

Local Council of Women

On February 14, 1894 2,000 London women met at the London Opera House to form a group to advance the interests of women and children. The Local Council of Women elected Mary English as their first president but Harriet Boomer was the woman who would wield the most influence in the advancement of women's interests. The LCW was an affiliate of the National Council of Women formed by Lady Aberdeen, wife of the governor general.

In the early years the LCW acted as a lobby group launching campaigns on child welfare laws, marriage laws, and adding domestic science courses to school curriculums. The LCW membership was made up of upper middle class and "Establishment" families who used their political connections to further their goals.

One of the first achievements of the LCW was to establish a branch of the Victorian Order of Nurses in 1906. The V. O. N. was a group of nurses who made home visits to families who could not go to the hospital. The first children's wing at the Victoria Hospital was also financed by the LCW.

The Women's Christian Association, London's oldest women's group became a member and in 1894 the opened their Home for the Incurables. In 1921 the Home was moved from Hamilton Road to Grand Avenue and was renamed Parkwood Hospital for the Incurables. Another member was the Young Women's Christian Association which provided a home away from home for young women coming to the city from the countryside or other towns.

Other clubs which were affiliates of the LCW were the Women's Canadian Club (1910), the Women's Music Club (1894), Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (1900), Children's Aid Society (1894), London Branch, Canadian Red Cross Society (1900). All of these groups made London a better place to live for the young, the poor, and the ill.

The LCW also allowed women to participate directly in community life. They made women aware of the fact that their sphere of influence existed far beyond the kitchen. In 1919 the LCW wasted no time in exercising the right of women to vote in municipal elections and Mrs. Lorna Harris, Mrs. Alberta E. Williams, and Mrs. A.T. Edwards became the first women elected to public office.

Volunteer work made up thousands of hours by local women during the war years. The Central Volunteer Bureau was set up by the LCW and coordinated much of this work. Many women worked closely with the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance, providing food, medical supplies, clothing and bedding. London women knitted thousands of socks and sweaters to be sent overseas, and 'sewed hundreds of miles of sheets and pillowcases, rolled endless strips of bandages, and put together countless numbers of "ditty bags" - cloth bags filled with such goodies as soap, socks, combs, and razors for the soldiers.' (Miller,195).

1953 was an eventful year for the LCW because they successfully got Margaret Fullerton, London's first female alderman, elected to city council. The London Free Press reported "More than 250 enthusiastic women from all parts of the city got behind and pushed Mrs. Fullerton to

victory in one of the most highly organized feminine campaigns London has every experienced". (Miller, 203).

The 1970s saw the LCW involved in another important campaign, preserving the history of London. A committee made of the LCW, the Urban League, the ACO, OAA, the LMHS, and the LPL Historic Site Committee; called the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee. Mark Gladysz was appointed in 1973 as the first Heritage Planner.*

Source: London 200 An Illustrated History by Orlo Miller, 1992

* Note that Mark Gladysz was actually first appointed Heritage Planner in 1989. The first LACAC also included the UWO History Department and several members at large.