THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN 1920'S OHIO

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ABSTRACT

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After the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, the League of Women Voters worked on the national, state, and local levels for gradual institutional reform. Using Western Ohio as a regional focus, this thesis shows how the Ohio League of Women Voters (OLWV) articulated a vision for post-suffrage women's activism during the interwar period. To do this, the OLWV built upon pre-existing reform structures, especially when trying to involve rural women in its reform measures. As an organization of mostly elite, urban women, the OLWV struggled to construct a broad-based women's coalition post-suffrage. Though the OLWV operated within a dense network of women's organizations that both cooperated and competed, it's role within the rural reform tradition has been understudied. This thesis analyzes records from the OLWV archives alongside local agricultural reform institutions like the Grange and Farm Women's Clubs to construct a picture of how these organizations interacted to pursue reform in the 1920s. Over the 1920s, the OLWV shifted its strategy from suffrage-era calls for female unity to specific focus on recruiting college women and promoting urban reform priorities. The OLWV's struggles to include rural women, among many other groups, and its reinvention in the post-suffrage era shows the formation of a new reform synthesis within the women's reform movement.

Dedicated to my parents, who have always believed in education for its own sake.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

A New Women's Reform Movement

On May 5, 1920, the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association (OWSA) assembled for its final meeting at the Southern Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. It was a triumphant gathering, Congress having passed the so-called Susan Anthony Amendment a year before guaranteeing women's right to vote, and final ratification now assured. The 1920 OWSA conference struck a retrospective tone, with gifts presented to leading lights of the Ohio Woman Suffrage movement to commemorate their work and years of dedication to the cause. The President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), Maude Wood Park, even took the time to attend as the keynote speaker.[1] The Chairman of the Resolutions Committee, Charlotte W. Boalt of Norwalk, delivered a speech declaring the fulfillment of "the platform of 1850." Boalt was referencing the Women's Right's Convention of 1850, which met in Salem, Ohio and was part of the larger national movement of women's rights conferences that arose during the late 1840s, coming just two years after the more-famous Seneca Falls Conference. The Ohio Woman Suffrage Association was a product of this conference and representative of the national women's reform movement, which addressed a host of social ills between 1850 and 1930. At Salem, the campaign for women's suffrage in Ohio officially launched, establishing the movement's formal, parliamentary-style procedure with twenty-two Resolutions stating the recommendations of the Convention. It also issued a Memorial to the Constitutional Convention of Ohio, taking advantage of the current redrafting of the state constitution to demand: "women shall be secured not only the rights of suffrage, but all the political and legal rights guaranteed to

[1] "Year Book of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association for 1919-1920," 1921, 1-7, Box 10, File 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio.

men."[2] This goal –equal suffrage – united disparate groups of reform-minded women within Ohio, as it did across the Republic, for the next seventy years.

When Charlotte Boalt referenced the 1850 Salem Conference and read its 22 Resolutions aloud at the OWSA conference, the historical reference was laden with triumphant symbolism. By claiming "the self-same spirit that moved in 1850 and has moved down through the years til now," she was expressing a sense of culmination in the adoption of the 19th Amendment.[3] While the reforms championed by American women from 1850-1920 were diverse and often pitted different groups against one another, suffrage was a major accomplishment. The leaders of the American Woman Suffrage Association, both national and local, understood that keeping a massive reform coalition organized and motivated now that the symbolic prize had been attained would be difficult. Organizationally, the OWSA needed to quickly pass its structure and membership to a new, rebranded but officially sanctioned organization to keep its more specific reform platform and priorities intact. A broader contest concerning women's roles in political life was unfolding as well. Though woman suffrage had been a reality in several western states for years and had been a hot-button issue for decades, in 1920 it was still unknown how woman's political citizenship would unfold or how women's activism in the reform movement would change now that they could vote. Some postulated that women would not exercise the vote, others thought that the two-party system would snatch them up based on their male relatives' political affiliation, while still others feared the creation of a woman's bloc of voters. As political parties and reform organizations alike competed for women's volunteer hours and votes in the

[2] "The Rights of Woman," *The North Star,* May 10, 1850, African-American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives, Accessed 10/16/18 at https://accessible.com/accessible/emailedURL?AADoc=THENORTHSTAR.FR1850051010.21892

[3] "Year Book of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association for 1919-1920," 1921, 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

1920s, they would have to define what places were available to women within those organizations. The OWSA wanted to see women politically involved, both within traditional political parties and through women's-only organizations, advocating for social policies that they believed concerned all women, on a national and local scale. The grand narrative of suffrage was over, the goal achieved. Now the project was to create an organization that could build upon the victories of the women's suffrage movement to accomplish further social reforms.

Figure 1: The Southern Hotel in 1897, site of the 1920 OWSA and LWV Conference[4]

In 1920, the OWSA officially dissolved itself and created a Constitution and Resolutions for a new organization, called the Ohio League of Women Voters, which retained the same leadership and federal structure of the suffrage organization.[5] The Ohio League was part of the national transformation of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) into the League of Women Voters (LWV). The Ohio League of Women Voters positioned itself to provide citizenship education, including the mechanics of voting, the structure of government, and desirable policies, both for members and non-members. Because of its explicit educational

[4] Columbus Dispatch, *Southern Hotel.* May 20, 1897. Historic Hotels, Columbus Public Library, Columbus, Ohio.
[5] "Year Book of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association for 1919-1920," 1921, 4-24, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

mission, the OLWV combined elements of both local-level, topical women's clubs popular in this period and elite-led organizations like the Ohio University Extension Agency, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or the Young Women's Christian Association, that sought to shape life for women in the early twentieth century. As an educational organization, the Ohio League of Women Voters was prescriptive. In its previous life as the OAWSA, it had argued that women ought to have the vote. As a voter education and social reform organization, it made certain claims about why women should exercise their right to vote and what they ought to do with it. As an organization of mostly urban, elite women, the OLWV tried to shape the industrializing state through protective laws for working women, educational reform, and better health care. Initially, the leaders of the OLWV retained calls for gender-based unity, echoing the solidarity rhetoric of the suffrage era. This changed during its first decade as it adapted to a changing reform movement that demanded intensive coalition-building efforts.

This thesis demonstrates that the women's reform movement of 1850-1935 was highly adaptive and varied widely depending upon local and cultural context. The League of Women Voters, as part of the women's reform tradition, was crucial in articulating a vision for post-suffrage women's activism in the 1920s. This thesis examines the OLWV's attempts to build a broad-based women's coalition including both rural and urban women during the 1920s, its shift to recruiting middle class university women by the end of the decade, and its move to economic relief work in the early 1930s. Analyzing the LWV during the interwar period reveals how the women's reform movement adapted to changing cultural and political realities and the struggle to define women's roles in the reform tradition post-suffrage. Western Ohio offers a useful site for investigating the adaptations women's reform underwent during the 1920s because it experienced both the urban and rural reform traditions. While the OLWV leadership was largely

comprised of white, upper-middle-class, educated women steeped in the urban reform tradition, they were flexible in successfully adopting elements of the rural reform tradition as they tried to build a coalition of female reformers in the Twenties. The contribution of the rural reform tradition to the changing landscape of women's post-suffrage activism has been understudied, and this thesis shows that both urban and rural reform organizations, methods, and personnel were crucial to forming a new reform synthesis.

Though there were many divisions within the broad-based women's reform movement, I have focused here on the urban and rural divide as it has received little attention in histories of the women's movement. Women living in cities or rural areas faced different challenges and therefore had different reform priorities during the interwar period. Urban reform studies typically focus on the Settlement House Movement, the beginnings of social work, and attempts to educate immigrants.[6] The rural reform movement was also rooted in late eighteenth-century attempts to solve social problems through formal study and education but developed separately from the urban movement. The rural reform tradition was a combination of post-Civil War grassroots farmers' cooperative organizations like the Grange and Farm Women's Clubs and state-sponsored reform and education programs like the land-grant college Extension Agency system and the Farm Bureau. These state-funded organizations were largely an outgrowth of the 1909 *Report of the Country Life Commission,* launched by President Teddy Roosevelt to understand the concerns and needs of rural America in a nation obsessed with industrialization

[6] The Settlement House Movement was an urban uplift movement where middle-class, white women would live in homes with the poor. Social services were one of the few professional career paths open to college-educated women in the early twentieth century, and the exposure to urban social ills further galvanized women suffrage workers to campaign for a voice in public policy. Wendy Kaminer, *Women Volunteering: The Pleasure, Pain, and Politics of Unpaid Work from 1830 to the Present* (Garden City, Anchor Press, 1984), 40-41.

and urban growth.[7] In response to the concerns raised by the *Report*, a myriad of programs were devised to assist rural women in improving their lives, families, and homes. These reform programs, like many of the urban reform projects, emphasized women's responsibilities to the community, though the specific priorities and context were usually different. Importantly, rural women, especially those living on farms, were seen as a unique group worth understanding after the 1909 report brought their lives to the national spotlight. In a response to the Country Life Commission's *Report*, *Good Housekeeping* magazine launched a "national farm home inquiry of its own," which elicited "more than one thousand letters, from farmers' wives in all parts of the continent."[8] *Good Housekeeping* portrayed the "farmers' wives" as "the mothers of our future Abraham Lincolns…the real basis of the nation" implying that the farm woman was the archetype of idealized American womanhood. Letters containing both positive and negative assessment of farm life were printed, but one entitled "Contentment in Ohio" shows the self-consciousness of farm women as a group: "Do I work hard? Indeed, I do, but I enjoy it... We do not care to be classed as a downtrodden, back-woodsy, know-nothing set. We want equal rights with those of other occupations and environments."[9] In a rapidly urbanizing state and nation, rural women were quick to point out that they were as eager as their urban sisters to pursue new educational opportunities, reform programs, and technology.

Like many urban and rural reform organizations of the early twentieth century, the OLWV fit into the "municipal housekeeping" tradition of female political involvement.[10]

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[7] Edith M. Ziegler, "'The Burdens and Narrow Life of Farm Women:' Women, Gender, and Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life," *Agricultural History* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2012), 77-103.
[8] "A New Era for Farm Women," *Good Housekeeping* 49 No. 1, July 1909, 39–43, Home Economics Archive: Research, Tradition and History (HEARTH). Ithaca, NY: Albert R. Mann Library, Cornell University.
[9] "A New Era for Farm Women," 40.
[10] "Municipal housekeeping" rhetoric is a category used by historians to characterize middle-class, white women's defense of their own reforming political activity. See Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984), 620-47; for an example of

Women, as mothers, were presumed to hold a special responsibility and insight into certain political matters like health, sanitation, education, and public morality. This viewpoint had been rhetorically powerful during the suffrage campaign, as it preserved the separate spheres construction in which many Americans, both male and female, raised on Victorian familial ideals believed. Every policy position endorsed by a major woman's group was at some point linked back to an essentialist argument that women were more restrained, clean, and concerned with human life and moral conduct than were men. Historian Susan Zeiger has argued that the Peace Movement that began in the 1870s, and in which the National American Women's Suffrage Association and League of Women Voters were active, connected anti-war agitation with women's roles both as mothers and as Christians seeking to remove temptation from men.[11] The special role for women included legislative priorities specific to women and children, as might be expected. This mission could be extended in practice, however, to a whole myriad of social, economic, and political problem that the OLWV saw. For example, in 1922 the OLWV pledged itself to a careful study of law enforcement, because it "stressed the importance of social and civic betterment for morality, for the little children, and the home."[12] Furthermore, the work of law enforcement "rests so vitally on that great institution – the American home."[13] Since any policy or social issue would ultimately affect the private household, politically active women could still argue that they were technically exercising influence over issues appropriate for

how this rhetoric operated on local policy, see: Celeste K., Carruthers and Marianne H. Wanamaker, "Municipal Housekeeping," *Journal of Human Resources* 50, no. 4 (2015): 837-872

[11] Susan Zeiger, "Finding a Cure for War: Women's Politics and the Peace Movement in the 1920's," *Journal of Social History* 24 no. 1 (Autumn, 1990), 69-86. Illegalizing war and disarmament were part of the national and Ohio LWV platforms from the beginning.

[12] Convention Notes, May 1922, 9, Box 5, File 9, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

[13] Ibid.

females to discuss. The OLWV was clearly steeped in municipal housekeeping rhetoric and used it frequently to emphasize priorities and call for gender unity in pursuit of its legislative goals.

Historiography

Much has been written about the rhetoric surrounding American women and the vote. Most studies of the post-suffrage women's reform movement have focused on urban women, though there is a vibrant sub-field considering the interactions between Black and white women's clubs and reform organizations. Rural women are typically not mentioned in studies of women's reform movements, except as an aside when mentioning social activities open to farm women. Strengths of rural women's history currently lie in analyzing women's reactions to technology as with Katherine Jellison's *Entitled to Power:Farm Women and Technology 1913-1963*; adaptation to increasing economic and educational opportunities, as in "Technological and Economic Change in the Employment of Women" by Adshade and Keay; and frictions in gender relationship within the patriarchal farm structure, as in Kristin Mapel Bloomberg's analysis of farm women's oratory in the 1870s and '80s.[14] Dorothy Schwieder and Deborah Fink's article "U.S. Prairie and Plains Women in the 1920s: A Comparison of Women, Family, and Environment" is a good example of the growing attention paid to regional differences among rural women in the United States, dispelling the myth that there is a universal farm woman or

[14] Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology 1913-1963,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Marina Adshade and Ian Keay, "Technological and Organizational Change and the Employment of Women: Early Twentieth-Century Evidence from the Ohio Manufacturing Sector," *Feminist Economics* 16 no. 1, January 2010, 129-157; Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, "Women and Rural Social Reform in the 1870s and 1880s: Clara Bewick Colby's "Farmer's Wives,"' *Agricultural History,* 89 no. 3 (Summer 2015), 402, 425.

pioneer woman experience.[15] But rural women are mostly absent from the historiography of women's suffrage and post-suffrage women's activism.

This project attempts to unite two threads of women's history that rarely meet in an attempt to understand how women's reform movements adapted in the 1920s: the history of the League of Women Voters and post-suffrage women's reform movements more generally, and rural women's history, especially rural reform. Works within both these subfields inform this project. As the direct heir of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and one of the most influential organizations promoting and interpreting women's full citizenship in the post-suffrage period, it is striking that the League of Women Voters has largely lacked systematic, book-length critical analysis by historians. While there are innumerable histories of the woman suffrage movement, the LWV tends to play a supporting role in most histories of post-suffrage women's reform activism.

The League of Women Voters is remarkably well documented from the inside. In keeping with the preservationist inclinations of that first LWV conference in 1919 that memorialized suffragists, the LWV produces histories of itself periodically. Publishing profusely has always been part of the LWV's strategy, on both the federal and state level, for citizenship education. Titles like *A Portrait of the League of Women Voters at Eighteen*, *25 Years of a Great Idea: A History of the National League of Women Voters, A Non-Partisan Organization,* and *Forty Years of a Great Idea* are all examples of the LWV's self-documentation between 1938 and 1960.[16] Though these short publications offer useful timelines, and reflections on the

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[15] Dorothy Schwieder and Deborah Fink, "U.S. Prairie and Plains Women in the 1920s: A Comparison of Women, Family, and Environment," *Agricultural History* 73 no. 2 (Spring 1999), 183-200.

[16] Marguerite M. Wells, *A Portrait of the League of Women Voters at Eighteen* (Washington, D.C. League of Women Voters of the U.S., 1938); Kathryn H. Stone, *25 Years of a Great Idea: A History of the of the National League of Women Voters, A Non-Partisan Organization* (Washington, D.C., League of Women Voters of the U.S.,

LWV's aims, especially in the 1920s, they are more publicity than history. The 1960 publication even acknowledges its limitations as a solely national story and recommends readers refer to the historians written of local movements as a supplement. Rather than a comprehensive history, these works were intended to "hark back often to the early days…. particularly for newer, younger members."[17] Intended as celebratory or exhortative works and not historical analysis, these publications serve as useful primary documents but do not provide critical evaluation of the League. A media study of these collected histories alone merits book-length treatment but is not the primary aim of this study.

A unique contribution to the historiography of the League of Women Voters came in 1989 with Louise M. Young's *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970.*[18] Though not officially part of the LWV leadership, Young facilitated the acceptance and preservation of early League records as historical documents at the Library of Congress.[19] She produced the first professional history and analysis of the LWV, at the request of its national president. Young does an admirable job of placing the early League platform in context of social and political tensions of the 1920s, but her focus is mainly on the National League and not on how non-mainstream groups of women were incorporated (or not) into local League programs. In conjunction with Young's book and developed from the source base that Young helped to preserve, Barbara Stuhler released *For the Public Record: A Documentary History of the League of Women Voters* the same year. A thoughtfully annotated collection of primary sources,

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1946); and National League of Women Voters, *Forty Years of a Great Idea* (Washington, D.C., League of Women Voters of the U.S., 1960) are the selected publications mentioned here, chosen for their representative nature of LWV histories, though the LWV has published more historical reflections in a similar vein.

[17] National League of Women Voters, *Forty Years of a Great Idea* (Washington, D.C., League of Women Voters of the U.S., 1960), 6.

[18] Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (Westport, CN, Greenwood Press, 1989).

[19] Young, *In the Public Interest,* ix.

Stuhler's collection provides helpful access to national LWV documents from the organization's early days.

