

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CHARTER
Home Rule Government

DOROTHY HIMSTEAD

Member of First County Council
1949-50

President of League of Women Voters
Montgomery County

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY-ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
(in cooperation with the Department of Public Libraries, Mont. Co.)

Biographical Notes on DOROTHY HIMSTEAD (Mrs. Ralph Himstead)

Birthplace - Baltimore, Md.

Residence -

Childhood - Evanston, Ill.

Montgomery County - 1936 to 1957 Area - Chevy Chase

Present - Madison, Conn. (18 Waterbury Ave.)

Education -

Undergraduate - A.B. Northwestern University

Graduate - Studied abroad

Business & Professional Experience

Taught French at Illinois College, Cornell College and Syracuse University

Editor of Madison Shore Line Times, a weekly newspaper. Presently, a
columnist for that paper.

Community Activities

President of LWV-Onondaga Co. 1934-36

President of LWV-Montgomery Co. 1946-48

Legislative chairman LWV-Maryland

Member of various Boards in Montgomery Co.

Chairman of Structure & Operation of Govt., LWV-Mont.Co., 1948

Public Office

Member of Montgomery County Council 1949-50

Present Interests

Retired after seven years as editor of the local newspaper in Madison.

Continued as columnist for that paper. On Board of Salvation Army.

Former Board member of AAUW and of Madison Historical Society. Publicity
chairman for various organizations.

This interview is with Dorothy Himstead, Mrs. Ralph Himstead, on June 30, 1972. The interviewer is Blossom Holland. We are in Mrs. Himstead's home in Madison, Connecticut where she has lived since leaving Montgomery County in 1957. Mrs. Himstead was very active in the movement for a Charter with the County in the 1940's and held public office after the Charter's adoption in 1948.

HOLLAND- WHERE DID YOU LIVE, MRS. HIMSTEAD, AS YOU WERE GROWING UP, AND BEFORE YOU CAME TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY?

Mrs. Himstead- Well, I spent most of my life, my young life, in Evanston, Illinois where my father was a professor at Northwestern University. Then, after I was married, I lived for a while in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, and in Syracuse, New York. And from Syracuse, I went to Montgomery County.

HOLLAND- I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE TOLD US THAT YOU TAUGHT IN BOTH CORNELL COLLEGE IN MT. VERNON, IOWA, AND ILLINOIS COLLEGE.

Mrs. Himstead- Yes, I taught French both places.

HOLLAND- AND IN SYRACUSE?

Mrs. Himstead- Yes, and in Syracuse.

HOLLAND- WHY DID YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND COME TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY?

Mrs. Himstead- My husband, who was a law professor at Syracuse was made General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors with headquarters in Washington, so we moved there in 1930.

HOLLAND- AND YOU ALSO TOLD ME THAT YOU HAD ONE SON?

Mrs. Himstead- I have one son, yes.

HOLLAND- NOW TO GO ON TO YOUR COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. WHEN DID YOU JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS AND WHERE WERE YOU?

Mrs. Himstead- I joined the League of Women Voters and it was the Onandaga County League and it was organized on the County basis, as it is in Montgomery.

I held various positions in the League and was then President of it until I left to come here.

HOLLAND- I THINK YOU SHOULD SAY, THOUGH, AND I'M GOING TO SAY IT FOR YOU, THAT YOU WERE ASKED TO JOIN THE LEAGUE AND BECOME PRESIDENT.

Mrs. Himstead Well, it shows how hard up they were to get someone to take the job.

HOLLAND- WHEN WAS THIS WHEN YOU JOINED THE LEAGUE?

Mrs. Himstead I joined it about 1934.

HOLLAND- SO THEN YOU CAME DIRECTLY TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY AND JOINED THE LEAGUE THERE? AND I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU HAD LOTS OF BACKGROUND, BUT WE'LL GO INTO THAT IN JUST A MINUTE. WHAT WERE YOUR OTHER ACTIVITIES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY?

Mrs. Himstead I was at one time on a number of Boards; I was interested in Planned Parenthood; I was president of my National Sorority Alumnae Association; during the war years, I was on a Heart Committee, Board of the Heart Fund and a hospital Board Member.

