League of Women Voters, One of Nation's First, Mark 30th Birthday

Luncheon Held To Mark Occasion At Lafayette Inn

By Mildred Jennings
Geneva League of Women Voters are proud today. They've reached their 30th birthday...a milestone in any organization...but particularly so in this group which dates back to the early days of the Woman Suffrage movement.

At a luncheon today in Lafayette Inn, honoring the past presidents of the organization, members heard of the spectacular accomplishments of the organization during the past 30 years.

Names and deeds of early leaders were reviewed lending an aura of glory and pride to the scene. As the books were opened, and one member took "a look at the record," they found it good.

Once upon a time...and this isn't a fairy tale...men believed that the League of Women Voters was just another women's group.

The ladies, God bless them, needed another hobby. If they enjoyed organizing a new club...let them have their fun and relaxation.

Little did the men realize that the League would become a formidable organization, wielding a wide influence in the community, the state, the nation, and the world.

A verbal pat-on-the-shoulder to the League is an editorial printed following a recent League convention. It pays them a high tribute: "Our confidence in the ability of the League of Women Voters is solidly based."

It is through their habit of becoming seized in the facts that League members have been able to marshal power in politics. "No politician can afford to have the assiduity of his actions repeatedly exposed. By this kind of pressure rather than by traditional ward politics, the League of Women Voters has become a power in this state." Soft, pretty and feminine, the members may be but there's a sharp hat pin hidden in their corsages.

Geneva unit of the League of Women Voters is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, units in the country. Its members were pioneers in the inception of the nation-wide organization.

The local unit was organized in June, 1927 with the late Mrs. Chauncy W. Grove, wife of Dr. C. W. Grove, City health officer, as its first chairman.

First record of the Ontario County League, which preceded the Geneva unit, is contained in a letter from Mrs. Frank A. Vanderlip, chairman of the State League to Mrs. H. J. Dunton, Canandaigua, first chairman of the county League. The letter is dated Dec. 3, 1919.

The League was organized in this country by Mrs. Carrie Cushman Catt. Mrs. Catt felt that if the women were to have the right to vote, they should be able to do it intelligently.

Many important matters have been on the agenda of the local unit since its organization 30 years ago. Members have kept close touch on the pulse of government. Currently on the state agenda of the League is the New York State Judicial System and the New York State Constitutional Convention. Study on the national agenda is on Water Resources and Individual Liberties.

On the local level, the Geneva League has many accomplishments to its credit during the years. In the coming year, they are planning a project on "Know Your Own Community." A survey will be made studying the structure and responsibilities of the city and area governments. The study will result in a comprehensive report.

Successive presidents of the Geneva League since 1927 are: Mrs. C. W. Grove, Mrs. D. C. Carpenter, Mrs. R. C. Coit, Mrs. N. M. Florez, Mrs. Charles H. Meilen, Mrs. J. W. Meredith, Mrs. U. F. Hedrick, Mrs. Paul J. Chapman, Mrs. Ithiel Pool, Mrs. Lewis Niven, Mrs. Frank M. Adams, Mrs. Alan W. Brown and Mrs. Andrew J. Reed. Mrs. James C. Moyer is the newly-elected president of the unit.

There was a time, when law-makers both in Albany and Washington, probably hoped the ladies would let them get on with the job of running the government. Frequently the League was given the "brush off" by those who failed to reckon with the power of women.

But the picture has changed. Take for instance PPR, (Permanent Personal Registration), the League has worked hard and long in pushing for this measure. In the April L. L. V. State News is the statement: "to the credit of the New York State Legislature and relief of the League of Women Voters of New York, three of the most important amendments to the optional PPR Law were approved."

When the National Council of the League met recently in Washington, D. C., they were addressed by President Eisenhower who "sounding board" for his foreign aid program. The League has this subject on its continuing agenda.
Mrs. Lewis Leader in Campaign

Closely identified with the League of Women Voters from its beginning, Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis, was honorary chairman of the Ontario County League from its inception in 1919. She was also director of the Seventh Region of the New York State League which included seven counties.

Mrs. Lewis was born in Geneva, the daughter of Henry Lawrence and Agnes Stacey Strop, both members of old Geneva families. She was educated at the De Lancey School, Geneva High School, and St. Margaret's School, Buffalo, and also studied singing for several seasons in New York.

In 1903 she was married to Alfred George Lewis of the White Springs Farm, formerly of Buffalo. A few years after her marriage, she became interested in the Woman Suffrage movement and, upon the death of Miss Anne Fitzhugh Miller, became president of the Ontario County Woman Suffrage Association. She worked enthusiastically for the cause until women were given the franchise.