A recent trend in the historiography of women's movements has been to integrate the LWV into thematic works dealing with women's voluntary action. Kristi Anderson argues that historians were mistaken to assume – through the 1980s – that women were politically unpowerful post-suffrage because they did not act in ways that men predicted and expected. She argues that women permanently changed American politics post-suffrage and that the LWV experienced fierce competition with the political parties to control civic education. Because her focus is primarily on partisan and electoral involvement, Anderson focuses on whether the League led to greater political activism through traditional party politics.[20] By contrast, I compare the LWV to voluntary agricultural reform organizations that also competed for space in rural women's lives alongside partisan groups or the LWV. Similarly, Anna L. Harvey argues persuasively in *Votes without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970* that during the post-suffrage decades, "the major party organizations were able to initiate the electoral mobilization of women, giving the parties significant advantages in imperfectly competitive markets for women's electoral loyalties," thus eroding the power of women's organizations.[21] While Harvey acknowledges that evidence of LWV elites is far more plentiful than that of their constituencies, she asserts that "NLWV elites clearly seemed to believe that women constituted a distinct electoral group, sharing interests, beliefs and norms," without

[20] Kristi Anderson, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics before the New Deal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 41-47.
[21] Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

acknowledging the unexamined preconceptions of LWV elites that colored their educative messages.[22]

As Wendy Sharer shows in her study of political discourse of women's movements, the founders of the LWV were steeped in the pedagogical philosophies of John Dewey, the father of Progressive education. Sharer argues that the League's goal was to educate for action, not for mere academic knowledge, and to habituate women to the experience of political activity.[23] Sharer adheres to Harvey, Young, and Anderson's assertion that power shifted away from the technical process of voting after suffrage but does not discuss the distinctions between prescriptive messages toward urban women and rural women in the LWV.[24] My work addresses the gap between rural and urban women in the early days of the LWV. Additionally, these books all examine the power relationship between the female leaders of the LWV and the male leaders of political parties and journalism. While undoubtedly important, focusing solely on the gendered power dynamic obscures the subtler workings of region and class at work, which this paper explores in the context of elite, urban prescriptions for rural Ohio women.

While suffrage and women's reform movements have traditionally held a prominent place in women's history, works examining the divide between urban and rural women are rare. Rural history as a subfield is growing, and historians over the past two decades have taken creative approaches to accessing the thoughts and experiences of rural women, most of whom did not leave "ego documents," like memoirs or collected correspondence, in the way elite reform women did. The Extension Agencies hosted by land-grant colleges in various states are

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[22] Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage,* 111.
[23] Wendy B. Sharer, *Vote and Voice: Women's Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 128
[24] Sharer, *Vote and Voice,* 92-5.

central to these works on rural women's reform because they were among the most prominent and long-lasting institutions in rural areas. Ann E. McClearly argues that rural women welcomed the educational initiatives of the extension agency, appropriating tools for economic improvement that they adapted to their own particular situations in life, even though the agency's push toward corporate farming eroded many women's traditional income streams like dairying and poultry.[25] Similarly, Katherine Jellison analyzes the gospel of modernization promoted to rural women after the Country Life Movement. While she thoroughly analyzes how women's self-identification as farmers in their own right often went unrecognized, she does not integrate a discussion of changing female citizenship roles post-suffrage into her work.[26]

Analyzing how the LWV incorporated the rural reform tradition into its post-suffrage structure requires an understanding of rural reform. The Gilded and Progressive Eras are considered the golden age of the voluntary association, and rural areas were no exception. Women took care of the cooking, fundraising, organizing, and planning that made most rural voluntary organizations possible, writes Donald B. Marti in *Women of the Grange.* He argues persuasively that women were able to subtly influence the policy and programs of the Grange, a farmers' lobbying and social organization extremely popular in the Midwest, through the 1930s by their continued presence, though they did not hold high offices within the Grange.[27] As with most histories of the Grange, Marti only discusses the interactions of rural reform organizations and the Woman Movement within the context of the Grange's eventual support for suffrage. I

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[25] Ann E. McCleary, " 'Seizing the Opportunity:' Home Demonstration Curb Markets in Virginia," in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century* ed. Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006).
[26] Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
[27] Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

would argue that support for suffrage by 1919 was not a meaningful marker of a group's definition of women's citizenship. This is because women's suffrage had become a surety by then; this work is more interested in the cultural attitudes surrounding how women would use the vote and attempt to influence change.

By establishing the organizational and ideological pathways to reaching rural women, agricultural institutions retained power and influence in the 1920s. Examining the role these rural organizations played in women's lives is important to understanding the women's reform movement more fully. The works listed do not address how the Rural Extension Agency influenced and combined with other reform organizations, especially the LWV. Because most women's history works examine the urban and reform traditions in isolation, they obscure how these movements related to and influenced each other, and sometimes competed.

Rural women were symbolically and rhetorically important in the early twentieth century. In a time of unprecedented urbanization and increased diversity in immigration, white women living on farms were often portrayed as a snapshot of the past; virtuous women living out the agrarian myth in their everyday lives. The idealization of pioneers and frontier life, always particularly strong in the Midwest, took on more nostalgic power after the Second Industrial Revolution and with the shift of immigration patterns from Western European nations to Eastern and Southern European.[28] Popular culture of the time pressured rural women to fulfill their roles as guardians of the farm. A feature piece in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1919 tracked "the injury that the American woman has done to the farm" through a rise in urban relocation, which this author treats as synonymous with ill-health and vice and the author warns that only fertile

[28] Tiziano Bonazzi, "Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis and the Self-Consciousness of America," *Journal of American Studies* 27 no. 2, (August, 1993), 160-161.

farm women can rescue the United States from the fate of war-torn and supposedly depopulated (western) Europe barely recovering from the "German hordes."[29] This pressure affected the tone of rural women's reform movements, as Marilyn Irvin Holt discusses in her work *Linoleum, Better Babies, & the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930.*[30] Holt shows that rural life was diverse, and women often active participants in rural reform movements rather than passive recipients of knowledge from urban counterparts. Furthermore, Holt uncovers an unwillingness among early twentieth-century reformers to question the presumed goals of reform: assimilation and Americanization. Holt writes: "few experts, including those in black agricultural schools, identified racism or failure to meet dominant-culture expectations as rural problems."[31] This observation can be carried over to the LWV, and examining how its preconceptions were similar to agricultural reform organizations is a key part of this project.

No analysis of post-suffrage women's reform is complete without a discussion of African-American women's activism in light of continuing franchise restrictions. For many African-Americans, especially in the South, the campaign for the right to vote did not end in 1920 but stretched on into the 1960s. This fundamental difference between the reform movements of white and Black women made their reform history unfold differently after the uneasy unity of the national suffrage movement ended. Floris Cash Barnett examines the complex intersections between voluntary social service programs and class friction among African-American women in the Progressive Era in *African-American Women and Social*

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[29] Herbert Quick, "The New Farm Wife: Who She Is and What She Will Demand Before She Will Stay Put," *The Ladies' Home Journal* April 1919, 42, 82.

[30] Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, & the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

[31] Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, & the Modern Farm Woman,* 192.

Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow through the New Deal.[32] Cash's regional focus shifts throughout the book, with the discussion of the Midwest mostly focused on Settlement House work. Though the time span is outside the scope of this project, *White Women Organized and the Challenges of Racial Integration, 1945-1965* tackles the problem that white women's volunteerism often drew its moral authority *from* white exclusivity, not despite it.[33] Cash's chapter on the League of Women Voters draws extensively on local studies, especially from Southern states, and points to the League's careful negotiation of women's political identity in the Twenties: "in carefully constructing a public identity for women, the League was deliberately vague and non-prescriptive about its own purpose, urging activism on the impeccably non-partisan and benign groups of "good governance.'"[34] While the League may have been ambiguous about its own ultimate reason for existence, I will argue that it was quite prescriptive in the ways in which it communicated how different groups of women should navigate their newfound role as voting citizens.

Though her study ends in 1920, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn provides helpful context in *African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920.*[35] Terborg-Penn offered a revisionist history of Black women's involvement within both mainstream and segregated suffrage movements that centers non-white priorities in the fight for the vote. She pays attention to the moment of transition where the NAWSA becomes the LWV and how women of color had largely been left behind in the movement by white suffragists who emphasized increasing career

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[32] Floris Barnett Cash, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936 (*Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001).

[33] Helen Laville *White Women Organized and the Challenges of Racial Integration, 1945-1965* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).
[34] Laville, *White Women Organized and the Challenges of Racial Integration,* 68.
[35] Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).

opportunities and legal advances for middle-class, native-born white women. Terborg-Penn shows that the LWV inherited the racial compromises of its founders like Carrie Chapman Catt and Harriet Taylor Upton, who helped create an anti-Black suffrage agenda in 1903 that left Black enfranchisement a "states' rights" question.[36] Studies like Terborg-Penn's are crucial, as they reveal the deep entrenchment of segregation and racist beliefs among whites at every level of American life. Though the primary source base used in this study predominantly reveals the actions of white women, that in itself is significant, given the LWV's assertion that the League bore "no bars to membership."[37] The League hoped to be a representative organization based on the assumption that all women bore similar interests. Despite this unifying claim, its early membership tended to appeal to upper-middle class white women while African-American women found organizations more targeted for the problems they faced elsewhere.

Ohio provides an effective regional context for studying the League of Women' Voters outreach to rural women and its adaptations as a major women's voluntary organization. Though each local and state chapter of the LWV was part of the national organization and promoted the national platform, there were variations across regions. Though most studies of the LWV have focused on the national organization, it is crucial to understand how individual chapters pursued League policies within each one's local or regional context. Ohio provides a useful example of a model state League in the 1920s. Ohio was considered an early success, with 10,000 members by 1927 and a thriving voter outreach program.[38] Ohio produced several prominent leaders of the National League, notably Belle Sherwin. From Cleveland, Ohio, Sherwin was President of the National League between 1924 and 1934 and oversaw a shift towards "pragmatic and

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[36] Terborg-Penn, *African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote,* 115-116.
[37] Sybil Burton, "President's Report," May 1925, 6, Box 5, File 9, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[38] "Report of Organization of the Ohio League of Women Voters," March 25, 1927, 1, Box 5, File 10, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection.

experimental" political education while defending the organization against claims of Communism and partisanship.[39] Politically and economically, Ohio serves as a useful microcosm of the country, with strong Republican and Democratic enclaves along with a balance of populous farming areas and booming industrial cities.[40] Ohio's economic woes after the 1929 crash were some of the worst among the Midwest and became a major focus of women's relief work in the 1930s. Finally, the League of Women Voters of Ohio records have been well preserved as a coherent set, whereas most local chapters' records were not so fortunate.

Women's voluntary organizations underwent a period of transition in the 1920s as they attempted to create a post-suffrage coalition comprising different groups of women. This project asks a question that, to my knowledge, has not been asked in the scholarship: how did rural women fit into the LWV's message of female citizenship? I intend this as a modest contribution to the growing scholarship of rural women, images of whom have often been a tool in American political rhetoric. Understanding prescriptive perceptions and assumptions about rural women helps us understand how reform priorities developed post-suffrage and shows that rural women were considered an identifiable constituency by groups like the LWV. It also suggests that the early twenty-first century cultural divide between urban and rural is not new but has its roots in early twentieth century anxieties and assumptions about the "problems" of country and city and who had the right and power to suggest solutions. Finally, this project is not intended as an indictment or polemic of the League of Women Voters. The League simply provides a cogent example of an elite, urban, white reforming organization that took a leading role in defining female citizenship in the 1920s. This gives us a window into the prevailing thought of the time

[39] Young, *In the Public Interest,* 81.
[40] Michael Pierce, "Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-1891, *Agricultural History* 74, no. 1 (Winter, 2000), 58-85.

and place, which I analyze here. These preconceptions and prejudices within the LWV of course altered down through the decades. Each generation has its own set of presumptions. It is my hope that by questioning the inherited preconceptions of the past, we can better identify and challenge our own.

CHAPTER II – THE OLWV'S OUTREACH TO RURAL WOMEN

The OLWV as an Educational Organization

The primary goal of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association (OWSA) was to establish adult female suffrage in Ohio and across the United States. This was a concrete, tangible goal, but by 1920 that goal was achieved.[41] This led the OWSA to bequeath its organizational structure and membership lists to the Ohio League of Women Voters (OLWV) and shift to a broader and more nebulous political goal: citizenship education for women. This meant not only teaching women the practical mechanics of voting, like using a ballot or registering, but imparting the OLWV's view of how a voting citizen should perceive her political responsibilities. How this education would be implemented was undefined at the beginning of the League's life. As the League struggled to reinvent itself, some within its leadership attempted to make rural outreach a major organizational goal. The organization's anxieties about its priorities would become evident as its platform shifted over the decade.

An early challenge the League faced in defining its reform message post-suffrage was defining its relationship with political parties. The League tried to chart a course that was political, but not partisan. This led to some confusing stances as the League worked out what it meant to pursue political involvement outside of the party structure. The OLWV did endorse specific legislation and, up to 1925 in Ohio, even specific political candidates.[42] The National LWV lobbied Congress as a key member in the formation of the Women's Joint Congressional Committee in 1920, which brought together a spectrum of women's organizations to promote

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[41] Anna L. Harvey, *Votes without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 231-2.

[42] Grace R. Peters, "Minutes of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Ohio League of Women Voters," May 13-15, 1925, 5, Box 5, File 9, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio.

legislation considered of particular interest to women.[43] Despite this legislative involvement on the national scale, the League's work on the local levels during the 1920s primarily consisted of informing women about promoted legislation, rather than forming lobbying groups or other direct-action political activity. Citizenship education was seen by the OLWV and others as a crucial method of political engagement. The pamphlet and formal citizenship school were seen as tools to help women develop into political actors. Citizenship education was not apolitical: it was a crucial site of competition for defining the meaning of the woman vote as a natural extension of the traditional woman's sphere of interest. The OLWV was at the forefront of this effort in the 1920s, and trying to define the scope and meaning of women's political activity became a real challenge for the organization as it navigated the chaotic world of 1920s politics.

While elite members of the National League were engaged in lobbying, the work on the local levels was segmented according to the characteristics of the group of women to be reached. The OLWV's perceptions of the women they sought to influence, as well as their goals, and methods as an educational institution can be seen clearly through its efforts to reach the rural women of the state. This chapter will analyze what the leaders of the Ohio League of Women Voters in the 1920s wrote about rural women, how they aimed to reach rural women with citizenship education initiatives, and whether they were successful. Examining the League as primarily an educational organization, rather than a lobbying or interest group, engages with the League's conception of itself as a group that, "seeks to guide the voter in thinking for herself rather than to attempt in any way to think for her."[44] The emphasis on "preparing" women for a new citizenship role echoes broader modernization efforts of the early 1900s that tried to ease the

[43] Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage*, 107.
[44] "A Challenge," *The Ohio Woman Voter,* 1 no. 3, August-September 1922, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

transition for women from a traditional, agrarian society to a technological modernity through educational reform programs.[45] There was by no means a unanimous consensus about what reforms were needed in rural areas; in fact, some agricultural newspapers hosted heated debates as urban reformers and farmers battled over rural out-migration and the sometimes condescending tone of city editors.[46] This approach also creates a different framework for evaluating the League's activities in the 1920s. While electoral outcomes of voter mobilization and the election of female political candidates were part of the League's program, its role as an educational organization of the 1920s was just as important for normalizing female suffrage once it became legal fact.

Although separate from their directly legislative work, the League viewed its educational work as political, but outside the formal party system, similar to how women's reform organizations had operated in the pre-suffrage era. A League officer writing in the *Ohio Woman Voter* in 1923 that "both the old parties have sadly neglected their duty in an educational way. Their only reason for existence seems to be to get members of their party in office."[47] This view dismissed the partisan system, which relied upon trading favors, and supported the Progressive vision for disinterested politics, a movement to seek the good of the community instead of the balance of faction.[48] Citizenship education was a crucial step to political revitalization in the view of League officers. At the low point in voter turnout in 1925, when many issues the LWV

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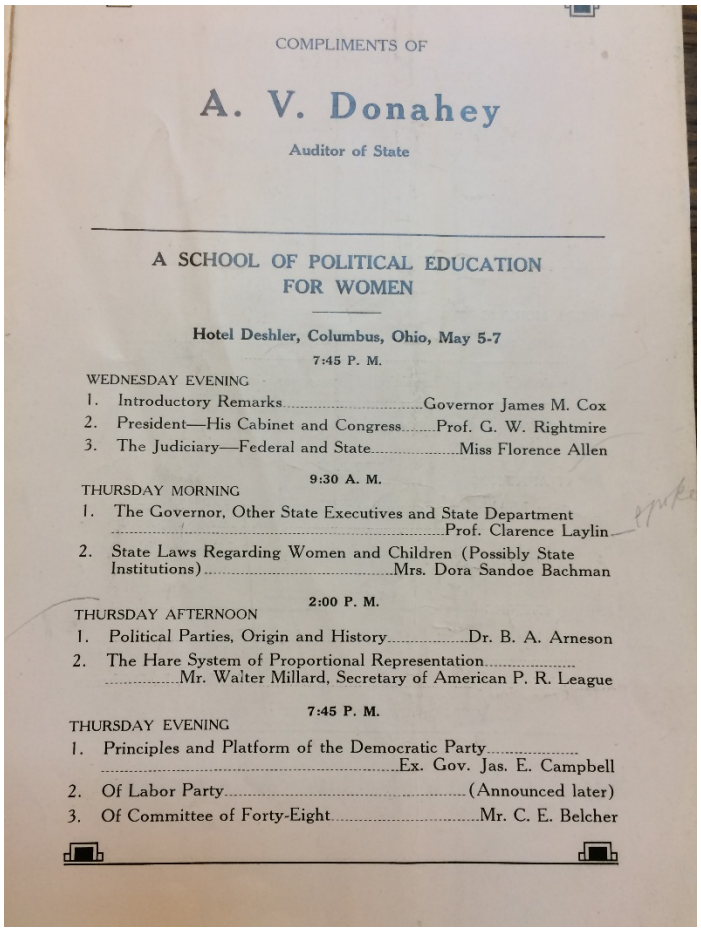
[45] The effort to modernize women's agricultural work began in 1914 with the Smith-Lever Act, which created Cooperative Extension Services and Divisions of Home Economics in many midwestern land-grant colleges, including the Ohio State University. For a good introduction to home economics work in another midwestern state, see: Dorothy Schweider, "Changing Times: Iowa Farm Women and Home Economics Cooperative Extension in the 1920s and 1950s," in *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads*, eds. Lucy Edersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 204-222.
[46] John J. Fry, "'Good Farming- Clear Thinking- Right Living': Midwestern Farm Newspapers, Social Reform, and Rural Readers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Agricultural History* 78 no. 1 (Winter, 2004), 35-36.
[47] "Do the Men Need Education Politically?" *The Ohio Woman Voter*, 1, no. 7, January 1923, 11, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[48] Anderson, *After Suffrage, 30-34*.

patronized were suffering legislatively, Ohio League President Sybil Burton argued that the real strength of the LWV lay not in immediate legislative victories but the power that would come from political education. She wrote, "to be educated is to know," not just the mechanical functioning of government, "but the art of public life."[49] This suggests that the OLWV members thought they were engaging in a purer, better form of political activity.



