public interest in 2017, the Des Moines League sponsored a well-attended public event featuring a journalism professor discussing “fake news.”

Leaguers greet and register attendees at a Give a Damn Des Moines! Vote! event titled “It’s NOT a Damn Debate!” The event featured Republican and Democratic party chairs answering moderator questions.

Pictured are Kathy Kahoun, Judy Dirks, Karla Brizzi, Barb Adams, Phyllis Franklin Devine, and Karen Person.