When the League of Women Voters was organized Mrs. Lewis was made director of the Seventh Region of the New York League. She covered a wide area organizing units in several communities and was frequently accompanied by state leaders of the organization on her journeys.

Mrs. Lewis was a member of the state board as Seventh District director for about 15 years. She was named a trustee of Hobart and William Smith Colleges in 1932, and served for 17 years. She received an honorary degree at the 124th annual Commencement of Hobart College and the 38th of William Smith College in June 1949.

At this time, she was cited as "a fighter for all great and good causes and citizen of the world."

"As one of the leaders in the movement for woman suffrage she toiled unceasingly to win for women in this country the right to vote. That victory won, she became one of the founding spirits of the League of Women Voters."

Mrs. Graves Active Member

Mrs. Henry B. Graves was closely associated with both the Ontario County and city Political Equality Club and served as auditor for a number of years. She was prominently identified with the Geneva League of Women Voters for many years.

The photo shows the late Mrs. Graves as a young woman during her earlier association with both the Political Equality Club and the League of Women Voters.

In reviewing highlights of her early efforts in behalf of the county organization, we find that in February 1921 she was writing letters to her friends in the county to raise the sum of $300 as the quota for the state education work.

Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis

MRS. ALFRED G. LEWIS

MRS. HENRY B. GRAVES

She was service chairman at various times and was frequently on the resolutions committee at county conventions.

As chairman of the committee to investigate fund-raising, she and her co-workers were instrumental in bringing the play "Peggy" to Geneva. She was Women in Industry chairman and press chairman from 1935-1936.

In 1934 Mrs. Graves led a series of three study classes on Disarmament, assisted by Mrs. Arthur Sumner, Mrs. U. P. Hodrick, and Miss Marguerite McKay, and Mrs. N. M. Florszi. In the year 1932, she presented a paper on legislation backed by the League.
County League Has Had Variety of Activities

The annual convention of the Ontario County League of Women Voters was held in Canandaigua, Saturday, May 15, 1920, in St. John's Parish House.

Mrs. H. L. Dunton, Canandaigua, presided. She urged the members to study the political situation, decide where they stand and then proceed to use the franchise intelligently.

After the closing of the morning session, Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis of Geneva, honorary chairman, sang a group of "beautiful old songs," several being favorites of our beloved pioneer, Miss Anne Miller.

Miss Marion Dickerman of New York was guest speaker.

In a splendid concise and comprehensive manner she told us what the League aimed to do, what it did not do and what it wanted us to do for it.

Election of officers was held. Elected were: Mrs. H. L. Dunton, Canandaigua, chairman; Miss Mary Grap Peck, Seneca Castle, first vice-chairman; Mrs. Boneeakie, Blicit, second vice-chairman; Mrs. Henry B. Graves, Geneva, third vice-chairman; Marjorie Wagner, Geneva, secretary; Mrs. D. W. Halleeneck, Geneva, treasurer.

The following resolutions were read and approved:

1. The Ontario County League of Women Voters is to be made to direct the Budget System.

2. The reinsatatement of the appropriations committee of the three items, N. 3, 4, and 5, of the "Sundy Civil Bill" for State Board of Health, and Medical and Educational Research.

3. Respectfully petition your excellency Governor of New York State to veto the bill pending before you, commonly known as the "Gillette 2.75 per cent beer bill".

4. Expresses appreciation of Canandaigua for the rise of the parish house and other courtesies.

At the annual convention of the Ontario County League on May 21, 1921, a resolution was adopted urging the national government to take the initiative in securing international disarmament.

On Jan. 23, 1922, during an executive meeting at the home of Miss Mary Gray Peck, there was a discussion of whether or not the county organization should be retained. The matter was tabled.

In the following year on Nov. 15, 1923, a meeting was held at the Community Building in Canandaigua for the purpose of reorganizing the County League of Women Voters. About forty women were present.

Speaking included Miss Anne Shepherd, and Mrs. Mead of New York, both state officers and Miss Peck of Seneca Castle. Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis of Geneva, presided.

In Sept. 1924, announcement was made of a political course in Rochester at Lake Avenue Baptist Church.

"Because of the fact that many women will be casting their ballots for president and for other offices this fall for the first time, a class has been organized for women who want information on this subject."

A discussion of "How to Get Out the Vote" was a feature of the executive meeting of the Ontario County League on Sept. 29, 1924. It was decided to have movie slides urging people to register and vote. Miss Mary Gray Peck was appointed to write the slides and various women volunteered to see the movie men in their respective towns and ask them to show the slides.
Miller Home Was Center Of Women's Rights Battle

"A brilliant woman with wide variety of interests... her keenest one being political equality for women."