COMPLIMENTS OF

A. V. Donahey

Auditor of State

A SCHOOL OF POLITICAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Hotel Deshler, Columbus, Ohio, May 5-7

7:45 P. M.

WEDNESDAY EVENING

1. Introductory Remarks.....Governor James M. Cox
2. President—His Cabinet and Congress.....Prof. G. W. Rightmire
3. The Judiciary—Federal and State.....Miss Florence Allen

9:30 A. M.

THURSDAY MORNING

1. The Governor, Other State Executives and State Department .....Prof. Clarence Laylin
2. State Laws Regarding Women and Children (Possibly State Institutions).....Mrs. Dora Sandoe Bachman

2:00 P. M.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON

1. Political Parties, Origin and History.....Dr. B. A. Arneson
2. The Hare System of Proportional Representation..... .....Mr. Walter Millard, Secretary of American P. R. League

7:45 P. M.

THURSDAY EVENING

1. Principles and Platform of the Democratic Party..... .....Ex. Gov. Jas. E. Campbell
2. Of Labor Party.....(Announced later)
3. Of Committee of Forty-Eight.....Mr. C. E. Belcher

Figure 2: A program from the OLWV's first "Citizenship School," a method of political education favored by the OLWV in the Twenties.[50]

The League's educational programs, which avoided party politics but were instead designed to empower women by teaching them to be informed citizens, clearly represented the

[49] Sybil Burton, "President's Report" May 1925, MSS 354 League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Box 5, File 9, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio, 7.
[50] "Program: Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention Ohio Woman Suffrage Association and First Convention Ohio League of Women Voters and State Citizenship School," 2, Box 10, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

League's goals for political transformation. Examining the League's outreach to rural women, specifically, reveals that citizenship education programs rested firmly in the tradition of social feminism and on the extension agency model of women's education.[51] "Social feminism" is drawn here from Naomi Black's definition in *Social Feminism*, which was "implicitly for the integration of the social and the political, the movement of women into the public sphere in the extension of their domestic role."[52] Black asserts that the League's non-partisan stance did not make it non-political. Black argues that citizenship education is inherently political and that the LWV has been mistakenly dismissed as trivial because it sidestepped partisan politics. This study takes Black's view that the LWV's bipartisanship was developed "from a sophisticated understanding of the party system in the United States," rather than from an essentialized feminine dislike of conflict or political innocence. As early as 1920, citizenship education for women was contextualized in terms of the gender-specific instruction Midwestern women had already been receiving through State Extension Agencies. As *The Lima News & Times-Democrat* reported: "Ma is going to school again with the kids, but this time she's going to learn about the ballot and voting instead of domestic science or sewing or art or even the 3 R's."[53] Those who advocated citizenship education for newly-enfranchised voters did not need to construct an educational system from scratch. One already existed ready-made for them.

Formulating a Message for Rural Women

In the first decade of its existence, the Ohio League of Women Voters featured a commitment to gender solidarity in political reform that gave way to the awareness of a diverse population of women within Ohio that required a variety of programs and messages. The

[51] Naomi Black, *Social Feminism,* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 26; 241-303.
[52] Ibid., 26.
[53] "Instruction for Women Voters," *Lima News and Times-Democrat,* August 31, 1920, 5.

successes and failures of the League's attempts to interest Ohio women in its programs rested on its ability to make use of voluntary organizations that different groups of women already saw as useful. This was evident as early as the League's founding conference. The OLWV was born into a dense network of women's organizations that pursued a wide variety of reform goals with an even wider variety of methods. At its founding conference, the OLWV hosted representatives from the most prominent Ohio women's groups, including the Federation of Women's Clubs, the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and more.[54] These organizations sought to mitigate the wide variety of social ills that they saw in Ohio. This early inter-organizational cooperation matches the early League rhetoric proclaiming that it was an organization for all women. The obvious weakness of an organizational union based upon the need for reform is that every organization held different reform priorities and even actively disagreed about the solutions necessary to solve social and economic problems. Confident that gender unity would triumph over disparate interests, a 1921 pamphlet entitled "Why Join the League of Women Voters?" answered, "because it unites the country's woman power into a new force for the humanizing of government."[55]

At the 1923 National Conference, League President Maude Wood Park, from Cleveland, Ohio, stated that "we are now an every woman organization," citing the mixed bag of electoral successes and failures on the state level in 1922 as proof of the League's importance to all women.[56] Similar unity rhetoric can be seen in the *Ohio Woman Voter* in 1923. Arguing that the

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[54] "Year Book of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association for 1919-1920," 21, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[55] Barbara Stuhler, *For the Public Record* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000), 37-38.
[56] Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 71.

League was invaluable because of its educating mission and its emphasis on legislation beneficial to women and children, the author asserted "I believe that it is the duty of every woman who loves her home and her country to identify with the League of Women Voters."[57] The implicit argument is that the League should not need to tailor its message to specific groups of women, because blatant reform needs should be obvious to all women. This confidence in gender solidarity, however, waned somewhat after the national legislative defeats in 1924. Even during the suffrage era, there had been an awareness that Ohio suffragists needed to build a coalition of women who shared a group identity built around attributes other than gender.

During the 1920s, rural women were a priority in attempts to build a coalition of Ohio women, but the OLWV was unsure how to relate to them and gain their trust. Rural women were recognized as a distinct group by the OLWV, reflecting the growing awareness that there was a cultural, economic, and societal divide among rural and urban populations in rapidly industrializing Ohio and the United States. Other groups specifically targeted were women in industry, college women, and immigrant women, though regional emphasis varied. Identifying rural women as a crucial interest group was inherited from the OWSA, which actively tried to enlist rural women in the suffrage campaign. Farm women and women living in rural locations were a representative example of the coalition-building tendency the OWSA showed when trying to build its movement. In the correspondence between Harriet Taylor Upton, then-president of the Ohio Women's Suffrage Association, and Vedae K. Meekison, a lawyer and suffrage organizer in Henry County, outreach to rural women emerged as a significant focus of the campaign. To reach farm women, Upton and Meekison dispatched speakers and distributed

[57] "Do the Men Need Education Politically?" *The Ohio Woman Voter*, 1, no. 7, January 1923, 11, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

educational materials through Farmer's Institutes, the Ohio Farmer publication, local granges, and farmers' wives' clubs. Upton writes: "your [Meekison's] suggestion that the farm women ought to have something simple yet comprehensive and broad to study is exactly right."[58] Rural women are identified here as a separate group requiring focused campaign tactics to reach. Upton implied that rural women identified first as farmers, and needed to be convinced that their interests aligned with those of the woman suffrage movement: "…would not the country women be more apt to be interested in a program or in a number of programs suggested to them through the Ohio Farmer than suggested directly through us? I really believe they would."[59] Upton was suggesting that the suffrage movement leaders were very different from rural women, who may not have fully trusted them. If an organization within the rural reform movement could be enlisted, like the agricultural newspaper *Ohio Farmer,* perhaps rural women would be more likely won over to the cause. Here, rural women are significant as a group because their activism was solicited. Yet, it was also suggested that outside influence is required to convince them to adopt programs that would benefit them as women, and as farmers. This approach to reaching rural women in the suffrage era would set the tone for the OLWV's post-suffrage educational outreach.

Urban and Rural Reform Priorities

The OLWV was an organization formed chiefly of educated, middle- or upper-class white women. Juliette Sessions, the President of the OLWV in 1922, is a good example of the League leadership. Though she came from a rural farming family in Massachusetts, she was

[58] Harriet Tyler Upton to Vedae K. Meekison, July 11, 1913, Vadae G. Meekison Collection, Box 1, File 1, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

[59] Ibid.

educated in a women's academy, followed by the Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. Her education and subsequent career as a history teacher, and her experience with the OWSA placed her as a regional elite.[60] Sessions, along with the other OLWV officers, had access to the avenues for voluntary activism open to middle class white women that had steadily been growing in Ohio since the 1870s.[61] Utilizing these experiences, the officers sought to transform society and promote gender equality, which they believed would be a primarily educational task. As Wendy Sharer shows in her study of political discourse of women's movements, the founders of the LWV were steeped in the pedagogical philosophies of John Dewey, the father of Progressive education. Using his theories as a framework, the OLWV officers attempted to educate not for mere academic knowledge, but to habituate women to the experience of political activity.[62] As Dewey wrote:

> Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive.[63]

The first generation of the League of Women Voters were seeking to change society from one in which women were non-voters into one in which they were active participants in democracy. Because the natural mother-to-daughter progression of knowledge and habit did not contain the skills and habits thought necessary for exercise of the franchise, the LWV sought to intersect

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[60] "Juliette Sessions," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 1 no. 1, June 1922, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[61] Stephane Elise Booth, *Buckeye Women: The History of Ohio's Daughters,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 111-127.
[62] Wendy B. Sharer, *Vote and Voice: Women's Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 128.

[63] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education,* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 3.

itself into this natural, generational process with educational efforts that would reach all ages of women.[64]

The minutes and reports of the OLWV offer one perspective on what the OLWV officers thought and said about rural women, while the *Ohio Woman Voter*, a publication sponsored by the OLWV as one of its key educational tools, offers another. Both sources consistently show a rhetoric combining a call for female unity that included rural women within the fold, and a perception about rural women that revealed an unawareness within the urban reform tradition of the parallel structure of agricultural reform in which rural women were active. The call for unity among all women was based upon notions of shared identity as mothers and defenders of the home, as a poem published in the February 1924 edition of *The Woman Citizen,* and reprinted in the *Ohio Woman Voter* makes clear. The poem paints a picture of "a woman we admire" who "'housekeeps' with the best of them," loves her children admirably, and "makes that love the basis for her love of politics."[65] Similarly, an admiring letter from an Episcopalian pastor who had attended a League Citizenship School was published in 1924, where he attributed the League's political work to "a high, maternal emotion."[66] This rhetorical link between the virtues developed by motherhood and housekeeping and the necessity to apply those virtues to political and social problems was made frequently by the League's leaders throughout its first decade and was a crucial part of its mission to mainstream civic engagement for women. Rural women were included in this conception of reform unity, as when it was suggested in 1921 that the League spearhead a multi-organizational effort to promote reform activities to farm women at the 1922

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[64] Young, *In the Public Interest,* 81-2.

[65] Charlotte M. Conover, "Points of View," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 2 no. 10, April 1924, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

[66] Gilbert P. Symons, "One Man's Opinion of the League of Women Voters," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 2 no. 8, February 1924, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

Ohio State Fair.[67] The plan rested upon the assumption that the dissemination of information on voluntary organizations was all that rural women needed to jump on board with the reform program. Similarly, a blueprint for voter mobilization offered by the National League president in 1924, suggested that the urban structure of block workers and precinct captains could easily be reproduced in rural areas, ignoring the problems of geographic distance that made the community geography of rural areas significantly differently than that of cities.[68]

Despite the League's inclusion of rural women in its rhetoric of maternalistic reform, it prioritized urban reform and often neglected enfolding rural reform goals into its platform. A Woman in Industry Committee was a key part of the League's program from the beginning, but a Rural Extension Committee was not formed until 1927. Furthermore, the National Chairman of the Committee of Women in Industry, Amy Maher, wrote in 1925 that women in factory work "is of course so largely one of large industrial centers, of the big cities."[69] Maher argued that local, state, and national attention needed to be focused on the growing presence of women in paid work in cities, but that "the women in the more rural leagues do not come in contact with it in the same way, and it must be explained and made significant to them." Maher's proposed solution was that funding needed to be appropriated to educate rural areas on the needs of the cities. This, of course, ignored the possibility that rural women might wish funds to address problems in their own hometowns. Additionally, the major legislative project of the OLWV Women in Industry Committee until 1925 was the Child Labor Amendment, which imposed restrictions upon the number of hours minors could work and was controversial with Ohio

[67] "Minutes Executive committee," May 31, 1921, 1, Box 11, File 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[68] Elizabeth J. Hauser, "How to Get Out the Vote," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 2 no.9, 8, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[69] Amy Maher, "What a State Committee on Industry can Do," November 10, 1925, 4, Box 8, Minimum Wage Correspondence Folder, 1921-1926, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

farmers, who thought it might bring state or federal inspectors to family farms.[70] The National League even released the script of a short play in 1927 to promote the Amendment, in which a "conversation between a farmer father, a League mother, a lawyer son, and a political daughter on the subject of the child labor amendment," used these easily-recognized character types as vehicles for differing opinions on the law.[71] Issues of identity were at work, with League members attempting to overcome the stereotype of the activist, reforming woman and to make broader connections among the general population.

The OLWV focus on cities was unsurprising, given the economic changes in Ohio in the 1920s. The rapid urbanization of Midwestern cities brought sweeping economic and social changes and vaulted the problems of expanding cities to the forefront of many women's reform organizations. Employment opportunities for women had ballooned after WWI, especially as new technologies opened up jobs in clerical and factory work.[72] This caused many young people to move to large cities seeking employment. A depression in food prices after the boom production years of the war made farming expensive for many small landholders, even as advances in farm technology pushed many farmers to expand their debt to unprecedented levels.[73] For women, the economic pressure in farming areas often meant that they needed to seek a living elsewhere, especially if they were unmarried and could not count on the economic stability of joining an already-overtaxed father's or brother's household.[74] Rural populations

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[70] "Ohio League of Women Voters 1925 President's Report," 4, Box 5, File 9: "The Farmer's Attitude," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 3 no. 5, November 1924, 11-12, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[71] "Child Welfare," January 1927, Marion C. Neprud Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[72] Marina Adshade and Ian Keay, "Technological and Organizational Change and the Employment of Women: Early Twentieth-Century Evidence from the Ohio Manufacturing Sector," *Feminist Economics* 16 no. 1 (January 2010), 131.
[73]Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "The Limits of Community: Martha Friesen of Hamilton County, Kansas," in *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads*, eds. Lucy Edersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 80-8.
[74]Monda Halpern, *And on that Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 27-36.

were not unaware of this obvious demographic shift. 1920, the beginning of female enfranchisement, is also famously the year that urban dwellers outnumbered rural on a national level, but Ohio had surpassed this mark by 1910, when 55.9% of the population was urban.[75] While the allure of city employment was strong, many were alarmed at the trend of farm flight. Chief among those trying to halt the apparent emptying of the countryside in the early twentieth century was The US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA sought to "preserve and improve" farm life by educating and organizing farmers, who were still broadly perceived as too individualistic, despite their activism of the 1890s[76]. Government institutions like the USDA specifically targeted rural women with educational publications regarding better ways to perform farm work traditionally considered a female's domain. While urban reformers worried about the problems caused by large groups of women, often young, working in demanding jobs, rural locations worried about the mirror image of the problem: the youth drain on their farm populations and the struggle to keep their communities functional and attractive to mobile young people. Ignoring the flip side of urbanization was simply the result of the OLWV being led almost exclusively by women steeped in the urban reform tradition and demonstrating those priorities.

Popular Perceptions of Farmers

In addition to its emphasis upon urban reform, the League perpetuated some farm women themes that were common at the time. The odd example of "Ma and Pa Ohio," a regular fictionalized feature in *The Ohio Woman Voter* shows that farm people occupied a contradictory

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[75] "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1920 Forty-Third Number". *Department of Commerce: Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921, 49.

[76] Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 31-35.

double-space in the popular imagination in which they were both reliable and honest, along with being rather backward and a contrast to the educated, urban reformer. Their typecast dialogue reflects this:

> **Pa Ohio Says:** Gosh, Ma! It's tax-payin' time again. Reckon we've got to help them rascals in the Court House buy new eight-cylinder cars. Sich outrageous taxes – it's jist plain stealin' from poor folks like me.
>
> **Ma Ohio:** But Pa! Didn't I hear you boastin' last week to that man who acted like he might buy our farm about our improved roads, our new school building, our good drainage, and how we ain't even had a hold-up in these parts for ages? Didn't I hear you tell him we're surely getting' our money's worth for our taxes? Didn't I hear you sayin' jist these very things? Now Pa! you might at least be consistent.[77]

On the one hand, the exaggerated country speech of Ma and Pa, as well as their casting as parents with old-fashioned titles reminiscent of the frontier, evoke images of rough cabins and minimal educational attainment. On the other, Ma is clearly a vehicle for the views of the OLWV, which advocated a more rigorous role for government actions and greater efficiency in government.[78] Ma Ohio is even more assertive in 1923, when Pa resents being "dictated at by a bunch of silly women whos jest getting' a chance at votin' because we give it to 'em?" Ma Ohio fires back:

> "Us Ohio women don't intent to learn the old political game by gulpin' down ever'thing you say, we're workin' to co-operate with you men in gettin' the rules right, nothin' has to be that way jest because it's always been that way, which is your old theory of knowin' how to vote so well jest because you've been votin' so long.[79]

Ma and Pa's argument is an alternate presentation of the League's fight to prove that women wanted cooperation with men politically, instead of competition, and that political parties were insufficient providers of political education, hence the need for the League. The folksy presentation of Ma and Pa Ohio provides archetypes for a state transitioning from a traditional,

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[77] "Untitled," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 1 no. 6, 16, December 1922, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[78] Black, *Social Feminism,* 262.
[79] "Untitled," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 1, no. 9 March 1923, 17, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

agrarian society to a more egalitarian and politically improved one and rests in an American media tradition of presenting country people as backward while simultaneously implying that their presumed simplicity is ultimately more accurate and honest than urban sophistication.[80] Despite this, Ma Ohio's spirited defense of League priorities strengthens the female unity rhetoric by implying that all women are interested and capable in attaining a civic education and extending their homemaking responsibilities into the public sphere.

