

Work of local suffragists continues 100 years later



Susan Hesselgesser

It is a big year for women voters here in Dayton in more than one way.

Along with the ratification of the 19th amendment, the Greater Dayton Area League of Women Voters proudly celebrates its 100th birthday in 2020. As the executive director of the Dayton League I am often asked why, in the 21st century, do you still call yourselves the League of Women Voters?

For me, that is an easy question. Our League is a direct descendant of the women's suffragist movement; a 144 year effort carried on through the complications of the Civil War, World War I, and followed by 14 generations of women, most of whom were barely educated and groomed primarily to be wives and mothers.

Women who stepped out of the shadows of their fathers and the ownership of their husbands to demand equal rights - not for themselves but for those who would come after them. Together these women with no constitutional rights challenged and changed the Constitution of the United States.

Theirs is an inspiring story. Yet only a short paragraph in most history books, about the Seneca Falls Convention, serves to educate today's students of the first and longest movement for equal rights for women in the history of our country.

In 1920 Carrie Chapman Catt founded the League of Women Voters and our

Dayton women were ready.

Boldly opening the doors of our downtown office and cementing our history as one of the first leagues in the nation. At the time John Patterson, a supporter of the Dayton suffragists, forever cemented his faith in the organization by stating: "The hope of political regeneration in this country lies in the work of the League of Women Voters."

Originally the league was to only exist for five years, but the necessity for nonpartisan voter information has kept our office open for 100 years; we remain downtown only blocks from our original site.

We retain the name, League of Women Voters, to preserve the history of the women who came before us and to share their story for the generations who will come after us.

Yes, women have the right to vote and now we work to preserve voting rights of every citizen.

Susan Hesselgesser is executive director of the League of Women Voters of the Greater Dayton Area.

NOTE

Community Impact Editor Amelia Robinson's column will resume next Sunday.