That is the way in which Miss Florence Parker, 96, of 119 N. Main St., describes Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller, one of Geneva's prominent women citizens, an ardent supporter of woman suffrage.

In her recollections of the Miller family who lived at "Lochland" on Lochland Rd. as told to Mrs. George Parmelee of 119 N. Main St., Miss Parker says:

"My earliest memories of the Millers began with Col. Miller, a fine-looking man, with great fondness for horses... race horses. He kept several and enjoyed driving them at full speed from his home, the present Lochland School the N. Main St., to the end of the street.

In the winter he wore a sheepskin coat, a sheepskin hood and used a sheepskin robe in his sleigh. His cheeks were very red and his full beard very white, so he looked like Santa Claus in his sleighing outfit. One day when I was about six years old I was playing out in front of our house. (119 N. Main St.) when he came dashing along. I yelled "Santa Claus" at him. He stopped and took me for a nice ride.

He was devoted to his wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller, a brilliant woman with wide variety of interests, her keenest being political equality for women. Her home was center of activity for 'women's rights' and for women. I remember the many important visitors who came there... Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, Anna Howard Shaw, and I think Mrs. Bloomer of Seneca Falls.

Mrs. Miller had very definite ideas about women's dress. She really wished that women should adopt a uniform. For herself she always wore gray, with a Shaker bonnet to complete her costume. (According to the record, while residing in Peterboro, Mrs. Miller made an innovation in women's dress which brought her attention throughout the country. It consisted in the adoption of trousers and short skirts which was later named the "Bloomer" costume for Amelia Bloomer of Seneca Falls).

The thrilling cadence of the poet's voice.

"Forever... never... forever's in her unforgettable voice stay with me to this day. She was in a higher class in the Geneva Union and Classical School, when I was in one of the lower ones, but on Friday afternoons the school gathered for entertainment by the older pupils under the direction of the principal Mr. Clapp. She had been the object of my unbounded admiration for some time, and this particular recitation of hers suddenly awakened me to the realization that poetry was rhythm as well as the rhyming of words.

From that time on I really read poetry..."

...and Activities

of New York; both state officers
National Conference of League Held at Hobart College in June

Many historic meetings attended by some of the outstanding personalities in government and the League were held in Geneva in the last week of May.

On June 23, 1927, a regional meeting at White Springs Farm, home of Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis, brought together leaders of the women voters of New York State when they outlined their conception of the principles of good government before 300 people.

The gathering represented the state board of the League, the Ontario County League and members of the State Senate and Assembly.

For the first time the state board of the New York League of Women Voters was held in Geneva instead of in New York City. League members from 15 counties attended the event.

Such personalities as Mrs. Har-

of 1932

Mrs. Moyer President—
Current League Officers Named

Arthur Miller’s Trial
For Contempt Starts

of the vote.”

On Dec. 9, 1927, Mrs. George B. Williams, Lockland Rd., gave an interesting review of the Lame Duck amendment and also mentioned in connection with that meeting were Mrs. W. T. Tapley, Mrs. A. Van Es-elle, and Mrs. A. Van Bartlett.

In that same year, the county chairman compared the members of the League to the “woman with a lantern in her hand.” Prohibition enforcement was discussed. Other subjects included how to get out the vote, a study of the candidates, and how to raise money with bridge parties and “picnic baskets.”

One of the largest and most important gatherings sponsored by the Geneva League was the two-day National Conference held June 24-25, 1927. The event was formally opened at Cazenovia Hall, Hobart College. Sessions of the conference were held at the White Springs Farm.

Approximately 300 women were present at the sessions. Seven department conferences were held in the dining room of the barracks on the Lewis estate.

Subjects relating to the economic emergency and the betterment of world conditions through cooperation were the highlights of the discussion.

Miss Ruth Morgan of New York National chairman for the Department of International Cooperation to Prevent War, spoke on the subject. She urged “Would not the strength of the League be better spent on a single purpose that we work for the double purpose of saving our economic lives?”

Discrimination against married women as such, and the Equal Rights Amendment came in for stinging censure at the conference.

A group of the women who were in Geneva to attend the two-day conference motored to Seneca Falls to view the building where the first Women’s Rights Convention in the world was conducted in 1848.

The visit to Seneca Falls gave the League women an opportunity to pay their respects to the pioneers in the suffrage movement. It was the first time that a National Convention was held in New York State and the first convention of the suffrage leaders was held. It was also the first time that many of the women had seen the “cradle of equal rights.”

Other officers are: Honorary

MRS. JAMES C. MOYER
Standing on the broad porch of White Springs Farm, former home of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis, are some of the members of Geneva League of Women Voters and guests attending the two-day national conference of the League in June, 1932. Leaders of the organization of New York State outlined their conception of the principles of good government before 300 persons.