While the semi-comical characters of Ma and Pa Ohio do not provide the whole picture of the OLWV's view of rural women, they do tap into common stereotypes of farmers and rural people. Rural women were imaged as the perpetuators through motherhood of a wholesome, white Anglo-Saxon agrarian republic with roots in Jeffersonian Republicanism. At the same time, they were portrayed as backward and lacking the freedom and sophistication of their urban sisters. A feature piece in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1919 tracked "the injury that the American woman has done to the farm" through a rise in urban population, which this author treats as synonymous with ill-health and vice, and warns that only child-bearing farm women can rescue the United States from the fate of war-torn Europe barely recovering from the "German hordes."[81] There are racial undertones which associate rural women with whiteness and traditional virtue and cities with Eastern and Southern European immigrants. The author of the *Ladies' Home Journal* article, a male member of the Federal Farm Loan Board, abruptly shifts his tone from chastisement of rural women for abandoning their civilizational posts to one of dismay over the "drudgery" that farm women are needlessly enduring in the face of new

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[80] For a discussion of rural stereotypes in American media through the radio and television age, see: Jacob J. Podber, *The Electronic Front Porch: An Oral History of the Arrival of Modern Media in Rural Appalachia and the Melungeon Community* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007).
[81] Herbert Quick, "The New Farm Wife: Who She Is and What She Will Demand Before She Will Stay Put," *The Ladies' Home Journal* April 1919, 42;82.

technologies. The emphasis is heavily on implementation of practical goals: bathrooms receive an entire column themselves. Quick writes:

> For all the harm done by this lack of equipment for doing work is the ruin of the women's health and the destruction of their morale...the morale of our rural population began to suffer when the cities began offering the women and children a better chance in the world than seemed obtainable in the country.[82]

In this discourse, rural women have a crucial role in preserving American economic and cultural success. The rhetorical tension between the assumed drudgery and isolation of farm life and the reverence for the moral and economic contributions to American life made by rural women are on display in Quick's piece. This tendency to conceptualize rural life as simply "not urban" and mired in the past hindered urban reform institutions that could have expanded into deeper cooperation with rural reform groups.

The First Phase of Rural Outreach: 1920-1926

The records of the Ohio League of Women Voters reveal two phases of initial outreach to the rural women of Ohio. The first phase took place between 1920 and 1927 and was mostly an attempt to adapt the Ohio League's urban outreach programs to a rural audience through a variety of pre-established educational venues, with a focus on gender unity. The second period was at its strength between 1927 and 1930, lingering until major programmatic shifts in 1935. This period was characterized by a close cooperation with Home Demonstration Agents from the Ohio State University College of Agriculture Extension Service. This shift in programmatic emphasis shows how the OLWV tried to find its feet as a primarily institutional, educational group with regards to rural women rather than a chiefly voter mobilization organization. It also demonstrates the segmentation of citizenship education as the League slowly realized throughout

[82] Ibid.

the 1920s that a platform claiming to appeal to all women, solely by virtue of their gender, was less effective than a program that tried to tailor its needs to groups with unique characteristics.

The League's first and most important legislative campaign involved rural women directly and was the program that showed the most unity among all the different groups that the OLWV tried to reach. The Sheppard-Towner Act for Maternal and Infant Health in 1921 was the League's first major victory, and almost it's only piece of sponsored legislation that passed. This act represented a major increase in appropriations for travelling nurses and health care education, aiming to reduce the dismal mortality rates among new mothers and infants both in rural and urban areas. A survey of seven industrial centers and rural regions across six states conducted by the US Children's Bureau in 1921 revealed that high infant mortality rates were tied both to low economic status in cities and the lack of prenatal care in the country.[83] The law provided funding both for public health nurses to visit underserved urban and rural populations and disseminate educational information to mothers. This was just the sort of mission that the OLWV was looking for and that it could easily unite its membership. The OLWV was active in promoting federal appropriates for the Sheppard-Towner bill in 1921, and in 1924 tried to win a more active role in dictating where the public health nurses would be sent.[84]

The Sheppard-Towner Act was the most significant piece of legislation sponsored by the League and had the widest impact among differing groups of women. The OLWV's early successes with Sheppard-Towner implementation in rural areas rested on its use of preexisting

[83] Wilson traces the formation of the Children's Bureau in 1912 as fruit of the Progressive Era emphasis on the value of maternalism and domesticity and by extension, the need for a national focus on children's well-being. The League worked with the Children's Bureau through the WJCC, of which it was a key member. Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee,* 28-31.

[84] "Minutes Executive Committee, March 15, 1921," 1, Box 11, File 1; "Executive Committee Meeting September 18, 1924," 1, Box 11, File 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

institutions that reached rural women. The educational portion of Sheppard-Towner implementation matched the OLWV's mission as an educating body within the tradition of the home economics movement and progressive women's reform. Over nine hundred health lectures were delivered to rural women through Farmer's Institutes, Parent-Teacher Associations, and Women's Club meetings within the first eighteen months that the Ohio legislature approved appropriations.[85] Public health nurses were employed for each county in Ohio and "district demonstrations" were held, using the educational model popularized by Extension Agency work in the previous two decades. Along with reaching both urban and rural areas, the OLWV pointed out that district demonstrations in Cincinnati were "confined to sections of the city where colored people live," implying that there was a concerted effort to reach segregated African-American women with the new health care resources to some extent.[86] Proponents of the bill were able to overcome accusations that it would lead to "state medicine," excessive "snooping" into home life, or mass distribution of birth control and consequently "free love and socialism," by consistent appeals to the duty of female voters to see to the welfare of vulnerable mothers and infants.[87] Well-child clinics to deliver basic medical attention were held at county and state fairs. With the success of these programs between 1921 and 1924, the League held forth Sheppard-Towner as a showpiece of how women voters who had been educated for civic involvement could place pressure on legislative bodies to produce laws benefiting women and children. During its most successful phase of outreach to rural women, the League would make use of preexisting organizations in a similar way.

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[85] "Saving the Babies: Ohio Sheppard-Towner Activities from 1923-1924" *Ohio Woman Voter* 3 no. 12, June 1925, 6, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Dorothy Kirchway Brown, "The Maternity Bill," *The Survey,* June 18, 1921, Marion C. Neprud Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

While the campaign for Sheppard-Towner was successful, attempts to reach women for other policy issues were haphazard and often ineffective. Early efforts to reach rural women relied upon the Ohio State Fair, an annual gathering which many women affiliated with farming would be likely to attend. The League planned a booth at the State Fair in 1921, its first active year at the invitation of the head of the Ohio State Board of Agriculture.[88] Unfortunately, a fire at the site of the Fair in 1922 led the League to donate its booth to other displays and therefore didn't start a significant display there until 1923, losing some of its early momentum from the passage of the 19th Amendment.[89] The League did manage to establish a presence at Farmer's Week in 1922 at OSU, where it experimented with holding a Taxation Institute and planned to reproduce the program in local Leagues throughout Ohio.[90] In its attempts to incorporate rural women into the OLWV, its officers tended to emphasize communication and cooperation with the state-led, Columbus-based organizations like the Farm Bureau, Rural Extension Agency, and Grange. Interestingly, the League leadership worked with the leadership of these organizations who tended to resemble the League leaders in education and career path, but who were mostly male. As an example of organizational cooperation, the League leaders were more comfortable with other institutional reform efforts than they were with female-exclusive groups of rural women, like the auxiliaries of the Grange and Farm Bureau or with farm women's clubs. Similar to Sheppard-Towner, the League attempted to dispense information by relying on gender as the drawing factor. However, this framework was not as effective for promoting citizenship education as it was for promoting legislation.

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[88] "Executive Committee Minutes," May 21, 1921, 1 Box 11, File 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[89] "Fire Ruined Fair Plans, League Returned Booth," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 1 no.3, August-September 1922, 9, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[90] "Program: Tenth Annual Farmer's Week," January 30, 1922, 11, Ohio State University Archives, Cooperative Extension Service, Director and General; "A Year's Working Program for the Ohio League of Women Voters May 1922-May 1923," 1922, 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

Another complication was that the League was not without explicit political competition in rural areas. In Van Wert, Ohio, the Republican Women's Club held a school for female voters in October of 1920, right before the first national election in which local women would be eligible to vote. This school was not the intensive, curriculum-heavy program of the OLWV that was only held on a single day. Rather, the Republican voter school was "open each week day from this date until November 2," so women could drop by at their convenience to learn how to cast their ballots.[91] Making the invitation more explicit, the article mentioned that "Republican women who desire instruction are urged to visit Republican headquarters." This showed the urgency felt by political parties to control the direction of female citizenship within the context of the two-party system. Controlling the means of political education meant, presumably, shaping the priorities of this new class of voters and solidifying their loyalty as party members first and foremost. Van Wert hosted campaign stops for both Cox and Harding in 1920, where both presidential candidates made appeals to farm women on the basis of their specific interests as women and as farmers.[92] By inviting rural women as "Republican women," the local party emphasized belonging to the party as the significant identifying factor. This was different than the OLWV's approach, which tended to emphasize an all-woman's program based upon gendered interests. Whether partisan or gender identity would take precedence was a question that affected the OLWV's attempts to redefine its mission.

The Second Phase: 1927-1929

The League's second phase of rural outreach was more systematic. This is attributable to the creation of a Rural Extension Committee in 1927. The leadership of this committee is

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[91] "School for Voters," *Van Wert Daily Bulletin*, October 15, 1920, 2.
[92] "Democratic Rally," *Van Wert Daily Bulletin,* October 13, 1920, 2; "Political Comment," *Van Wert Daily Bulletin,* September 23, 1920, 2; "Cox to Appeal to Women Voters," *Van Wert Daily Bulletin,* August 10, 1920, 1.

significant, because it shows that the League embraced the professionalized model of extension agency outreach that relied upon professional extension agents, both male and female, who obtained information from land-grant universities and government organizations to distribute to rural communities.[93] The Committee was co-chaired by Blanche Bowers and Marion Neprud. Bowers was a Home Demonstration Agent with the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station (OAES), a professor of Home Economics at OSU, and the OSU President of the Ohio Home Economics Association.[94] Neprud was brought on by the League as it's State Organizer in 1925 and had a past as a community organizer in New England and as an English teacher in China.[95] As one of the few full-time, paid officers of the OLWV, Neprud was chiefly responsible for visiting new territory and organizing women into Leagues, as OLWV President Sybil Burton pointed out in 1926:

> She [Neprud] has helped materially in the organization of two new local Leagues and six college Leagues. She has also visited seven cities not yet organized, and five colleges. However, with the contacts she has established we may hope to have other new Leagues on our list in the near future.[96]

By both hiring a professional state organizer to actively seek out interested women and form new Leagues that were not based in preexisting suffrage organizations, and by creating a separate Rural Extension Committee in 1927, the OLWV was demonstrating that it recognized that all

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[93] Neil Betten and Michael J. Austin, *The Roots of Community Organizing, 1917-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 94.
[94] "Girls Hear Canning Lecture: Mrs. Blanche Bowers Gives Demonstration of Preserving Methods," *Ohio State Lantern*, April 11, 1918, 1, The Ohio State University Digital Archives; Frank C. Dean, "Columbus Letter," *Ohio Farmer,* May 20, 1922, 5, Farm and Fireside Collection, Illinois Digital Newspapers Collection, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; The OAES was founded in 1882 after agricultural Ohioans protested the shift of OSU towards liberal arts and away from agricultural education. The name was changed to the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Station (OARDC) in 1965, the name it has to date: R.E. Whitmoyer, "A Brief History of the OARDC," The Ohio State University, accessed December 19, 2018, https://oardc.osu.edu/about/history.
[95] Sybil Burton, "Annual President's Message," 1926, 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records; Marion C. Neprud, "General Correspondence," Box 1, File 1, 1919; 1920-1922, Mss 222 Marion C. Neprud Papers, 1914-1966, Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections.
[96] Sybil Burton, "Annual President's Message," 1926, 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

women would not automatically grasp the appeal of the League. Instead, specific groups would need to be targeted by League organizers and educators. As with many other voluntary organizations in the 1920s, the League's success in a competitive marketplace of associations and clubs would largely depend upon its ability to tailor its message to specific groups.


League Speaker

MISS MARION NEPRUDE

Figure 3: Photo of Marion Neprud, State Organizer for the OLWV and head of the Rural Extension Committee.[97]

Neprud and Bowers laid out a three-year plan in 1927. At this point, the OLWV had about 10,000 members across the state and was looking to expand.[98] The three-year plan rested upon the cooperation between the League of Women Voters and the Extension Agency at the Ohio State University**.** Its stated purpose was "to meet the demand of rural women for more

[97] "League Speaker," *Canton Daily News*, October 26 1929, 4.
[98] "Report of Organization for Ohio State League of Women Voters," March 25, 1927, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

information about government, local, state, and national" and was formulated as a plan for "citizenship education."[99] The plan proposed three different groups working together to bring rural women together for civic education between three and six times a year. The OLWV would supply knowledgeable speakers to deliver the lectures and literature, while a township-level committee would handle outreach, enrollment, and local organizing. The county- level Home Extension Agent would mediate between the township leaders and the League, especially helping with the organizing and planning stages of a lecture.[100] This model was almost identical to the structure of local Farmer's Institutes, which were often organized by township-level groups but sponsored by state-level organizations like the Farm Bureau or the Grange. Neprud's plan struck a balance in which each of the three groups would bear some of the organizational and financial burden for organizing each lecture. They planned for rural outreach to begin in Lake Montgomery, Trumbull, Erie, Summit, Huron, Clinton counties, all areas within easy reach of major Ohio cities to make it easier for resources to flow to the programs. Neprud encouraged the active League members from urban areas to support the rural citizenship extension program, and "cited the interest taken in national affairs by the women of the rural districts" as proof that the well-established leagues needed to be active in bringing educational materials to farm women.[101]

The Rural Extension Committee recognized the usefulness of a pre-existing network of education professionals and compiled lists of Agricultural Agents and Home Extension Agents along with their Ohio territories. The agents, as professional educators, could not be lobbyists but could disseminate educational materials, as a note from the OSU Home Economics staff made

[99] Marion C. Neprud, "Citizenship Project for Rural Women," n.d., circa 1927, 1, Marion C. Neprud Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[100] Ibid.
[101] "League Hears Speakers Talk," *Sandusky Register*, November 3, 1927, 7.

clear: "This list is furnished with the understanding that these workers are public officials and cannot act as commercial agents or representatives. They are glad to furnish educational service in their respective lines."[102] Both the OLWV and the OSU Home Economics department saw citizenship education for women as an educational initiative compatible with the pre-existing work in health and agriculture Ohio women had been receiving through agents' work for the previous twenty years.

This program normalized women's political activity by incorporating it into the preexisting tradition of women's modernization efforts overseen by professional Extension Agents, as in the case of one meeting in Sandusky, Ohio in 1927. A presentation of "the citizenship work which is offered through the courtesy of the League of Women Voters," Neprud's rural extension plan, was delivered alongside kitchen modernization workshops and plans for a sewing-machine repair clinic.[103] Led by the county Home Demonstration Agent and the only female board member of the Farm Bureau, this Sandusky meeting showed how women in Ohio's agricultural regions could access differing threads of modernization, from technology to voter education. The Rural Citizenship Program generated some interest among the rural women of Ohio. Bowers reported successful Citizenship Schools held in rural areas in Summit and Delaware counties in 1927 as well as more specific programming for Farmer's Week.[104] In 1927, Neprud drew a crowd of almost 250 rural women near Delaware, Ohio, for a lecture about voting.[105] The plan laid out earlier that year demanded a minimum of 25 rural women attending to warrant OLWV resources, so a turnout of ten times that amount can be considered a success.

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[102] "Home Economics Extension Staff," August 15, 1927; "List of Agricultural Agents in Ohio," June 1927, Marion C. Neprud Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[103] "Co-Women Met to Plan Work Coming Weeks," *Sandusky Star-Journal*, August 16, 1927, 4.
[104] "Minutes, Ohio League of Women Voters Board Meeting," November 10, 1927, 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[105] "Notes of Interest to Women Voters," *Sandusky Star-Journal*, November 4, 1927, 4.

Members of the Erie County League who wanted to help with the extension work could attend a Rural Extension Training School in Columbus, building on the model of Columbus-based outreach to farm women.[106] While the contentious presidential election of 1928 often distracted Ohio residents from rural outreach in favor of partisan mobilization, the Neprud's work with the Erie County League bore fruit in October 1928. Milan, a small town near Sandusky, hosted Erie County's first Citizenship School, organized by the OSU Extension Service, the OLWV, women's clubs from Milan, Huron, and Oxford, and Erie County Grange chapters.[107] The organizations involved show a broad-based cooperation in creating the program. Grange members would have had the necessary experience planning Institute-style educational events, as they often hosted Farmer's Institutes in the area. Furthermore, rural women in Erie County were eager for the program as "the outcome of an appeal on the part of rural women in Erie co. for information regarding problems dealing with citizenship."[108] In Erie County, the OLWV was able to create a coherent plan for reaching rural women when it relied upon preexisting organizations in which women were already invested and saw as useful.

The cooperation between the Ohio State Extension Agency and the OLWV continued at Agency-sponsored events along with Neprud's Rural Citizenship Extension Program Bowers modeled the plan of incorporating League work into her extension agency work. In 1928, she used the OSU radio station, WEAO, to deliver a lecture entitled "Rural Citizenship" as part of a program that included other media tailored to a farming audience, like marketing reports, a segment on "Power Farming," and local music and poetry.[109] Including lectures on citizenship from a professional woman affiliated with the League signaled to listeners that civic education

[106] "Problems are Discussed Thursday at Luncheon," *Sandusky Register,* December 8, 1927, 6.
[107] "To Hold School for Citizenship," *Sandusky Star-Journal*, October 5, 1928, 14.
[108] Ibid.
[109] "What's On at WEAO," *Ohio State Lantern,* March 14, 1928, 4, Ohio State University Digital Archives.

for women could be enfolded under the tradition of rural extension work and feminine education. Featuring OLWV programs at Farmer's Week continued into the later Twenties, expressly making the case that political affairs could be included under women's issues. A Piqua, Ohio newspaper declared in 1928 that "a woman's place may be in the home fifty-one weeks out of the year, but emphatically there is a place for her on the campus of the Ohio State University during Farmer's Week," which featured twenty-eight female speakers that year, including Marion Neprud and Juliette Sessions of the OLWV.[110] The article continued, stating that the most interesting programs for women would be those hosted by the Home Economics Department, but that "home activities will not occupy nearly the whole program. Political and community activities will be stressed equally with the more domestic tasks."[111] Connecting the domestic, community, and political spheres for farm women served to place the new responsibility of voting within a framework of traditional female responsibilities and interests without challenging the truism that "a woman's place may be in the home fifty-one weeks out of the year." While planning the 1928 Farmer's Week programs, Neprud wrote, "Farmer's Week offers one of our best chances for real legitimate publicity and considerable care and thought should be exercised in getting as much across as possible."[112] In Neprud's view, positive media exposure, as well as a direct line of communication to rural women, would keep the legislative program of the League alive in the minds of Ohio women.

