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**League of Women Voters
Interview with Faye Olson by Gwen Willems**

1. What was your perception of the League before you joined?

Faye told me that she didn't have a perception, didn't know about it. She found out about the League maybe from a flyer left on her door when she lived in Ames.

2. How did you get involved?

Faye said, "The first time I joined I was a student down in Ames, and I had no knowledge of it, but I knew that I was supposed to be voting and know something." She doesn't remember how she got to know about the League. She said, "I went to a couple meetings down there and was very impressed with all their knowledge. That was 1955. My husband graduated in March of 1956. So I only went to a couple meetings."

After they moved to Minnesota and were settled into a house, she called up the local chapter. "Jerry Jenkins and her friend Betty actually came and picked me up," Faye said. "That was great." Meetings were held in different homes. They took turns. She described members who were professors' wives living in the Grove as "very knowledgeable about everything and lots of fun." She was on the board every year and held various positions, the last one being president of the Falcon Heights chapter, which she thinks she did for two years, ending in March 1971.

She went back to work in 1977 and became inactive with the League at that point, but the Falcon Heights League had also broken into St. Anthony [Park?] and Roseville branches. She was active with Roseville until work got too busy. She retired in 2003 and got involved with the League again in 2008 or so.

3. What did you find most satisfying?

"What I found most satisfying was the in-depth conversations," Faye said. "That was bipartisan. We had all parties represented at our League, and just to have good discussions, in-depth discussions, on all things. I liked the study groups the best—national, state, and local. I didn't especially care to go to city council meetings. But I think that's a very important part of the League—to be a watchdog." Two League people would sit in on each council meeting. But "that wasn't my thing to do."

Civil rights and women's rights were big issues in the League in the '60s. On the state level, Faye said they were studying clean water at that time. She said, "I don't think we had a city human rights director [commission?] prior to our study, nothing prior to the '60s, and I think we got one afterwards, but I'm not sure of that. They also studied local parks and recreation, about the same time the Roseville League did. I enjoyed the state and local discussion more so. We had meetings on civil rights and women's rights. That included the Indians in Minnesota, too, who were very poor. Civil rights, discrimination, Jim Crow Laws. Women's rights – I think we supported the amendment, but it got voted down."

She remembers that there was a lot of deadwood in the Minnesota Constitution. Did you want to have a constitutional convention? That never came about. Instead they lobbied for certain things, piece by piece.

[These are some of Carolyn Cushing's added questions.] What have you found most surprising about the LWV?

Faye mentioned two things: the League's longevity and that it always stays up to date on the issues.

What did not live up to your expectations?

She couldn't think of anything.

How has the LWV affected your life?

Faye told me, "It made it more interesting. I'm more knowledgeable about what's going on in politics and in the nation, and how messy democracy can be."

If you could change one thing what would it be?

Faye told me, "I don't know how to change it but I wish we could attract more young career women with jobs and family—and young men, I guess."

4. How much has changed since you have been a member? In LWV? In the country/culture?

She said everything has changed, including communications: "We had to dig for information and interview people. Now you can find it on the internet. That part was hard. The studies took

longer. Even printing, sending out a flyer, (now) you get an email. We had to mimeograph back in the '50s."

Faye noted that, "I think there's less racial discrimination, but it's still there. And women having a career is acceptable today. It wasn't in the 50s. I started taking classes at the University of Minnesota and people my husband worked with asked if I was leaving my husband. Women didn't work unless they *had* to, that was the idea, that was the '50s. In the '60s, women's working more accepted, little by little women have gotten more rights and less discrimination against women in the workplace."

5. What was important to women about the LWV at the time you joined? What is most important today?

Faye told me, "I think the basic importance of the League of Women Voters today and back then was the same. It was to be knowledgeable about government issues and making life better. Realizing that democracy needs active participation by individuals and the community, mainly individuals."

6. Have you observed change in public attitudes to the LWV?

Faye said, not really.

**7. How was the LWV important to the community through the years?
(see chronology list for interviewee to scan for choices)**

Faye mentioned that it's important to be a watchdog, study issues, and have candidates' meetings. In Falcon Heights the candidates' meetings were interesting ones for council or school board. "I remember Falcon Heights also was an advocate for equal opportunity and housing," Faye said. "We were for the Human Rights Commission."

8. Is there a particular episode or event that stands out in your memory?

One candidate meeting in particular stuck in her memory: "We had some council members who were chain smokers and we had a candidate meeting, asked for a non-smoking meeting, and we got one, too! They were a little shocked at the time."

She also remembered a skit that board members put on: “It was a humorous way to tell what the League was about and doing. It was a lot of fun. That was Betty [Jones] was in charge of the skit and she was very talented. It was one way to introduce the League to people who didn’t know anything about the League of Women Voters. I had just a very small part in it. Every board member had a role. We let them know what we were studying on each level. One line was, ‘And there are rats in the city dump!’ It was environmental. You wished you’d kept some of these papers, local flyers we sent out.”

What study/position was most interesting to you? What do you remember learning?

She learned a lot about the Indians in Minnesota and civil rights in the ’60s.

Do you remember changing your mind about an issue with more information?

Faye didn’t remember such an issue.

9. Describe the most memorable person/people you have been involved with.

“I met Mrs. Walter Heller through the League,” Faye said. “He was economic advisor for John F. Kennedy, and Mrs. Heller was part of our League I think, and she spoke to us about what it was like living in Washington. I think they had a protocol for wives and congressmen and cabinet members. So she gave a talk on that and having her husband leave by limousine in tuxedo while you were in your scrubby old nightgown.”

She was also very impressed with Jerry Jenkins and Betty Jones, who she said were the big instigators in the local League, and very nice and knowledgeable.

What was the most difficult part about Voter Service work? Do you remember any incident in particular? Have you noticed any changes over time? In the audience?

Mainly they held candidate meetings. She was an election judge for a while. She hasn’t gone to any candidates’ meetings in a long time so doesn’t know if there have been any changes.

Now she goes to League meetings, but doesn’t take part in boards anymore. She reads their materials. And when national comes out and tells her to put in a work for a study, like voting rights, she does. As she said, “Voting rights—I get emails from national and tell legislators what to do on certain issues.” For example, when the Supreme Court came down on five southern

states about getting approval for changing voter rights. She thinks the League is getting more active on voter rights, so we don't go back to Jim Crow or any form of it.

10. What is the lasting importance of this organization (if any)?

Faye told me, "I think it will stay around even though there are fewer young people coming in. I think it's necessary in a democracy for somebody to be a watchdog and promote active participation in government. And I think we do a good job of that."