HOLLAND- AND SO THEN WHEN YOU CAME TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY, YOU JOINED THE LEAGUE AND WHAT WAS THE PROGRAM OF THE LEAGUE AT THAT PERIOD? WHAT KIND OF THINGS WERE THEY FIGHTING FOR?

Mrs. Himstead Well, they were studying much the same kind of things that they study now. It was responsible voting for citizens, to teach them how to use their vote intelligently, and local government items and national items. I remember I was Chairman of the Status of Women at one time and that was to work against the Equal Rights Amendment which was just recently passed. We have been working against it all these years.

HOLLAND- MAYBE YOU SHOULD EXPLAIN WHY, BECAUSE ANYONE LISTENING...

Mrs. Himstead They felt that women...Oh, that's a long story. But they were opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment because they felt that women had to have

certain privileges and certain protections because they were women. And if they made everything on an equal basis, women were going to suffer from it. They were joined with all the big, most of the big women's national organizations, of that time.

HOLLAND- WELL, WHAT WERE YOUR PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Mrs. Himstead My particular interests, of course, were always in local government and in voting regulations, and I was on the State Board when we were working against the Declaration of Intent Law.

HOLLAND- WHAT WAS THAT LAW?

Mrs. Himstead That shows what a newcomer you are! You used to have to go before an official body and declare that you intended to become a citizen of Maryland one year before you could register. So a great many people who wanted to come up and register for an election found they couldn't do it because they hadn't declared their intent a year ago. We spoke and the League was very active in that field and it was repealed.

HOLLAND- AND YOU WERE ACTIVE IN THAT CAMPAIGN TO GET IT REPEALED?

Mrs. Himstead Yes, I spoke before the Legislative Assembly and it was very interesting.

HOLLAND- OBVIOUSLY YOU WERE INTERESTED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS IN STATE.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, I was the Local Government Chairman for quite a while in the local League and wrote a lot of pamphlets and things like that. I remember I wrote one called "It's Your Government" in which we outlined what the government was and what it would be under the Charter, and then election information of all kinds about candidates, that type of thing.

HOLLAND- AND WERE YOU ALSO INVOLVED IN TAX POLICIES?

Mrs. Himstead Oh, yes, I wrote a couple of tax studies for the State League as well as for the local League.

HOLLAND- AND THEN YOU WERE PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL LEAGUE?

Mrs. Himstead Well, I think it was around '45 to '47. While the main agitation for the Charter was on, I was President.

HOLLAND- AND BEFORE YOU BECAME PRESIDENT, YOU WERE CHAIRMAN OF THE VARIOUS COMMITTEES?

Mrs. Himstead Yes.

HOLLAND- AND DID YOU HOLD VICE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY?

Mrs. Himstead No.

HOLLAND- YOU WENT RIGHT INTO THE PRESIDENCY. PERHAPS YOU MIGHT SAY JUST A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW LEAGUE MEETINGS WERE HELD. YOU KNOW, NOW WE HAVE UNITS. WERE THEY LIKE THAT?

Mrs. Himstead At first they weren't. There were study groups, but not units. There was a study group in every field, information gathering groups in every one of the League program items, and just as I quit being President, they started to break up into units. We continued the study groups to give information to the units but it was quite different because we had regular monthly meetings. But we hadn't room that we could put people in, many groups were so large, they couldn't do that.

HOLLAND- AS I REMEMBER IT, YOU USED TO HAVE THESE STUDY GROUPS AND MEET FOR LUNCH.

Mrs. Himstead Oh, yes, we met for lunch. The churches used to take us in. But anyway, it was always a very live group of dedicated and interesting women. It was lots of fun to know them.

HOLLAND- LEAGUE HASN'T CHANGED VERY MUCH.

Mrs. Himstead No, not in that way.

HOLLAND- WE ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN HEARING ABOUT YOUR PART IN THE CHARTER MOVEMENT AND HOW ALL THE CHARTER MOVEMENTS STARTED, AND PERHAPS YOU COULD TELL US THAT.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, I'd be very glad to. I'll do it, but very briefly, because, of course, you could talk for hours about how the Charter movement started. And, of course, the League was right in there from the beginning, so you can't separate the two.