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[110] "Woman's Place Not in Home 52 Weeks," *Piqua Daily Caller,* January 20, 1928, 2.
[111] Ibid.
[112] "Special Project: Farmer's Week at Ohio State University," 1928, 2 Marion C. Neprud Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

4

GENERAL ACTIVITIES.

Report only *results* of extension activities that are supported by *records*.

1. List below the names, titles, and periods of service of all county extension agents whose work is included in this report. 1

(Name.)	(Title.)	(Period of service.)
Miss Blanche Bowers	Home Demonstration Agt	Dec 1 '12 to Jan 13
Florence M. Walker	" "	June 25 '13 to Nov 1

2. Total number of communities in county recognized for extension work	14	2
3. Number of communities in which the extension program has been cooperatively worked out by extension agents and people concerned	10	3
4. Number of voluntary county, community, or local leaders actively engaged in forwarding the extension program: (a) Adult work	27	4
(b) Junior work	13	4
5. What is the name of the county organization (if any) promoting extension work	Franklin Co. Farm Bureau	
6. Number of adult clubs, if any, organized for promoting extension work		6
7. Membership in county extension organizations, including adult clubs, if any, organized for promoting extension work	763	7
8. Total number of farm visits made on extension work		8
9. Number of different farms visited		9
10. Total number of home visits made on extension work	152	10
11. Number of different homes visited	104	11
12. Number of office calls* relating to extension work	147	12
13. Number of days agent spent in office	57½	13
14. Number of days spent in field	60½	14
15. Number of individual letters written	238	15
16. Number of different circular letters prepared and sent out	15	16
17. Total number of copies of such circular letters	393	17
18. Number of extension articles written by agent and published in local papers	18	18
19. Number of community buildings established	0	19
20. Number of rest rooms provided for use of rural people	0	20
21. Number of fairs at which extension exhibits were made	3	21
22. Training meetings* held for local leaders: (a) Number	2	22
(b) Attendance	6	22
23. Demonstration meetings held: (a) Number	3	23
(b) Attendance	13	23
24. Farmers' institutes* held: (a) Number	5	24
(b) Attendance	1370	24
25. Extension schools* and short courses held: (a) Number		25
(b) Attendance		25

*See definition on page 3.

1. Questions 2, 3, 7, 21, 24 give complete summaries for the county.

2. Questions 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22 & 23 are relating to Home Demonstration Agents work

Figure 4: A page of Blanche Bowers annual report as a Home Extension Agent, detailing the kinds of outreach completed among rural women. Note the importance of Farmer' Institutes and Home Visits, both methods of disseminating educational materials.[113]

The timing of Bowers and Neprud's outreach program proved to be unfortunate. Though the Erie County program was initially a success, membership in the League dropped toward the end of the Twenties in part because the state's economy worsened and fewer people had the time or disposable income for any organizations not deeply important to them. US farmers had been pummeled by high import costs and the low price of crops throughout the twenties and had repeatedly sought federal aid through a Farm Relief Bill that was defeated repeatedly from 1924 through 1928.[114] Working with the state legislature, the Ohio Grange formulated a plan for state-level relief to farmers in 1927 while local Ohio newspapers continued to cry for the imposition of agricultural tariffs, arguing that "the welfare of agriculture is of supreme importance not only to this Midwest country, but to the entire nation…the men and women who by their toil and labor produce the food that feeds the world must not be unfairly dealt with."[115] By 1929, Farmers in Ohio were proud both of the technological progress they had made in farming, with tractors now the norm and horses a thing of the past, and simultaneously still felt themselves at a disadvantage, with no way to cooperatively market their goods or no labor organization supporting their needs.[116] The OLWV recognized that the agricultural depression was a significant burden to Ohio women, and recommended that the Committee on Living Costs study

[113] "Annual Report of County Agent Work and Farm Bureau Work from December 1, 1921, to July 31, 1922, Franklin County, Ohio," 4, Ohio State University Archives, Cooperative Extension Service, Director and General.
[114] Richard Hirsch, "Shedding New Light on Rural Electrification: The Neglected Story of Successful Efforts to Power Up Farms in the 1920s and 1930s," *Agricultural History* 92, No. 3 (Summer 2018), 303.
[115] "State Grange has Plans for Farm Relief," *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram,* September 19, 1927, 1; William J. Bulow, "Who's Who in the Day's News: Adjustment of the Tariff Laws Asked," *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram,* July 19, 1927, 4.
[116] O. M. Kile, "How Things Look to the Farmer," *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram,* January 28, 1929, 12.

it to formulate solutions to the problem.[117] These concerns simply weren't part of the League's main platform, however, in the way that labor or health care were.

By 1929, the OLWV has experienced a limited measure of success reaching rural women through Neprud's Rural Extension Program and the annual Farmer's Week. By inserting citizenship education into the tradition of home economics work, the OLWV and the Extension Agency made a compelling case that voting for women represented a natural extension of their family and social responsibilities. The Rural Extension Program developed in Ohio was considered an innovative solution to the "farm outreach problem" the League had across the nation and Bowers and Neprud were invited to explain their approach at the National Convention in 1928.[118] The successes of Erie County proved to be the exception rather than the rule. The promising program laid out by Neprud and Bowers was doomed both by the changing circumstances of rural people and the administrative difficulties that the League found itself in at the close of the Twenties. Neprud resigned as state organizer from the OLWV in 1929, thus depriving the rural extension program of its motivating force.[119] Furthermore, the Board slowly limited the resources allotted to rural extension work, stating that there were not enough League speakers to send to fulfill the Farm Bureau's request for educational resources.[120] A passive advertising campaign was advised instead, by which pamphlets would be mailed to interested women. The OLWV also battled a nationwide downtown in women's reform organization membership. Throughout the Twenties, the trend gradually shifted towards exclusively social organizations, like sororities or literary women's clubs, and away from voluntary social work.

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[117] "Program of Work for the National League of Women Voters, 1928-1929," April 1928, 12, Marion C. Neprud Papers.
[118] "Ohio Leaders Will Speak at Convention," *Sandusky Register,* April 21, 1928, 6.
[119] "Board Meeting, Ohio League of Women Voters," September 25, 1929, 1, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Papers.
[120] Ibid.

This made it harder for the League, unsure of its own priorities, to articulate a convincing recruiting message.

A local case study shows how the League's organizational priorities shifted to emphasize college women by the end of the 1920s, as the next chapter will show. The League's relationship with rural women faltered until the Great Depression brought farming back to the OLWV's attention in the early Thirties, which will be the focus of Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III – RURAL WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY ACTIVISM IN NORTHWEST OHIO, 1918-1928

Rural counties in Ohio were "eager for the work to begin," reported Blanche Bowers and Marion Neprud at the Ohio League of Women Voters (OLWV) Board Meeting in 1927.[121] As the heads of the newly-formed Rural Extension Committee at the OLWV, these two women struggled to form a coherent plan for reaching non-urban women, instead of the League's previous haphazard method of mailing literature and setting up the occasional League table at the State Fair. Bowers and Neprud laid out a three-year plan to reach rural women through educational programs modeled after Bowers' work as an Ohio State Extension Agent.[122] The Extension Agency model relied upon experienced professionals traveling to rural areas to instruct residents on topics relevant to their occupations: crop rotation and machinery upkeep for men; chicken keeping, health care, and now voting, for women.

Finding educators to travel to these isolated spots was a problem, however, leading to a call for "a Speakers' Bureau, of which there is a crying need," especially since "rural work would need many more speakers as it develops."[123] In 1928, the State Organizer, Marion Neprud, lamented that the OLWV lacked enough field organizers to travel to far-flung locales.[124] From the perspective of a state-level reform organization like the OLWV, rural regions were an underdeveloped area that required a disproportionate amount of resources to educate compared to urban areas, where a single strategically-located Citizenship School or voter drive could easily

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[121] "Ohio League of Women Voters Board Meeting," September 22, 1927, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[122] "Ohio League of Women Voters Board Meeting," April 15, 1927, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[123] "Ohio League of Women Voters Board Meeting," November 10, 1927," 3, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[124] "Ohio League of Women Voters Board Meeting," November 15, 1928, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

draw hundreds of women- and men, too.[125] While the state-level reformers at the OLWV tended to view rural Ohio as an overwhelming large tract of virgin territory, completely unorganized in terms of voting power or citizenship education, in fact there was a vibrant network of voluntary organizations, including the Grange, the Farm Bureau, and Women's Clubs in place by 1920. The League's tendency to underestimate the efficiency of exploiting these well-established networks in favor of urban and college outreach likely contributed to the under-involvement of rural women in the League until the 1950s. The intense competition for women's volunteer time from established organizations made it difficult for the League to make inroads. The OLWV's urban leadership often misunderstood the lives and needs of rural women while logistical problems made communication across the state difficult. This was the case in one rural location: Wood County, Ohio.

To understand the Ohio League's attitudes towards rural women, it is useful to look at one region and examine women's involvement in reform efforts in their own communities and compare the efforts in which rural women were engaged to the programs the OLWV attempted to promote. Rural women were not outside of the movement to transform societal ills in the early twentieth century. Despite this, the popular literature of the time that portrayed country life as a simple and unchanging, "good, solid, plain living," free from the complications of urban life.[126] Non-urban areas received ample share of reformers' attentions throughout the Progressive Era, and women were often enthusiastic participants in efforts to increase technology adoption, improve rural schools, and increase access to health care. The domestic economy movement of the 1900s-1930s was, in large measure, an attempt to use agricultural extension work, college

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[125] "Where Voters Learn to Mark Ballots," *Cleveland News,* November 1922, Box 10, "Historical Matters" File, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[126] Amy Mattson Lauters, *More than a Farmer's Wife: Voices of American Farm Women, 1910-1960* (University of Missouri Press, 2009), 52.

courses, and educational publications to instill managerial principles of efficiency and scientific methods into the lives of rural women of the United States.[127] Wood County, in the northwest of Ohio, offers a useful example of a predominantly rural area that boasted several flourishing voluntary organizations open to women. A well-preserved, coherent body of minutes and membership rolls offers a glance into the population the OLWV was trying to reach and provides a standard of comparison for OLWV methods of reaching country women.

Women living on farms, in small villages, or scattered about the countryside presented a logistical challenge for the usually enthusiastic urban female reformers of the 1920s. During its first decade, the Ohio League of Women Voters struggled to make meaningful inroads among rural Ohio women. While urban Leagues like Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Toledo were celebrated, small, local, rural leagues were often a point of organizational frustration for the leadership of the OLWV, either because they failed to send reports and dues to the state League or were hard to sustain through regular visits from a state organizer.[128] Knowing rural women were difficult to reach, state organizers urged county Leagues to set up tables at annual Autumn Farmers' Picnics and county fairs, and to "take orders for 'Ohio Election Laws in Brief,' and memberships in the League, which include subscriptions to the *Ohio Woman Voter*, a monthly magazine published by the League."[129] Getting literature into the hands of rural women was the first step, but the author of the article seems unclear about which was the logical next move for including rural

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[127] For a thorough examination of the domestic economy movement, including its underpinnings in Progressive thought, see Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930.*

[128] The Lorain County Chapter had organized independently, which caused consternation among the Executive Committee in Columbus, which wanted a coordinated program. "Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting," September 25, 1924, Box 11, File 2, MSS 354 League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio.

[129] "County Fairs, Farmers Picnics, and the League of Women Voters," *The Ohio Woman Voter* 1 no.2, August 1922, 12, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

women in the League: "perhaps you [local leaders] can arrange to have some speaker for the League on some summer program over which you have influence –picnic, fair, institute, or Chautauqua."[130] State-level leaders knew that there were avenues for enrolling and educating rural women in citizenship initiatives, but seemed divided about what would interest women living in the countryside. Mentions of rural women in the *Ohio Woman Voter* centered around county fairs and fluctuating school attendance rates, the occasional mention of rural electrification, and approval of the traveling nurses who visited rural areas under the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act.[131] These brief mentions conform to popular conceptions of the women living in rural areas, especially farms, as deprived of technology that would allow them to participate more completely in modern society and fulfill their community duty as informed, reforming women.[132]

There are indications that leaders of the OLWV viewed rural women as backward, belonging to an obsolete way of life that contrasted with the leaderships' educated and urban backgrounds. This outlook would make it difficult to formulate a program that appealed to rural women, as rural women, instead of one that conceived of a uniform, Progressive ascent to a better life that left country life and its concerns behind. Olive Colton, an influential member of both the Ohio League and the Toledo League, published a retrospective pamphlet in 1938 describing "An Account of the Women's Movement in the United States," with an emphasis on what Toledo women and the LWV had accomplished. In it, she wrote:

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Rural school attendance was up in 1922 due to an early legislative success of the LWV, the Bing Law in: "Do You Know?" *Ohio Woman Voter* 1 no.1, June 1922, 13; details on health education to mothers in "Progress of the State Department of Health in Maternity and Infancy Work," *Ohio Woman Voter* 2 no. 9, March 1924, 15; and "The Right of the Farmer's Wife to Electric Service at a Fair Rate," *Ohio Woman Voter* 6 no.2, September 1927, 12, Box 10, Volumes I-IV, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[132] Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 33-39.

> Women over the world have unbound their feet, they have removed their veils, they have come forth from the harems, they are in business and the professions, even those working in the fields have learned to read and write. [133]

This perspective of uplift reform emphasized a single, progressive arc for women that pictured them leaving the supposed confines of traditional societies, including American farming life, to take their place among highly educated, urban women. This view was problematic because it assumed that all women had similar aspirations or trajectories. It implied that reform success for rural women would mean transforming them into an urban image.

By grouping women involved in agriculture with a common Orientalist assumption of non-Anglo women as uniformly oppressed, Colton presented rural women as belonging to an outdated and homogenous way of life, in contrast with the modernizing, urban women "in business and the professions." An ideology common in the 1920s presented non-native born Americans as starting disadvantaged concerning citizenship. Similarly, when holding Citizenship Schools in Cleveland in 1922, native-born women were prioritized, with schools for immigrant women planned for later. This further illustrates the tendency to group women into easily identifiable categories , in this case on a sliding scale of citizenship, with the native-born women presumably requiring less education to transform them into full, voting citizens.[134] Overall, the perceptions of state-level League reformers throughout the 1920s portrayed rural women as isolated, difficult to organize, and in need of modernization initiatives.

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[133] Colton apparently meant her pamphlet for local general readership, much like the LWV educational pamphlets, as the archival copy examined here bears Christmas message to the Tollman Beauty Shop. Olive A. Colton, "The Forward March: An Account of the Women's Movement in the United States," (Toledo, OH: Chittenden Press, 1938), 37, pOG 459, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

[134] "Minutes, Executive Committee," March 15, 1921, MSS 354 League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Box 11, File 1, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio, 2.

Though rural women were distant from the reform movements in population-dense areas like Dayton, Toledo, or Cleveland, they were by no means unorganized. Rural people's membership dues prove that organizational involvement was a crucial part of their lives in the 1920s. In his 1928 Annual Report, C. G. Williams, the Director of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station noted the wide participation of rural Ohioans in voluntary organizations. He reported:

> Dues paid to various clubs and organizations varied from 15 ¢ to $135. The most frequent dues reported were to the Farm Bureau and Grange. Nine families belonging to the lowest expenditures [sic] groups were the only ones who were not members of a club or organization.[135]

The "lowest expenditures groups" described the rural residents with the least money to spend on all giving to churches, charity, gifts, and clubs or associations. According to Williams, the spending of rural Ohioans on organization dues was roughly comparable to that spent on church donations, a significant measure in a time when one's church was often a primary center of social and community affiliation. Giving to voluntary associations far outstripped that given to "benevolence," a category that included all formal, non-gift, non-church charity given and for which almost half of the two lowest income groups reported no monetary giving.[136] Williams's report is one indicator that organizational involvement was both accessible and important to rural Ohioans in the 1920s. As Williams noted, the most prominent non-church organizations in rural Ohio were based around an agricultural identity. In Wood County, as with other rural Ohio counties, affiliation with farming ran strong and there were multiple avenues for rural women in Wood County to be involved in voluntary organizations centered around their identity as "farm

[135] C. G. Williams, "Annual Report," Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Department of Home Economics Records, RG 22.N.4, Ohio State University Archives, Ohio State University.
[136] Ibid.

women." When the Ohio League of Women Voters began its efforts to enroll women as voters and conduct citizenship education after 1920, it attempted to use the pre-existing network of agricultural organizations to reach the rural women of the state to a limited extent. Despite its attempts to use these organizations to distribute OLWV literature, the League never fully integrated into the interdependent network of agricultural organizations.

Who Were the Wood County "Farm Women?"

The 1920 US Census listed Ohio's population as 63.8% urban, with over two million people living in rural areas.[137] While often used interchangeably, "rural" and "farmer" are not synonymous terms. Instead, the label "rural" simply described those living in a town of under 2,500 people.[138] Though vocational farming was on the wane in the twenties, it was still a common occupation. Ohio boasted 255, 699 farms in 1920, a decrease of 5.6% since 1910.[139] While useful to show the ongoing trend towards farm consolidation and the steady migration of farm youth to cities for work, this statistic is also limited in its usefulness to women's history because it only shows how many individual farm owners there were in Ohio. In 1920, farm ownership was almost exclusively limited to male heads of household.[140] The 1920 Wood County census provides better detail concerning the rural population of the area and has the added benefit of including personal information about female residents of Wood County that helps to describe and contextualize their lives. The total population of Wood County at this time was small, with a total of 44, 892 residents, of which 39,104 were classified as "rural" and 5,788

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[137] "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1920 Forty-Third Number". *Department of Commerce: Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921, 49.
[138] Ibid., 49.
[139] Ibid., 132.
[140] For a thorough discussion on Anglophone patriarchal agricultural inheritance practices, see: Monda Halpern, *And on that Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 27-51.

were "urban."[141] To analyze the participation of rural women in local reform movements, this study compares the individuals listed in club rolls, minutes, and dues books to their records in the Wood County census. While it is clear that Wood County was overwhelmingly rural in the twenties, did most of the women participating in reform movements actually reside on farms, or identify themselves as farmers or farmer's wives and daughters? What was the educational attainment of these women, especially when compared to the extension agents or OLWV representatives who worked with them? Was there any racial or ethnic diversity present in the Wood county movements? Minutes of club meetings may seem trivial or parochial upon first glance, but they offer clues to demographic details, the needs these voluntary reform organizations met in rural women's lives, and the differences between the OLWV leadership and rural women.

