

NEWTON

The Newton League of Women Voters was organized in the autumn of 1934. Seven women met with Mrs. John Nollen of Grinnell and Mrs. E.A. Hunt of Des Moines, who told them of the purpose and achievements of the League. They were convinced of its value and decided that day to ask seven more women to join with them to organize a League.

The Newton group began a serious study of the six areas of government which the National and State Leagues were then stressing. One of these was Child Welfare. This soon became of great importance because the legislature passed enabling legislation for five of the six Social Security measures and omitted Aid to Dependent Children. This became a political football in Iowa for several years.

One of the first seven members, Gladys Nelson, later served as president of the Iowa League and then as legislative chairman through the League's eight year struggle for passage of the Aid to Dependent Children law.

In 1947 the Iowa League published a handbook "You Are Democracy" edited by Dorothy Schramm, which gave a concise and interesting explanation of the facts of government. Newton was one of the local leagues which supplemented this book by adding material on local and county government. Every member assisted in the research and compilation. It was titled "Citizens Handbook". It was endorsed by representative groups in the community and financed by gifts from industry, businesses and individual donors. A copy was distributed free to every home in Newton and to all social science classes in every school in the county.

For five years the League worked diligently for the purchase of voting machines for Jasper County, and finally in 1958 by a margin of 2-1 they were approved.

After the voting machines, another long time project which the League spearheaded was the establishment of a Mental Health Clinic which has become of great value to the community.

Then came the battle against the Shaff amendment, a battle many thought was lost before it was ever begun, but the reputation of the League, the information given by the League to the citizens of the state on the weaknesses of the amendment and the many, many hours of hard work were sufficient to defeat the bill and lay the foundation for an acceptable reapportionment plan.

For over thirty years Mrs. W.R. McPherrin has made an unusual contribution to the Newton community through her study of the United Nations and the presentation of this information to the League and many other groups in the area.

Citizen education and awareness have always been emphasized through such projects as registration, candidates meetings, publication of candidate's answers to questionnaires, including one full page advertisement in the local paper in 1960. It was based on the policies of the various county offices and their views on the value of an affirmative vote for a constitutional convention.

A printed brochure with information of local and state government is given by the League to the Welcome Wagon to be given to all newcomers.

These are some of the more visible accomplishments of the Newton League, but its history includes many other studies and projects which have influenced the whole community.