It spearheaded the drive along with the Civic Federation. But it all started as early as around 1935 and I was interested to find out that it started up in Sandy Spring where a group of farmers who belonged to the Civic Federation felt that we weren't having the kind of government we should have and that we should have a professional manager and we should adopt a Home Rule Charter. Well, they took this up with the Civic Federation and the Civic Federation started to be active about it. In '37, they asked that an outside group make a study of the county government to find out whether it really was what it should be. And so they finally got the County Commissioners to approve and Brookings Institute was asked to make such a study. And the League was all prepared and waiting for this study. And in 1941, it appeared. The conclusion was that the county had outgrown its form of government and it advised the county to take advantage of this Home Rule Amendment to the Constitution which allowed the county to adopt a charter providing for home rule, because all local legislation, up to this time, had been passed in the General Assembly. And they felt that this amendment said that local legislation which affected only that one county could be passed in the county if charter provisions were followed. This meant signatures of 20% of the legal voters or 10,000 signatures, whichever was less.

The League was very active in circulating petitions to get these signatures. But I'm ahead of myself. Because at that time, a Charter Committee was formed and nearly half the members were League members who were active in this Charter Committee. They circulated the petitions and it was put on the ballot in 1942 to draft a charter. At that same time, the names of five people to make up the Charter Board were to be voted on. One of those was Alice Hostetler, a former president of the League, and another was Frederick Lee whose wife was very active in the League. He was a very civic-minded lawyer in the county. In spite of bitter opposition by the Democratic organization, the question won. After public hearings and much study and discussion, in which the League took a very strong part,

a charter was prepared and presented within six months as required. And then, of course, there was really a fight and much misrepresentation and bitter accusation against "do-gooders" and "experimenters" and all the rest of it. In 1944, this appeared on the ballot and was defeated. But the Charter Committee started all over again.

HOLLAND- SHALL WE JUST STOP THERE A MOMENT. WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS THE REASON FOR THE FAILURE OF THE FIRST CHARTER?

Mrs. Himstead Well, it was political pretty largely. Because this was something new to the people. It was a very well organized opposition in the Democratic organization and it was led by Brooke Lee. And the people just weren't ready for it, I guess. But the Charter Committee started all over again and in 1946, once more, the question was on the ballot. And what's more, it won. And another Charter Board went to work.

HOLLAND- DO YOU KNOW WHO WAS ON THE SECOND BOARD OR DOESN'T IT MATTER?

Mrs. Himstead No, no particular League people on it. I have the names, but I don't have them right with me. Then, during the next 18 months, this Charter faced very bitter fights. Obviously, it would. It also faced some legal fights. It was brought up that it was unconstitutional to adopt a budget in Executive Session as was provided in the Charter. It should have been adopted in the legislative session. Well, to go back just a little bit. According to the Charter, one month in the year was devoted to legislation. This was May. We had to pass all laws during that one month and the opponents to the Charter said it could not be put on the ballot because it was unconstitutional in that it did not provide that the budget be adopted in May. But our lawyers convinced the court that since the budget had never been adopted in the Legislature, since it had always been adopted by the County Commissioners, that all the functions of the County Commissioners were transferred to the County Council and that it had never been anything but the County Commissioners' job that it didn't have to be done as a legislative act.

HOLLAND- THEN WAS THIS WHAT WAS CALLED THE LINDSAY LAW; WAS THAT INVOLVED IN THAT?

Mrs. Himstead No, the Lindsay Law was something to do with not having a non-partisan election of members of the County Council. That's something different. Because of the bitterness of the Democratic fight against the Charter, in 1946 a group of Republican County Commissioners went in. It was the first time, I guess, since the Civil War that there had been a majority of Republicans and the Democrats were defeated in '46 as County Commissioners. When the Republicans were in, they didn't like the idea that they were going to be thrown out of office after only two years, in 1948. So they filed a court case, that legally we had no right to cut short their term, that they had been elected by the people for four years and they should not have been allowed to cut short their term. But the court held with the Charter group and they were turned out of office when a special election was held. Now those were the legal fights. There was an awful lot of misrepresentation, I remember one woman who was saying,--and sent a letter to the paper saying--that according to the Charter, all Council members would be elected for life. It was that kind of thing--lies and misrepresentation. But it passed, and...