Wood County Agricultural Associations

Agricultural organizations in the early twentieth century were active and multipurpose. They could encompass everything from cooperative marketing, to political action, to fundraising for boys' and girls' club trips to the State Fair. Each combined educational, social, and economic programs that spoke to different needs of the rural community. Wood County farmers had been active in the Farmers' Alliance attempts to organize a new political party in 1890, activism which would have been part of living memory for many members of voluntary organizations in 1920.[142] Like many Ohio counties in the early twentieth century, Wood County hosted a complex web of organizations open to women that included the Women's Christian Temperance Union,

[141] Wood County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society, "Index to the 1900 U.S. Census of Wood County Ohio," Bowling Green, Ohio 1998, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[142] For an excellent discussion on Populism's influence and legacy among Ohio farmers, see: Michael Pierce, "Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-1891" *Agricultural History,* 74, no. 1 (Winter, 2000), 58-85.

the Sunshine Club, the Woman's Club (a vaguely-named but specific and state-federated organization), the Farm Bureau, various township Grange chapters, Food Clubs, township-level girls' clubs like "The Worthwhile Club" and the "Liberty Girls," a canning club, Ohio Farm Clubs (more commonly called 4-H), and Ladies' Aid Clubs.[143] This sampling is from a single year; undoubtedly there were more organizations that came and went in women's lives.

Figure 5: Women's Club, Bowling Green, Ohio, circa 1927
MS 1104, Wentz Family Papers, Box 3, File 3, CAC, BGSU

These organizations provided avenues of reform work for women that fit neatly into the tradition of the domestic economy movement. Nation-building in the early twentieth century emphasized the role of women as modern homemakers, mothers, and wives and the home as the basic unit comprising a strong Union. Many women's groups fought throughout the Progressive Era for protective legislation for female workers, using the rationale that healthy women became

[143] Collection of women's organizations is drawn from reports in the *Wood County Sentinel Tribune* from 1923. *Wood County Sentinel Tribune* (Bowling Green, Ohio, the Sentinel Co., 1923), Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

better mothers, in the interest of societal strength as a whole.[144] Consequently, domestic economy sought to broaden women's and girls' opportunities for education, leisure activities, and vocational training within the framework of the domestic sphere. Dedication to education, health, home and farm beautification, scientific food production and preservation, literature, and child rearing were considered appropriate topics for women to pursue within organizations that also hosted men, like the Farm Bureau, Grange, or Extension Agency. As a typical example of the welfare work thought appropriate for women in the Twenties, in 1923 an all-woman task force from the Wood County Farm Bureau met with an Ohio State University Health Specialist:

> These women had been selected by their township Farm Bureaus to act as leaders of the Health Project, which has been decided upon as one of the practical activities for women of the Farm Bureau[145]

The program decided upon by these women focused on training women living in rural areas in up-to-date methods of patient care and equipment, a method in keeping with Extension Agency practices.

Women's Clubs in general of the era were often niche, with membership restricted to a particular social group.[146] The Farm Bureau and the Extension Agency presented avenues for voluntary involvement in state-led initiatives with opportunities for both men and women. These two organizations were a hybrid of state-led, elite reform efforts and local grassroots activism that featured programs devised by professors at the Ohio State University but were only effective

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[144] Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 31.
[145] "Farm Women Brave Weather Tuesday," *Wood County Sentinel Tribune,* February 22, 1923, 3, CAC, BGSU.
[146] There were, however, many "working girls' clubs" where well-off female sponsors attempted to teach urban girls in the workforce domestic arts, with much accompanying friction over marital expectations, the desirability of domestic service work, and ethnic background. See: Priscilla Murolo, *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 55-76.

and perpetuated if willingly received by local residents.[147] In 1923, the Wood County Farm Bureau alone boasted 1200 members and focused on the economic betterment of farmers, especially through cooperative marketing efforts.[148] The Grange, which included women as members, was an influential social and political organization with roots in the populist, anti-monopoly agitation of the 1880s. Farm Women's Clubs were women-only groups, resembling the popular self-improvement clubs in that they provided an avenue for socializing. They were often organized around a single topic, such as the Bowling Green Shakespeare Club, which gathered prominent women at the Shatzel home for literary discussions and socializing.[149] The organizations that rural women participated in did not share the socially and economically exclusive character of the Shakespeare Club, but were typically restricted to Protestant, white, native-born women. The Grange, for example, was disfavored by Catholics and strict Evangelical denominations who called it a secret society in line with the Free Masons.[150] The Farm Women's Clubs shared more of the reformist character of the Grange, Farm Bureau, and Extension Agencies and were local organizations that were federated at the state level. These were the most prominent opportunities available to rural Wood County women for social action within a widely accepted, institutional forum.

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[147] Neil Betten and Michael J. Austin eds., *The Roots of Community Organizing, 1917-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 94-102. Betten and Austin interpret the work of Ohio extension agents during this period as a partnership with government, where native agents acted as community organizers.
[148] "Leaders of Farm Bureau Vote Plans," *Wood County Sentinel Tribune,* March 15, 1923, 2, CAC, BGSU.
[149] "Shakespeare Club Gave Tea," *Wood County Sentinel Tribune,* April 5, 1923, 5, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[150] Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Sisterhood and Mutuality in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 6-7.

Fig. 6: Snapshot of Wood County, Lake Township, Grange Hall, Circa 1920
MS 205, Patrons of Husbandry, Ohio State Grange, Lake Grange #2205, Box #4, CAC, BGSU

The Grange was a major social and political organization of the Progressive Era to which women belonged. By 1920, the Ohio Grange was part of a well-established national organization with its roots in Reconstruction-era agricultural reorganization and the agricultural depression of the 1880s. Unlike most fraternal organizations, the Grange included women and provided an avenue of expression and activism for early Progressives seeking rural reform.[151] The Grange could wax political at times, though part of its mission was to strengthen social bonds among farmers. It was thought that women especially needed the increased interaction of Grange meetings. The Grangers' own history, published in 1949, still perpetuated the widespread myth that rural women were more susceptible to mental illness than city women because of their isolation: "what wonder that minds broke and insane asylums were filled. Women whose lives

[151] Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, "Women and Rural Social Reform in the 1870s and 1880s: Clara Bewick Colby's "Farmers' Wives"" *Agricultural History* 89 no. 3 (Summer 2015), 402-425.

have always been spent in city environment cannot even visualize what life on the farm meant in those days."[152] Although the personal accounts of many rural women mention the stress that heavy physical labor and motherhood took, concrete evidence is lacking to determine whether rural women really suffered a higher rate of mental illness than urban women.[153] Much of the controversy surrounding rural women's mental health centered on "the ability of women during their childbearing years to keep house, maintain their appearance, and repair their clothes," gender-specific tasks that all relate to a rural woman's ability to uphold the middle-class urban ideal of domestic motherhood.[154] This also displays the implicit belief that mothers were symbolic of the nation, and healthy, content mothers would produce a stronger society.

Granges in Wood County were organized at the township level during the 1920s. By this time, the political advocacy of the Wood County Grange had softened, though the Lake Township Grange maintained a legislative agent as an elected official.[155] The Granges hosted occasional lecturers on agricultural topics, several of whom came from the Farm Bureau. A typical meeting could include discussions like "the disappearance of the small farmer," "new dairy facts" or the corn borer, an invasive species threatening Midwestern crops. Jokes, guessing games, or plays could fill the social time which Grange business concerning induction of new members or the ongoing construction of new building consumed much of the rest of the formal time.[156] A blend of procedural concerns common to all organizations and farmer-specific trends of the time emerges, along with a desire to cooperate with other community organizations,

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[152] Charles M. Gardner, *The Grange: Friend of the Farmer, 1867-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Patrons of the National Grange of Husbandry, 1949), 17-19.
[153] Halpern, *On That Farm He Had a Wife*, 27-30.
[154] Ibid., 28
[155] Ohio State Grange, "Subordinate Minute Book: Lake Township Grange," December 28,1921, MS 205, Box 1, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[156] Ibid.

specifically the Board of Education, the Farmers Bureau, and of course the State Grange. Influences of the domestic economy movement and the Extension Agency work are apparent in the topics listed as of special interest to women. These programs included "Labor-Saving Devices for the Farm Woman" and a woman-led lecture on chicken keeping, which was a common source of independent "side" income for rural women.[157]

The officers of the Lake Township Grange included women farmers. As was common with Grange chapters, women were customarily excluded from executive positions like President or Treasurer and tended to hold symbolic offices of the "Graces," Pomona and Ceres, or offices thought compatible with feminine work, like secretary or lecturer. This latter positions allowed women opportunities as speakers and writers for Grange event and publications, though they were often restricted to domestic topics.[158] Women of the Lake Grange ranged in all ages, with younger, unmarried women often participating heavily in the social aspects of the Grange until marriage and familial responsibilities limited their time and energy, while women in their fifties and sixties, presumably with older children who needed less oversight, emerged to help organize the Grange from a position of influence.[159]

The economic and social standing of most of the Lake Township Grange women can be described as secure but not elite. Lavina Young is one example of a young woman who found the Grange worth her time. Elected to an officer's position of "Steward" at only 15 years old, Young had finished school and likely had no high school diploma.[160] Since her 12-year -old sister was

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[157] "Program, Lake Township Farmers' Institute," February 15, 1918, MS 205, Ohio State Grange Lake Grange #2205 (Lake Twp., Wood Co, Ohio) Records, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[158] Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 19-31.
[159] "New Business: Election of Officers," in "Subordinate Grange Record Book, Volume I," 1920, 2-5, Lake Grange Records.
[160] Ibid.

still in school, it's likely that Young had finished at 6th or 8th grade, which was seen as a reasonable amount of education to prepare a young person for the working world in 1920, though it would prevent her from joining the ranks of professional women like teachers.[161] Young's mother worked as a laundress for a private family, while her father was a laborer on a dairy farm. Though not farm owners, the Young family was affiliated with farming sufficiently to gain entrance into the Grange. Velma Berndt, another Steward at the Lake Grange, was married to a farmer, but like Young's father, Berndt's husband did not own the farm at which he worked.[162] The couple rented their home, a further indication that they were not among the highest income farmers. 23-year-old Velma, however, was employed as a public school teacher, indicating that she had at least a Normal School education. Her husband was born in Germany, demonstrating some level of welcome to the many immigrant families from England, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Romania and other European nations living in Wood County at the time.[163]

The membership of the Lake Township Grange, especially among its young members, was varied in terms of economic, educational, and societal position, though affiliation with farming through personal experience or through husbands and fathers gave all the female participants common ground. Even women who would have been considered part of the growing female professional class were not far from their agricultural roots, like the 24-year-old The Lake Township public school teacher, Lela Bloomfield, who lived at home with her parents Frank and Mary, who were farmers.[164]

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[161] Demographic information taken from: "Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920," United State Bureau of the Census, 137, accessed October 10, 2018, https://archive.org/details/14thcensusofpopu1449unit/page/n135.
[162] "New Business, Election of Officers," in "Subordinate Grange Record Book, Volume 1," 1920, 5, Lake Grange Records; "Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920," 143.
[163] ""Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920," United State Bureau of the Census, 133-170."
[164] "Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920," United State Bureau of the Census, 145."

"Ohio's Rural Character:" The OLWV Joins In

Decades before highways like Interstate 75 or 36 expedited travel, Northwest Ohio could take hours to reach from Dayton or Columbus. The oil and gas boom that had attracted labor to Western Ohio, including Wood County, was mostly played out and the area's economy was heavily dependent upon the fortunes of its farms.[165] With the growing attraction of employment opportunities for women in clerking positions in urban areas, rural regions could seem like someplace to escape from, rather than to reform. Life was hard for many in the early twentieth century. Ada Gardner remembered her early life was mostly spent in roughly built cabins as she followed her father's sawmill business across small rural towns across Ohio. Later, as a farmer's wife, she said: "it [the farm] was a dairy herd, but that's what we did. We sold milk to Cleveland. We had a dairy herd and good cattle. The boys [her five sons] had to go to service and I needed help, and I didn't have any."[166] With the hard work and isolation rural women faced, it is unsurprising that many Ohio women did not idealize rural living.

Many women in rural Northwest Ohio were already members of voluntary organizations that provided social, economic, and educational benefits. Despite the clear need that many rural women had for voluntary community action, the League of Women Voters still struggled to make its case persuasively to rural women during its first decade.[167] Wood County was one example of a hard nut to crack for the Ohio League of Women Voters. The Toledo League was highly active early in the Twenties, undoubtedly drawing many of the educated, upper-middle-

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[165] Michael E. Brooks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Wood County, Ohio* (Charleston, SC; The History Press, 2014), 16-20.
[166] Ada Garner, "Interviewed by Ron Garner and his 7th Grade Students at East Toledo Junior High in Toledo, Ohio, in 1980" MMS 0414, Garner Family Papers 1910-1982, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.
[167] It is widely acknowledged that churches were the primary community-building associations for both Protestants and Catholics. Because churches are categorically different from voluntary social organizations and deserve their own study, I have not included them in this project.

class women who composed the League's key demographic.[168] The name "Toledo League," rather than "Lucas County" implies clear identification as an urban group. At the 1928 OLWV convention, Blanche Bowers pointed out that the League had a remarkably small number of rural women among its officers and that number should be increased "to reflect Ohio's rural character."[169] This indicates that state-wide identification of Ohio as a Midwestern farming state was still strong, and that some within the OLWV saw an overdependence upon urban Leagues as leaving out a significant and representative portion of Ohio's population. While Bowers called for a "school to organize local leaders" to more effectively mobilize rural Ohio, the bulk of the OLWV's effectiveness came from cooperative efforts with well-established agricultural organizations.

Farmers' Institutes, Farmers' Weeks, and travelling Extension Agents all had enthusiastic recipients for their educational programs in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Scientific Farming and Housekeeping influenced the accepted wisdom of the day, and rural residents were eager to learn better ways of doing everything from dressmaking to crop rotation. The demand for new methods and information was constant, as Midwestern farmers in the 1920s had to be jacks-of-all-trades. Mixed farming, rather than single-crop farms, were more common in 1920s Ohio. A single family farm could contain horses, cows, pigs, chickens, sheep, oats, legumes, and wheat, like Frank and Lillie Garners' family farm in Huron County.[170] Women were typically responsible for "side work" like a large kitchen garden that would provide most of the family's food for the year or for poultry projects that could raise extra income. Despite the

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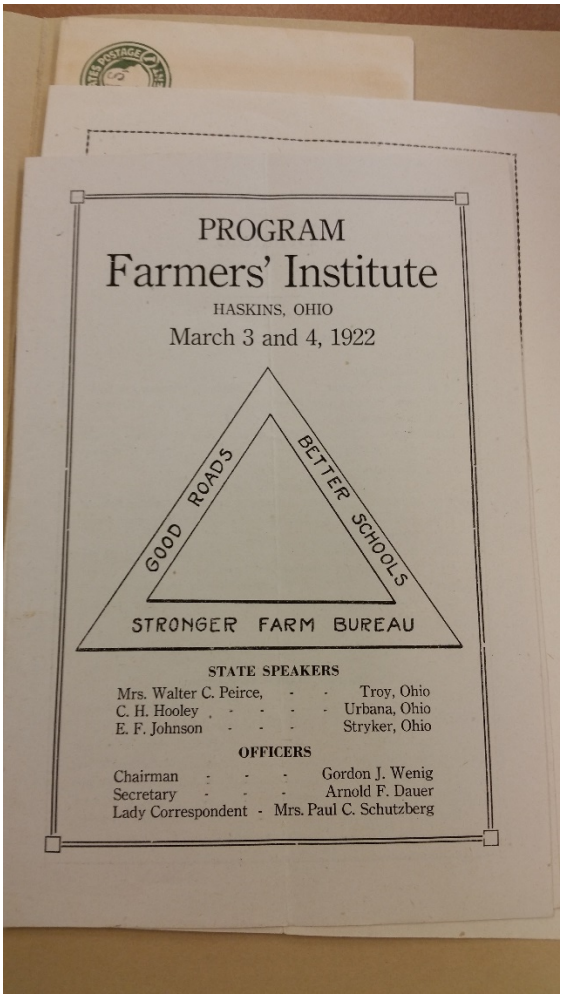
[168] "High Spots in Ohio's Big League Activities," *Ohio Woman Voter,* 1 no.6, December 1922, 12, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[169] Grace Peters, "Minutes of Business Session," May 17 -18, 1928, 6, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection
[170] Frank and Lillie Garner, "Daybook," Garner Family Papers, CAC.

domestic economy's focus on household work, farm women were often involved in the business aspects of farming, like Mrs. Stauffer, who owed Frank and Lillie $11.25 for her half of an order of twine bought in May of 1923, but "says she won't pay it."[171]


PROGRAM

Farmers' Institute

HASKINS, OHIO

March 3 and 4, 1922

GOOD ROADS

BETTER SCHOOLS

STRONGER FARM BUREAU

STATE SPEAKERS

Mrs. Walter C. Peirce, - - Troy, Ohio
C. H. Hooley - - - - Urbana, Ohio
E. F. Johnson - - - Stryker, Ohio

OFFICERS

Chairman - - - Gordon J. Wenig
Secretary - - - Arnold F. Dauer
Lady Correspondent - Mrs. Paul C. Schutzberg

Fig. 7- Farmers' Institute Program. This program demonstrates that the infrastructure and education were important reform priorities and shows the dominance of the Farm Bureau in the area.

MMS 410, "Farmers Institute Minutes, Haskins, Ohio" 1922, CAC, BGSU

The Garners or the recalcitrant Mrs. Stauffer may have attended Farmers' Week at Ohio State University, a week-long annual meeting that resembled a cross between a professional

[171] Frank and Lillie Garner, "Daybook," Garner Family Papers, CAC.

conference, a family retreat, and a fair. The OLWV maintained a presence at Farmer's Week from 1921 through the mid-Thirties, distributing copies of the *Ohio Woman Voter* and organizing speakers for one-hour sessions throughout the week.[172] The OLWV's program fit naturally into the list of Farmers' Week offerings, which included social as well as economic and technical topics. There was a precedent for woman suffrage activists arranging speakers for Farmer's Week. Women and men in could stop by the Home Economics building at OSU in 1919 for a keynote address by Jane Addams, of Chicago social work fame. Ohio Judge Florence Allen led the "women's section" of the Institute Speakers Discussion, while in other buildings lecturers spoke on "farm accounting," "the new country church," or "community action in marketing."[173] Representatives of the OLWV continued this tradition by encouraging topics they thought pertained to good citizenship at Farmer's Week: a speech on rural social problems in 1920, a Taxation Instituted in 1922.[174] Neither of these sessions was led by an officer of the OLWV or a local league member, but were instead speeches given by professional, male professors, similar to the other lectures. A. R. Mann, the lecturer on rural social problems, wasn't even an Ohioan, but the dean of the Agricultural College at Cornell.[175] These kinds of lecture were topically similar to the material covered by the League in their urban programs: community organization, legislative review, and taxation featured prominently in both. The urban projects of the OLWV, however, tended to encourage direct participation of local women in the planning and execution of the educational program. A preexisting structure like Farmers' Week, with its model of

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[172] "Minutes, Executive committee Meeting," June 12 1929, Box 11, File 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection.
[173] "Revised Program, Seventh Annual Farmers' Week," January 28-31, 1919, UA.22.O.1..002 - RG.22.O.1 Cooperative Extension Service Records, Director and General, Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.
[174] The programs for 1921 and 1929 were unfortunately not preserved as part of this collection. "Program, Eight Annual Farmers' Week," January 26-30, 1920, 8; "Program, Tenth Annual Farmers' Week," January 30-February 3, 1922, 11, Cooperative Extension Service Records, OSU Archives.
[175] "Program, Tenth Annual Farmers' Week," 22.

professionalized distribution of information to practicing farmers, operated on a completely different structure. Though it lent its support to these good government lectures at Farmers' Week, the League's involvement was distant and hands-off. The League was more comfortable distributing generalized educational content than creating specialized programs for rural women, or were unsure how to enlist rural women as leaders in their own citizenship development.

Once a Rural Extension Committee was formed in 1927 at the OLWV, interest was rekindled slightly in Farmers' Week. The OLWV State Organizer, Marion Neprud, ventured out to deliver a lecture entitled "Making Votes Count," in 1928. These speeches seem lost in programs that included up to six simultaneous speakers per hour occurring across the campus and do not give the sense of a noticeable presence for voter enrollment and education. Farmers' Week would appear to be the perfect outlet for reaching rural women with the citizenship education cause: it occurred in Columbus annually, it was designed around speechmaking and adult education, and it brought a far-flung population together. Its first iteration in 1916 was small, but it had grown steadily by the 1920s. Several factors could have contributed to the lackluster showing by the League. First, the first five years of the League's existence were consumed with the Sheppard-Towner Bill for maternal and infant health, the Bing School Attendance Law, and the Child Labor Law. Second, the OLWV was in debt $1,654 by 1923, about $25,000 in 2018 dollars, and continued to have financial problems throughout the Twenties, mostly because dues from local leagues were sporadic.[176] Third, there were other organizations competing for women's attention at Farmer's Week. Besides the number of lectures devoted specifically to women's concerns, the Farm Bureau held an annual meeting for

[176] Grace Peters, "Ohio League of Women Voters Meeting of the Executive Committee," September 18, 1923, Box 10 File 2 "State Board Minutes," League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection

women, encouraging their involvement in the group, and the Grange and Federation of Farm Women's Clubs were all represented every year as well. It seems that the problem was not of farm women being unorganized, but rather that there were already deeply embedded organizations using Farmers' Week to consolidate their membership. Finally, there was a significant economic bar to attending an event like Farmers' Week. Though intentionally planned for the first week in February to ensure no one would be working in the fields, the ability to take a week off of a side job or familial responsibilities to invest in education was a luxury. The members of Wood County's Middleton Township Farm Bureau certainly thought of a trip of Columbus as an occasional, and noteworthy event. At the annual meeting in 1921, "Dorothy Garrett gave a report on her sewing work and also her trip to Columbus," probably where she took part in a Home Economics demonstration.[177] Even attending the Boys' and Girls' Week (later called 4-H) for children to demonstrate their projects and compete on the state level required financial sacrifice, as "Ray Fackelman told how he fed and raised his prize winning pig, the sale of which made it possible for him afford to take the trip to Columbus during Boys and Girls week" in 1922.[178] Even if the League had made more of a concerted effort to follow through on its plans for reaching rural women through Farmers' Week, it still would have left large portions of the rural population unreached. Instead, rural women were expected to make the effort to travel to urban areas for League activities.

Institutes were a more limber method for spreading the word. Teachers Institutes had been established throughout the 1890s and 1900s to provide ongoing educational opportunities

[177] "Middleton Township Farm Bureau Minute Book," December 8, 1921, 5, MMS 0411 "Middleton Township Farm Bureau Records, 1920-1934," Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[178] Middleton Township Farm Bureau Minute Book," December 5, 1922, 5, Middleton Township Farm Bureau Records, CAC.

for teachers, and we know that in at least some cases, teachers could occasionally receive pay for attendance. [179] Farmers' Institutes followed suit and were different from Farmers' Week because they were organized with more participation from local communities. The numerous Citizenship, Taxation, and Voter Institutes held by the League were structurally similar to the Teachers' and Farmers' Institutes and delivered the professionalized training that was key to women as voters assuming the mantle of citizenship. Local Leagues mostly created Institutes independent of other organizations, like their Citizenship Schools and Leadership Institutes held in towns across the state, including agricultural regions like Van Wert and Sandusky.[180] There was precedent of cooperating with well-established Grange meetings on the Eastern side of the state: in 1921 members of the Canton Grange attended a one-day Citizenship School sponsored by the LWV and were impressed, subsequently asking the Canton LWV to send a speaker to the Grange for one of its lectures.[181] The League does not seem to have exploited this avenue of voter outreach. Adapting this structure to its project of voter education situated the OLWV's project firmly in the tradition of extension work.

The League was finally able to gain significant traction in 1926 at Bowling Green Normal College. Female students became interested in starting a college chapter after Marion Neprud, the Editor of the *Ohio Woman Voter* and the Organizational Director of the OLWV met with the young women and the college President to organize.[182] This effort was consistent with the League's strategy to enlist college women in OLWV efforts. After all, the women enrolled in

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[179] Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ohio State Department of Education, "A Study of Rural School Conditions in Ohio, (Columbus: The F. J. Hier Printing Company, 1920), 13.

[180] "Report of Organization of the Ohio League of Women Voters," May 13, 1927, 2, Box 44 File 9, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection.

[181] Minutes Executive Committee July 12 1921, 2, Box 11 File 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection.

[182] "League of Women Voters to be Organized at College," *Bee Gee News,* October 1926, page 8, CAC, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

these colleges would often go on to professional positions of community trust, as teachers, social workers, or extension agents. These women were more like the leaders of the OLWV. The *Ohio Woman Voter* reported the BGNC League's progress in 1927, after the College League sponsored a program on Child Welfare.[183] The authors went on to celebrate the success of the college leagues statewide, since "graduates of various colleges and universities have been recently added to the staffs of local and state leagues."[184] College leagues could offer the answer to the League's organizational and outreach problems. After all, female students were conveniently located on campuses, where state organizers could visit at their convenience. Students presented the ideal candidate for League work – middle class, with enough time for volunteer work, interested in literature, politics, and world events, and young enough to be enthusiastic about new ideas concerning female citizenship. Newly graduated, these women would be looking for jobs, and the League could offer them respectable feminine employment similar to popular fields like social work or teaching. Towards the close of the twenties then, the focus of the Ohio League of Women Voters shifted closer to nurturing its own leaders through campus clubs, and away from reaching women already invested in agricultural associations like the Grange, the Farm Bureau, or independent women's clubs. This approach was a compromise: League leaders could relate better to the college women, many of whom still had a personal stake in small towns. The League could thus broaden its reach while maintaining connections with women like them

[183] "Progress Being Made," *Ohio Woman Voter* 5 no. 10, April 1927, 11, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[184] Ibid.

Initially, the Bowling Green State Normal College League of Women Voters restricted membership to students and faculty of the Normal College.[185] By its second year, however, the College League "sponsored a program of expansion" to increase membership of students, faculty, and now town women.[186] The professional orientation of the college League was evident that year (probably 1928 or 1929), with the key events featuring a female attorney and League member from Toledo, Eva Epstein Shaw, and Myrna Hanna, the first woman to serve as state representative from Wood County.[187] The College League was also still very much a satellite of the successful Toledo League.

Rural women in their voluntary agricultural associations continued to move in a parallel world from the League women at Bowling Green State Normal College, later University, and in Toledo. Middle-class married women and those in the professions continued to be drawn to the League, which was still mostly urban. The College League floundered through the Thirties and Forties, when the reform agenda of the OLWV was subsumed first under unemployment relief efforts and then war effort work.[188] An attempt was made to organize a Bowling Green League of Women Voters in 1942 fizzled, allegedly because the town was already too organized with various clubs and charities.[189] White, middle-class women's volunteerism revived somewhat postwar, as labor became cheap again and social conservatism reasserted itself.

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[185] "Constitution and By-Laws of the Bowling Green Normal College League of Women Voters," 192?, pUA 1105, CAC, BSU.
[186] This information came from a single loose page that appears to be a yearbook. Author, date, and source not given. "League of Women Voters," N.D., MS 139 Box 12 Folder 3, "Bowling Green League History, 1953, 1960-1980, 1995, N.D.." CAC, BGSU.
[187] "League of Women Voters," MS 139 Box 12 Folder 3, "Bowling Green League History," CAC, BGSU; "5,700 Students Enrolled; 2 Buildings Renamed," *The B-G News,* September 18, 1959, 1, CAC, BGSU.
[188] "Background for the Study of Present Day Relief, Panel Discussion Presented by the Toledo League of Women Voters," December, 1937, Box 8 "Minimum Wage Correspondence 1921-1936" Folder "Relief-1937," League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection.
[189] Bernice Smith, "Our First Year," 1, "Bowling Green League History," CAC, BGSU.

Rural women do not seem to have been integrated into the League until it was resuscitated in the 1950s, but there was finally evidence that town and country women were coming together for League work. Bernice Smith was the first president of the Bowling Green League of Women Voters when it formed in 1953, and she recalled that founding member Marion Hench "lived in the country and was lonely" so took an active officer position in the new League.[190] Many of the reminisces of the offices from the Fifties and Sixties recorded similar feelings of isolation among the town women, who, like Marion Hench, saw the League as an intellectual and activist outlet for them that was compatible with their familial responsibilities.[191] Identification as a well-educated mother or housewife became a unifying factor among League members, and affiliation by class or farming identity was weaker. While the League had always targeted middle-class housewives and professional women, more women living in remote areas could hold this status by midcentury than they had in the twenties.

The League's belief that rural women were unreached and "waiting for the work to begin" did not match the reality on the ground. Wood County women were part of a complex social network of organizations that intersected and at times clashed. The Farm Bureau, Grange, Extension Agency, and smaller clubs interacted to bring educational opportunities to their members. They shared buildings, members, speakers, and publication space. Due to the economic problems for farmers in the Twenties, most of these agricultural organizations focused heavily on the economic position of farmers and how to improve it through primarily business, not political, methods. Women's spaces in these clubs were focused upon home and community

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[190] Bernice Smith, "Our First Year," 1, "Bowling Green League History," CAC, BGSU.
[191] Examples drawn from the "reminisces" of former officers from the 1950s-70s: Lucy Keil, "Memory of a Past President; A Paradigm in Balancing Roles," April, 1983; "Untitled," Mona Claflin, N.D.; Kristin Vessey, "LSWVBG Pres. 1975-77: Kristin Vessey," N.D., MS 139 Box 12 Folder 5, "Bowling Green League History," CAC, BGSU.

improvement, through clothing demonstration projects, health initiatives, and the mentorship of Girls' clubs. To the extent that the League of Women Voters reached out to organizations like these throughout Ohio, it was limited by those priorities, and other challenges. A Farmer's Week program steeped in the programmatic priorities of OSU's Domestic Economy movement might spare an hour for a lecture on Good Citizenship, but it will be lost in a program with dozens of speeches about the technical aspects of rural women's work. The commitment to this pre-existing network of agricultural-based organizations appears to have left little space in the volunteering lives of many rural women. For its part, the OLWV aspired to a professionalized inclusion in political life with men that would leave the world of women's clubs and women's auxiliaries behind. Its focus on the upwardly mobile women in colleges shows the aspirations of the elite women who led the League as well as the growing trend of white, middle-class women towards professional paid work. It also suggests ambiguity about rural women's roles in the "new order." Was rural life an honorable part of American womanhood? Or was it something to be escaped, as one fled to a more professionally and politically rewarding life in a city? That it did not address these questions, while it did ask these questions of urban working women, kept the League from investing long-term in rural outreach or forming a coherent program that could appeal to rural women.

CHAPTER IV – CONCLUSION: ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Concluding a study of the Ohio League of Women Voters in the interwar period requires analysis of how the organization adapted to changes within its leadership and within Ohio's quickly changing economic context, well into the thirties. The situation of the OLWV was dramatically different in 1930 than it had been in 1920 as the League was forced to adapt to economic and organizational changes. The League's early emphasis on gender unity and its attempts at rural outreach gradually gave way to a more strategic emphasis on recruiting college women who would be more likely to become League members and take on leadership roles within the organization. The OLWV struggled to maintain a truly "all-woman organization" in places like Toledo, where the membership was divided into an "East Toledo League," a "Colored Women's League of Toledo," and a Toledo "University League."[192] The earlier goodwill and strong sense of mission among women's organizations had frayed, with matters made worse when the OLWV had to fight a defensive battle against the Daughters of the American Revolution, who had accused prominent OLVW officers Judge Florence Allen and League President Belle Sherwin of Communist sympathies.[193] Many in 1930 overlooked the concerted opposition the LWV had received from political parties and assumed that the lack of a coherent female voting bloc signaled a LWV failure.[194] As the early unity among women's voluntary movements faded, the League had to abandon some of its early calls for gender unity in favor of specific reform efforts that responded to the pressing crises of the late twenties and early thirties.

The League faced organizational and legislative challenges, as did many women's organizations during the period, along with unity issues by 1930. Neprud's resignation in 1929

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[192] "Minutes, Board of Directors of the Ohio League of Women Voters," February 27, 1929, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[193] "Board Meeting Minutes," November 10, 1927, 3, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[194] Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage*, 206-208.

left the OLWV temporarily without a full-time, professional State Organizer, thereby damaging the continuity of some of their outreach programming.[195] The defunding of the Sheppard-Towner Act in 1929 seemed a discouraging end to a decade of legislative defeats, while politicians and party officials were no longer afraid of a unified woman's bloc as they had been before 1924.[196] While the OLWV had assiduously planted local Leagues throughout the Twenties, maintaining them over the long haul proved difficult, and OLWV proposed sending representatives to nine local Leagues who had simply stopped communicating with the state organization.[197] In a detailed retrospective review of the League's first decade, Belle Sherwin presented a nuanced view of the League's representativeness as a woman's organization, in contrast to the simpler "all-woman's platform" of 1920:

> "we are sometimes asked whether the League has a unifying political philosophy. If there is a current of common thinking running through the wide-spread, diversified membership of the League, it must be found in its program of work constructed by a procedure thoroughly representative in plan and increasingly so in usage."[198]

Sherwin continued to draw a distinction between which items on the League's platform were "inherited" from the suffrage movement, and which were innovations of the League's, showing a need to justify the League's existence on its own terms in a changed political context, rather than just carrying on the good work of suffrage days. The League's finances and membership rolls hit their low point after the 1929 economic collapse, leading to a 1930 national conference that was largely retrospective rather than optimistic.[199] All of these factors resulted in a state board in 1930 that was still deeply persuaded of the League's necessity, but significantly less optimistic than it had been in 1920.

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[195] "Pre-Convention Board Meeting," October 14, 1929, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[196] Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage,* 4.
[197] "Minutes, Board of Directors of the Ohio League of Women Voters," February 27, 1929.
[198] Belle Sherwin, "Ten Years of Growth?" May 1, 1920, 16-17, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[199] Young, *In the Public Interest,* 98-99.

The officers of the state League continued to be mostly white, upper-middle class or wealthy women, "who are financially able to devote a greater part of their time to the work without recompense," in the words of one 1930 study of the OLWV. Concerted efforts at rural outreach waned after 1929, with responsibility for reaching rural women devolving onto "members at large"; in other words, the local leagues would be responsible for initiating rural outreach, not the state organization.[200] Plans in 1929 to "coordinate work of rural and city women where interests are common," and to launch "preliminary campaigns in [rural] Counties to arouse interest so that women will be conscious of problems" did not materialize in the face of the economic crash.[201] Though the impetus to reach rural women left the Board of the OLWV when Neprud resigned in 1929, some rural women kept citizenship education efforts going with Blanche Bowers' help. She planned programs in cooperation with the Extension Agency in Toledo and Butler County for 1930, and maintained a League presence at the reliable programmatic staple, Farmer's Week.[202] A "citizenship project" was formed by the Federation of Farm Women's Clubs in Ottawa County, with the assistance of Bowers, the County Agricultural Agent F.K. Blair, and "one or two county officials" that would preside over a meeting at the Agent's office to deliver "information relative to county government, township government, and schools, which are the three units included in the project."[203] The vocabulary of "units" and "project" fit squarely within the domestic economy framework, which tracked canning, clothing, household improvement, and gardening projects for women on an annual basis.[204] That

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[200] "Pre-Convention Board Meeting," October 14, 1929, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[201] Ruth B. Blandford, "Ohio League of Women Voters, Minutes of Business Session, Tenth Annual Convention," May 2-3, 1929, 3, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[202] Edna Pfleger Van Fossen, "Minutes, Board Meeting," December 13, 1929, 2, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[203] "Citizenship is Club Project," *Sandusky Register,* January 24, 1930, 11.
[204] Blanche Bowers, "Annual Report of County Agent Work and Farm Bureau Work From December 1, 1921 to July 31 1922, Franklin County Ohio," 1922, 17-19, Franklin County File, Box UA.RG22.O.3.007, "Home Economics Narrative Reports," OSU Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

citizenship education could be seen as a "project," or a natural part of the scientific and professional homemaking movement in 1930 indicates a measure of success from the intense efforts of the three-year rural outreach plan of 1927-1930. The economic crisis would soon alter the roles of both the Extension Agency and the OLWV within rural women's lives. Both organizations served as mediating institutions between Depression-stricken Ohio areas and the new Federal relief agencies, altering their primary focus from a continuation of the nineteenth-century Progressive reform mission to an emphasis on relief.