HOLLAND- WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE?

Mrs. Himstead The Charters were very much the same. But the citizens had understood it better. The papers had been full of it; it had complete coverage of information. I know the League held study groups on it. And Edith Dinwoody and I, at that time, went out and spoke to groups all over. We had a Speakers Bureau on the question and a great deal of information had gone out. And this time, it wasn't so strange and it wasn't so dangerous and people were willing to accept it. It won by a fairly good vote.

HOLLAND- WELL, WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT THE REPUBLICAN COMMISSIONERS BEING AGAINST IT, AT THAT POINT, WOULD YOU SAY THAT BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTIES WERE AGAINST IT?

Mrs. Himstead No, I wouldn't say that. The Republicans never did fight it the way the organization Democrats did. They just didn't like to have their terms cut short. This was just a legal matter that they were fighting. No, there was no organized fight against it by the Republican party, ever. But there were not all Democrats opposing it, you can see that, because there was a Democratic majority in the county. But it was just the organization. Then, after it had won, according to the Charter, it would go into effect 35 days after it had been adopted. During that 35 day period, the former government went on. Then there was to be a special election thirty days after that. For those thirty days, the County Commissioners were the County Council, just those thirty days. And then, on January 7, the Charter Committee submitted seven names, five from each of the five Commissioner Districts and two at-large. And they were submitted without party designation and we ran as Charterites. There was a token opposition that the Democrats put up, but there was no fight feeling about that. After the Charter won, there wasn't any fight about electing the Council members.

HOLLAND- WHY DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WERE PUT UP AS A MEMBER?

Mrs. Himstead Well, I think I was because of my work in the League and because I had been President during that period, and because I had taken a very active part in getting the Charter adopted. I suppose that was it.

HOLLAND- YOU'VE ALREADY SAID THAT THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WERE REALLY
TOKEN CANDIDATES.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, token candidates.

HOLLAND- WELL, LET'S GO ON THEN TO THE FIRST-TIME COUNCIL. AS I UNDERSTAND
IT, YOUR TERM WAS ONLY FOR TWO YEARS.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, we really had to work to get things done. We elected Fred Lee as President. The success for whatever we did is owing in large measure to him because he was a brilliant man, a brilliant organizer and he knew just what we had to do and he saw that we did it. Our first act was to elect a County

Manager, Irving McNayr, who had been a County Supervisor under the County Commissioner. But he had done what the County Commissioners told him to do. Now as County Manager, he had the authority. The whole spirit of the County Manager government is that the Council adopts policies which the County Manager carries out, with legal authority.

HOLLAND- LET ME GO BACK A LITTLE BIT. WE KNOW YOU WERE THE FIRST WOMAN TO SERVE ON THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL. HAD THERE EVER BEEN A WOMAN WHO SERVED ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BEFORE?

Mrs. Himstead No.

HOLLAND- THEN YOU WERE THE VERY FIRST.

Mrs. Himstead I'm very proud to say, I was the first ^{person} in Maryland elected to a local government job.

HOLLAND- THE FIRST WOMAN.

Mrs. Himstead The first woman, I mean. The first woman elected to the State Legislature was Leona Bradford at that time. But I was the first woman on the local body. They didn't know whether to call me Councilwoman or Councilman.

HOLLAND- THEY ARE STILL HAVING THAT PROBLEM. ANOTHER LITTLE QUESTION WHICH PROBABLY EVERYBODY ELSE KNOWS THE ANSWER TO. WAS FRED LEE RELATED TO BLAIR LEE?

Mrs. Himstead No, no connection at all.

HOLLAND- HAD FRED BEEN ACTIVE IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

Mrs. Himstead Oh yes, Civic Federation, he had been very active in the Civic Federation. He was a lawyer who was very active.