The Great Depression

The 1929 crash dramatically reoriented the programs of women's reform organizations throughout Ohio. Cleveland and Toledo, previously boom towns offering promising new jobs, were quintessential Depression-era cities whose unemployment levels reached over 50%. The general Ohio unemployment rate in 1930 was already 13.3% and in 1932 it had ballooned to 37.2%.[205] The OLWV viewed the crisis as the result of ignorant political policies, as an OLWV board member stated in 1933:

> stressing the place of the League of Women Voters in times like these, Mrs. Stanley declared that ignorance and indifference are responsible for the state in which we now find ourselves. She urged a greater realization of its power for civic betterment upon each League.[206]

If the policymakers of the 1920s had been less "ignorant and indifferent," or in other words had a better citizenship education, Stanley argued, Ohio and the United States would not be experiencing the rampant unemployment of the 1930s. Such a crisis disrupted normal reform priorities and membership-building strategies, which shifted the OLWV leadership's attention to

[205] Stephane Elise Booth, *Buckeye Women: The History of Ohio's Daughters* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 122-123.
[206] Emma Harper Applegate, "Minutes of Board Meeting in Dayton," September 28, 1933, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

intensified cooperation with state departments and agencies to provide assistance by the middle of the decade.[207] Even in the worst part of the Depression, the OLWV still saw its educational mission as the foundation for political change that would prevent similar unemployment crises in the future, and tried to keep its voter education initiatives alive, even as it focused most of its legislative and programmatic efforts on specific unemployment relief measures.

The OLWV had always stressed "efficiency in government" as a priority, but by 1934 this priority took on new urgency as the effectiveness of government organs to provide basic administrative and relief function seemed desperately necessary to a state in the throes of the Depression. Therefore, OLWV platform priorities in 1934 included:

> administration of the minimum wage law in Ohio; enforcement of labor laws; compulsory unemployment insurance; a system of federal state, and local unemployment relief; reorganization of county government to promote efficiency and effective economy; reform of tax systems to provide adequate revenue for essential government services.[208]

The economic focus of the platform also included a list of agencies that required "adequate appropriations," including Extension Agency work and Maternal and Infancy outreach, a holdover from the years of Sheppard-Towner success and an indicator that women's issues and rural issues both still held a place in OLWV plans.[209] Other traditional League priorities, like the Peace Movement or International Women's Rights, received less emphasis in the 1930s, as the tone of reform movements emphasized survival and relief more than the modernization and progressive concerns of the Twenties. The Extension Agency had undergone a similar transformation in its efforts to help rural residents in the Thirties. Like the OLWV, the Extension Agency has been characterized as a mediator between rural residents and the slew of new

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[207] "Agenda: Meeting of the Board of Directors," May 15, 1934, 1-3, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

Federal programs developed in the Thirties to meliorate the Depression.[210] Aid to unemployed workers and protective legislation for those still employed was the focus of government agencies and reform organizations alike. In 1935, the OLWV supported a labor bill for women that would: "include all women gainfully employed except: (a) executives (b) professional (c) agricultural workers (d) domestic servants."[211] These exclusions reflected exceptions made in federal policy, especially the Social Security Act, which kept African-American women from utilizing the benefits of the legislation since they were overwhelmingly employed in agricultural and domestic work, especially those in rural areas. While the efforts to protect certain groups of female laborers undoubtedly helped to lessen the burdens of the Depression on them, programs that privileged white, urban women solidified the League's priorities as an urban white woman's organization, reflective of mainstream American societal priorities in the Thirties.[212]

The Social Security Act of 1935 fundamentally changed the nature of reform organizations across the United States. Whereas a variety of organizations had pursued a plethora of private philanthropy and moral uplift programs, now the federal government assumed a fundamental responsibility for caring for many of the poor in the U.S. through the Act. That reality would shape reform agitation in profound ways for the rest of the twentieth century. If World War I marked the spiritual death of Progressivism, as optimism in progress waned, 1935 signaled the end of reform movements as they had been known in the previous fifty years. The Great Depression had come close to bringing about the industrialized social welfare consensus that many organizations with roots in the 1880s and 1890s, like the League of Women Voters,

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[210] Douglas Sheflin, "The New Deal Personified: A. J. Haman and the Cooperative Extension Service in Colorado," *Agricultural History* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2016), 356-378.
[211] "Minutes of the Business Session of the Ohio League of Women Voters Convention," May 23, 1935, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[212] Daria Roithmayr, *Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock in White Advantage,* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) 36-37.

had fought for through the 1920s. The League's relationship with rural women during the second half of the 1930s would be characterized by its help implementing New Deal Programs, rather than initiating outreach as it had in the 1920s. As a panel discussion of the Toledo League in 1937 asserted, "Now it is evident that the shifting pattern of American life that necessitated the Social Security Program also makes it imperative that we have a permanent policy for public relief."[213] Worries about the aging of the population, an unprecedentedly low birth rate, and the decrease in employment because of technological advancement permeated this discussion, showing that the Ohio Leagues thought that much still needed to be done. "Social Security provides a bare old age subsistence pension…but it does not in itself solve relief or unemployment."[214] True to form, the League proposed systematic research into "why certain groups are on relief" in an effort to solve the problem through study. By 1937, "relief" was the key topic at the state level, and large meetings were held by Toledo, Elyria, Lorain and Oberlin to conduct overviews of "the relief problem."[215] In 1938, the OLWV assembled "relief kits," which contained information about the federal programs available, to be distributed to the public much like today's informational packets distributed to low-income families detailing assistance enrollment procedures.[216]

Back to the Farm

In the later part of the Thirties, the New Deal was in full swing and the OLWV was helping to promote it. The Works Progress Administration, the massive attempt to employ

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[213] "A Background for the Study of Present Day Relief: A Panel Discussion Presented by the Toledo League of Women Voters," December 1937, 1, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[214] Ibid, 2.
[215] "Toward Unemployment Compensation, 1937, 3-4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[216] "Relief Kits," October 11, 1937, League of Women Voters of Ohio.

workers across the nation, was employing 6,513 people in Lucas County alone in 1937.[217] In rural areas, the Resettlement Administration was created in 1935 to move unemployed urban families to rural areas in the belief that the city was a *worse* place to live. The fundamental reality of demographic migration from rural to urban centers was turned on its head in the Great Depression, as people sought security, or at least subsistence, in the country, where they could at least grow their own food.[218] The Resettlement Administration's name was changed in 1937 to the Farm Security Administration and its mission broadened to include all relief efforts to the rural poor. These organizations assumed most of the relief work for rural women in the coming years. Though the Extension Agency had pioneered the first systematic outreach to rural people, the FSA implemented the first concentrated effort to eradicate rural poverty.[219] By the late thirties, voluntary organizations became less important in comparison to federal efforts. Marion Neprud, former state organizer of the OLWV, eventually became an officer with the FSA in Wisconsin, showing that the location of reform efforts had drifted away from woman-only groups like the League towards official government agencies. Since the League's outreach to rural women had always relied upon cooperation with quasi-governmental organizations like Extension Agencies, this growing cooperation with Federal agencies and initiatives came easily. The OLWV's Women in Industry Committee took credit in 1934 for the first minimum wage law in Ohio and claimed that "our enthusiastic support of this measure was instrumental in securing its overwhelming victory in the legislature."[220] The same year, President Roosevelt was

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[217] "A Background for the Study of Present Day Relief: A Panel Discussion Presented by the Toledo League of Women Voters," December 1937, 4, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[218] Zimmerman and Larsen, "Opening Windows onto Hidden Lives," 47.
[219] Charles Kenneth Roberts, "Client Failures and Supervised Credit in the Farm Security Administration," *Agricultural History,* 87 no. 3 (Summer 2013), 368-70.
[220] "Letter to Women-In-Industry Chairman," February 28, 1934, Box 8, 1921-1936 Folder Minimum Wage Correspondence, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

a keynote speaker at the League's National Convention, praising its work "in promoting the ideals of intelligent citizenship," eliciting the help of the traditional women's reform movement in his New Deal.[221] This legacy continued in the late Forties, when the Farm Recruitment Program of the Ohio State Employment Service sought to stave off post-war unemployment by proactively settling workers in agricultural industries like sugar refineries, small farms, and food processing plants.[222] Images of smiling young women picking fruit, driving horse drawn wagons (technologically outdated in Ohio by this time), and hoeing tidy gardens peppered the magazine feature of the farm resettlement program. The image of the contented, industrious farm girl was resurgent in 1948, with the League actively working to disseminate information on farm relocation to the unemployed women of the state as a partner of the Ohio State Employment Service.

Industry, Agriculture, and Ohio Women: Opportunities for Further Research

This project began with a question: how did rural women fit into the Ohio League of Women Voter's civic education outreach? Sifting through the dozens of boxes of records left by the State League has revealed many avenues of research left unexplored in this thesis. The implementation of Sheppard-Towner Act in Ohio, for example, was one of the first major public-health initiatives in the state and nation. A detailed study of the medical and social history of Sheppard-Towner would inform current attempts to reach underserved populations in rural areas

[221] Stuhler, *For the Public Record*, 173.
[222] "Bureau Launches Farm Recruitment Program," in *The Compensator* 12 no. 3, (First Quarter, 1948), 3, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.

or among racial and ethnic minorities in Ohio: some of the same hurdles the Sheppard-Towner proponents faced.[223]

As suggested in the narrative, women in industry were a key priority for the OLWV in the 1920s. Concerns about the social effects of women in the workplace led to protective legislation that was predicated on the argument that women, as mothers of future citizens, represented a protected class.[224] As with Sheppard-Towner, protective legislation for mothers represented a conception of mothers as crucial elements of nation-building. Since the migration patterns in the Twenties were overwhelmingly rural-to-urban, European-to-American, and Southern-to-Northern, such rapid demographic shifts also factored into OLWV group identification. Their efforts to reach immigrant women and the role of Colored League of Women Voters chapters in Ohio would each form significant projects that would help us understand the diversity of experience among Ohio women in the 1920s.

Finally, this work has incorporated records from local Ohio Leagues wherever they have been found but acknowledges that the balance of historical evidence is overwhelmingly tilted toward the state League and large city Leagues. Identifying coherent primary-source collections from smaller Leagues, especially rural ones, would deepen our perspective on rural women's lives. Extensive records exist for local Leagues like Lima and Zanesville from the 1940s through 1980s at the Ohio History Connection. The transformation of women's volunteer work, the racial integration of the LWV, and the effect second-wave feminism had upon an organization firmly

[223] "Saving the Babies: Ohio Sheppard-Towner Activities from 1923-1924" Ohio Woman Voter 3 no. 12, June 1925, 6, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records.
[224] Wilson, *The Woman's Joint Congressional Committee,* 24.

rooted in the nineteenth-century Woman's Movement would all be elucidated by these documents.[225]

Conclusion

The OLWV's relationship with rural women was complex and fluid in the 1920s and through the 1930s. While simultaneously seeking gender unity in pursuit of a Progressive, largely urban reform agenda, the League's state leadership implicitly and explicitly acknowledged that distinct groups of Ohio women had differing priorities and therefore required different methods of outreach. The League's greatest successes in its first decade came when it sought cooperation with pre-existing organizations already meaningful to Ohio women. In the case of rural women, this was mostly the Extension Agency. The OLWV's reliance upon this established vehicle for rural reform was a potent tool for establishing citizenship education as a normal and accepted part of a women's interest as it was perceived in the Twenties. To quote from OSU graduate student Alice Johnston's assessment in 1930:

> The League has often shown much interest in the rural women, and it works in connection with the extension service of the Ohio State University. The committee of rural extension has held a number of citizenship schools and classes which have been well attended by the rural women. As a result of a series of questionnaires sent to four different Ohio counties concerning this work the answers were all favorable. One county replied: "It broadens one mentally. It makes you an intelligent citizen. It gives you a new appreciation of citizenship. It gives one consciousness of a new self-respect because it makes one realize the importance of being part of an important whole."[226]

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[225] For example, tensions seem to have heightened between Lima League President and National Board Member and member of the Black Caucus about attempts to increase Black membership in the League: "Letter, Mrs. Frank Williams to Mrs. Dorothy A. Beers," April 13, 1971, Box 65, Chapter Files D-N, Lima League File, League of Women Voters of Ohio Records, Ohio History Connection; For a discussion about racial integration within the National League, see: Helen Laville, *Organized White Women and the Struggle for Racial Integration, 1945-1965* (Manchester, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 65-69. Good

[226] While Johnston cites Mrs. Minnie Price of the Rural Extension Department for passing on this anecdote, she regrettably does not name the woman or county which provided the glowing report. Johnston, "Ohio League of Women Voters," 54.

These reflections from the rural participants of League programming in the Twenties are remarkably similar to reflections from Wood County League members active in the 1960s and 1970s. Former Bowling Green League President Kristin Vessey wrote "I remember lots of mail, lots of phone calls, and a nice feeling of representing a significant organization."[227] Reflecting upon the decreased membership of the League, nationally and locally, in the 1980s, Vessey continued:

> Look back at old membership and you can sense what a greenhouse LWV provided here! For me, studying issues with thoughtful people was the key attraction… a measure of its success is its more difficult existence now that many of the super women who made it go have found careers (often with pay!) outside their homes, which alas, means less time for the League, etc.[228]

Vessey's observations reflect the deepening complexity around women's volunteer work in Midcentury America, when perceptions of white, married women's community responsibilities underwent radical and controversial change between the 1950s and 1980s.[229] A sense of significance and political study opportunities for women clearly remained a major draw of the LWV across urban/rural, class, and educational divides for at least some women in Ohio form the 1920s through the 1980s.

In the 1920s, few women living in rural areas had the time or resources to commit to a position on the Board of the OLWV. Periodic travel to Columbus was expensive and time-consuming, and because most of the local Leagues in rural areas were newborn in the Twenties, they were less likely to produce experienced leaders like the large Leagues in places like Toledo,

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[227] Kristin Vessey, "LWVBG Pres. 1975-1977: Kristin Vessey," 1983, 1, "Bowling Green League History," MS 139, Box 12 Folder 5, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.
[228] Vessey, "LWVBG Pres.", 2.
[229] See Wendy Kaminar for analysis of differing perceptions of women's unpaid work during this period, especially how second-wave feminism affected the respectability of paid and unpaid jobs and first-hand accounts of women volunteers from this time. Wendy Kaminar, *Women Volunteering: The Pleasure, Pain, and Politics of Unpaid Work from 1830 to the Present,* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1984), 121-161.

Cincinnati, and Cleveland, staffed with experienced suffrage workers. Participation and leadership in a local mixed-gender agricultural organization like the Farm Bureau or the Grange or a woman-only club was much more feasible for rural women because it did not disrupt their work and family responsibilities to the same degree, as we have seen in Wood County. Additionally, the leadership of the OLWV tended to be middle-aged or older women who had been deeply invested in the suffrage work of the previous decades, whereas voluntary agricultural organizations tended to base their appeal upon familial and community connections and thus had a wider age range among their membership. Passing the generational torch along to social-reform minded, college-educated women was an easier step for the OLWV than expanding horizontally to enfold women's organizations with different priorities and social and economic everyday realities.

This thesis has shown that the Ohio League of Women Voters did make significant effort to reach rural Ohio women with its message of civic education and political engagement for all women. While its methods often faltered due to organizational priorities, outside economic factors (especially the 1929 crash), and sometimes even underestimation of what rural women were interested in (as with the 1925 assumption that they would have to be convinced that labor issues were important), the League was successful in some ways. Its ability to overcome old stigmas about women voters by building upon the widely-accepted Extension Agency rural outreach was innovative and effective within a single generation. Newspaper reports from 1927-1930 indicate that some groups of rural women desired a civic education enough to request it from their Extension Agents and from the OLWV. Though the face of reform work changed irrevocably after the New Deal, the League preserved a remarkably nuanced rhetoric that combined gender equality with an acknowledgement of women's specialized experiences and

qualifications through the 1920s. While the voting rates of Ohio's rural women remain unknown, since ballots were not recorded by gender, the League undoubtedly contributed to a climate of acceptance around women's involvement in public affairs.

Studying the League of Women Voters during the interwar period reveals the dynamism and adaptability of the women's movement. Following the changes and struggles of one voluntary women's group shows how these organizations fought for relevance and survived a changing political and social landscape while continuing to advance a message of reform. Despite its early challenges and intense competition from political parties and other voluntary organizations, the League of Women Voters adapted. In Ohio, the League remains a strong and well-respected institution that maintains its non-partisan stance and its commitment to enrolling young voters and providing unbiased election information. As of 2019, the OLWV has a strong state chapter and thirty-one local chapters, several of which encompass rural areas. League policy positions that embrace rural areas, like gerrymandering, health care access, and water conservation, suggest possibilities for rural members to highlight their regional concerns. The porous identities of urban, suburban, and rural identities, the unique situation of rural immigrants, and the loss of rural human capital represent just a small sampling of recent academic research and hints that rural areas are still a rich, dynamic topic of exploration.[230] By analyzing the history of rural areas, historians and contemporary reformers alike can better understand the context of rural and organizational change.

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[230] Betsie Garner, "Perfectly Positioned": The Blurring of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Boundaries a Southern Community," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 672 no. 1 (January 2019), 46-64; Thurka Sangaramoorthy, "Putting Band-Aids on Things That Need Stitches": Immigration and the Landscape of Care in Rural America," *American Anthropologist* 120 no. 3 (September 2018), 487-499; Adam Mayer, Stephanie A. Malin, and Shawn K. Olson-Hazboun, "Unhollowing Rural America? Rural Human Capital Flight and the Demographic Consequences of the Oil and Gas Boom," *Population and Environment* 39 no. 3, (December 2017), 219-238.

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