HOLLAND- WERE YOU ABLE TO GET THE REORGANIZATION OF THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMPLETED IN THE TWO YEARS THAT YOU PEOPLE WERE SERVING? OF COURSE, YOU TOLD ME THAT YOU CHOSE MR. MC NAYR.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, I think we did an outstanding job because we set up a responsible and nonpolitical government entirely. We appointed, according to the Charter, a three-member Personnel Board, one of which was League member Edith Dinwoody and all recommendations for all positions went through the Merit Board

to Mr. McNayr and then were referred to the County Council. And we set up a government to meet the needs for this rapidly growing community. We repealed outdated laws and put new ones in their place to carry out the spirit of the Charter, and we listened to the people. We adopted a Road Code. We put up for public auction property on which taxes had not been paid. That was a neat deal. These big-time operators, who owned a lot of land, wouldn't pay taxes on them and then after taxes had accumulated year after year after year, they'd buy them back for a small sum. Because why shouldn't they? So we put them all up for public auction. And one time, we put up signs, on, I think it was 75 pieces of Brooke Lee's property--signs "For Sale"--and then held a public auction on it. He had to come and buy them back at a regular price. They stopped doing that thing. And then we had to administer the zoning. And we adopted a Road Code. In fact, I've got to do a little boasting. We were so successful, that we were the first county in the United States to get the title "All American Municipality." And that was given us by the National Municipal League. And we also received the Achievement Award of the Municipal Finance Officers Association. I have to read this, because this is tricky. "Municipal Finance Officers Association For Outstanding Fiscal Management and Organization and Public and Financial Reporting."

HOLLAND- WELL, I THINK THAT IS GREAT, ALL IN YOUR FIRST TERM.

Mrs. Himstead Yes, all in the first term.

HOLLAND_ And I expect that the county was growing by leaps and bounds?

Mrs. Himstead Oh, it was, it was growing very fast. One of our main problems ...You see, this was so soon after the war that there had been almost no public building during that period and we needed schools. We had to start building schools very rapidly. That was one of the responsibilities given me. I went with this architect and we planned prototype schools where you could set up class rooms without having elaborate plans. You know, set up each school, the

same school in various districts without any of the embellishments, just to get the children into school.

HOLLAND- WE'VE TALKED A LOT ALREADY ON OTHER TAPES WITH OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT. WOULD YOU TELL ME WHY THE FIRST COUNTY COUNCIL DECIDED TO HAVE ANNUAL ROTATION OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL ?

Mrs. Himstead We didn't.

HOLLAND- OH, YOU DIDN'T?

Mrs. Himstead I don't know when that happened.

HOLLAND- DO YOU KNOW WHY IT HAPPENED?

Mrs. Himstead No, we elected Fred Lee for President for two years and that's all I know. There wasn't anybody else who could possibly hold it as far as I was concerned, he was so good.

HOLLAND- AS I UNDERSTAND IT, ONLY ONE OF THAT FIRST COUNCIL RAN FOR RE-ELECTION AND THAT WAS HAROLD HAMMOND.

Mrs. Himstead He was not originally elected. Lewis Merriam, who wrote the Brookings Report, was on that first elected Council, and resigned. I think it's interesting to show the nonpartisan aspect of the Council. Actually, Lewis Merriam was a Democrat and we picked Harold Hammond from Silver Spring to replace him and he was a Republican.

HOLLAND- THE COUNCIL COULD REPLACE ANYONE?

Mrs. Himstead Yes, that's right. We never asked what political party anybody belonged to. And I think that's a very good thing. We tried to get-- the Charter Committee tried to get--the Legislature to pass a law setting up nonpartisan election of the County Council, but they couldn't get it.

HOLLAND- OH, SO YOUR PARTY HAD TO BE IDENTIFIED ON THE BALLOT?

Mrs. Himstead Yes, after that first election. You see, ours was a special election. Actually, it was a seven-member Council, with four Democrats and three Republicans, because that represented the registration in the county, more or less. But we could run any way you wanted when you have a special

election and so we ran as Charterites. But after that, you had to be political. Now you notice the next County Council was four Republicans and three Democrats, running under party labels.

HOLLAND- WHY DIDN'T YOU RUN AGAIN?

Mrs. Himstead There wasn't one person there who wanted to run again except Harold . . . Well, we met constantly. We got \$1800 a year and it got to be almost a full-time job. As rapidly as that county was growing, we had to make all the zoning decisions on recommendations from the National Capital Park & Planning Commission. But we had the final authority. And, we were just meeting night and day. We could get \$20 a day, maximum \$1800, and we ran out of that in something like six months. So we did it for free the rest of the time. It just took too much time and effort. Nobody was willing to do it again.

HOLLAND- WELL, I CAN WELL UNDERSTAND THAT. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ANY MORE ABOUT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COUNCIL?

Mrs. Himstead Well, there were just a few of the laws that were passed during the first legislative session in May of '49. We repealed laws which were inconsistent with the Charter, and passed new laws to take their place. And we set up a Department of Finance as the Charter asked and a Department of Public Works. Looking over the bills that we passed, I particularly liked one. It was called "An Act to Relieve Prisoners in the County Jail from the Threat of Starvation." And the bill reads as follows:

"The Sheriff was prohibited from allowing payment of any claim for provision and food furnished for the keep and board of prisoners in excess of 35¢ a day, for each person."

Can you imagine that? It was still on the books in '49. So we repealed it. That was one of our accomplishments. But anyway, we adopted a Road Code, very much to the disgust of the developers which required that they met certain standards.

HOLLAND- IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WOULD HAVE TO PAY PART OF THE COST.

Mrs. Himstead They had to meet standards. The developers had to pay for their own roads, but they had been putting in almost any kind of a road. And there was a public meeting held in opposition to this Road Code and the developers...But incidentally, one of the bills that was most vividly fought was a bill which required that all dogs be inoculated against rabies. Why, those animal lovers came in there and just practically tore us to pieces. Oh, I could go on and on, but I guess there's no point in that.

HOLLAND- WELL, IF YOU HAVE INTERESTING THINGS THAT YOU WANT TO SAY --

Mrs. Himstead No, I think that's all.

HOLLAND- THEN, LET'S TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW EFFECTIVE HOME RULE WAS UNDER THE CHARTER AND WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO THOSE TWO BI-COUNTY AGENCIES THAT WE STILL HAVE.

Mrs. Himstead It was really very good. One of the things that we did in legislative session was to enlarge the suburban district. That was the populous area that had problems that the rest of the county didn't have. And we had more authority over that district. It's kind of hard to explain.

HOLLAND- BUT YOU DID ENLARGE THAT AREA?

Mrs. Himstead Yes, we did.

HOLLAND- AS I UNDERSTAND, YOUR ADMINISTRATION, OR YOUR JURISDICTION, COVERED MORE MATTERS?

Mrs. Himstead That was the built-up area. It would be very complicated to go into that.

HOLLAND- WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY A LITTLE BIT, THOUGH, ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BI-COUNTY AGENCIES?

Mrs. Himstead It was a very friendly relationship and we worked very closely together. Park & Planning Commission made up the recommendations for zoning and we could pass them or not as we saw fit. We generally did see fit. They did a very good job of research and presented them to us. The other agencies were Sanitary District. We weren't bothered with them at all because they had their own rules and operated under them and we got along very well.

HOLLAND- I THINK IT'S TIME WE TALKED ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY. I UNDERSTAND YOU HAD A BIG ROLE IN THE CREATION OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

Mrs. Himstead Well, I was lucky enough to have a role in that. What started my interest in it was a study group that the League had been holding for a long time on libraries. Ruth Bliss was chairman of it at the time and she was quite distressed about the deficiencies of the county and school libraries. The League had been working to see what they could do about it. And I was asked, after I was on the County Council, to bring up a bill which would set up a Department of Public Libraries in the first legislative session. In talking it over with other Council members, I found that there were some that objected. But at that time, there were two tax-area libraries; one in Bethesda that was collecting a 6¢ tax, and one in Silver Spring that was collecting a 4¢ tax. They were special "tax areas." And only the people who paid that tax would use that library. There were several volunteer libraries throughout the county, in Sandy Spring and places like that--there was one in Rockville that had fees, on a fee system--but not regular public libraries. So, the Council was willing to set up a public hearing on the bill. And to my great astonishment, the Bethesda library bitterly opposed it and so did the AAUW (American Association of University Women). I never could understand it. But they were doing it to help Bethesda. Silver Spring wanted it very much. The up-county people were neutral about it, because they didn't quite know if it was going to add to their tax bill, but they didn't know, maybe it would be a good thing. The reason Bethesda was opposed was that they were housed in the Bethesda High School and they had been saving as much money as they could toward a building for themselves. And they had a little nest egg. And to pursue it further, a bird in the hand was much pleasanter to them than a possible bird in the bush. They didn't know what was going to happen and they didn't want to give up their money. And they didn't want to give up any of the authority that this taxing-area gave them. They were

really quite unhappy about the whole thing. At the same time, Silver Spring wasn't in as fortunate a position and wanted it. Finally, we asked a committee to investigate and report and I was able to persuade the Council members who didn't want it. And we passed a very, kind of, wishy-washy bill, but it was all right. It set up a Department of Public Libraries. But when a Director was appointed, he was to negotiate with each of the libraries to see whether they wanted to come in or not. And that satisfied Bethesda because they didn't have to come in if they didn't want to. Of course, we would have had the authority to cancel their tax-area in our legislative session, but we didn't want to do that. We wanted to work with them. So, that bill was passed. And the Director was to negotiate with each existing library. There would be a central depository and several branch libraries. Well, it proved to be very successful. They consolidated right away. As soon as the committee was appointed in 1950, they consolidated the five existing libraries and by January of '52, there were seven branch libraries set up with three Bookmobiles and a Central Depository in Gaithersburg. In July of 1952, Bethesda joined the system. And you all know what the library system is now. They have been very successful and the schools have benefitted from it and I think there have been no objections to it.

HOLLAND- I'M INTERESTED THAT YOUR CENTRAL DEPOSITORY WAS IN GAITHERSBURG.
I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT GAITHERSBURG SEEMED MILES AWAY.

Mrs. Himstead I don't know why, but that's where it was. They had a building. It was a great problem to get buildings to house all these things at that time and Silver Spring didn't have a building but they very soon after got it. Mr. Moreland was made Director and I think the success of the libraries was dependent upon him because he was such a good negotiator. You see, he'd go out to Sandy Springs or any of those places. Rockville didn't enter at the beginning, either, because it was an incorporated town and then Takoma Park was partly the District of Columbia and partly Montgomery County [and partly in Prince George's County, Md. Together these two Maryland Counties were incorporated

as the City of Takoma Park, so it had a special problem. But these were all ironed out very well and those first people who worked on the Bookmobile-- Patty Rowse was one of them--and hear them talk about the demands that were put on them! Every place they stopped, people were so eager. So, really, the county did want libraries, but they didn't know it.

HOLLAND- YOU JUST MENTIONED PATTY ROWSE. WAS IT MRS. ROWSE?

Mrs. Himstead Mrs. Edward Rowse, who is still very active in the League. She is a trained librarian and she worked very hard. She was particularly interested in the schools and the reaction of the children to the libraries.

HOLLAND- WOULD YOU LIKE TO COMMENT ON THE GROWTH OF THE LIBRARIES?

Mrs. Himstead I really know nothing about it. I was there until '57 but I was active in a lot of other things and I just saw that they were growing beautifully and that every place you went, every time you read anything, you read about a new branch starting in. Nobody seems to object to what it costs.

It was provided that each local library have its own committee. The people were consulted all the time; nobody was putting anything over on them. And I think that was one of the successes.

I know when the Charter was under consideration, Volunteer Fire Departments all over the county fought it, because they didn't understand it. They thought that they were going to be wiped out. We just laid out their tax districts and paid them tax money to help them operate. So, by working with what was there, we really were able to change things without too much difficulty.

HOLLAND- WELL, WHEN YOU COME BACK TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY, YOU'LL HAVE TO VISIT THE NEW LIBRARIES.

Mrs. Himstead I was down there. I was asked to come down and speak at the Bethesda Library anniversary, at one time, and I was impressed with how it had grown. Let me go 'way back.

HOLLAND- SURE.

Mrs. Himstead About that first year on the County Council, we were speaking

about building. We met in the basement of the Courthouse. And it was said we should have a new building. So we made plans and got under way for the building that they now have. And we were talking about the costs. And somebody said, "Do you think it should be air conditioned?" And we said, "Oh no, we can save that much money." I've often thought of that. No building in the district now would ever go up without air conditioning.

HOLLAND- MRS. HIMSTEAD, WOULD YOU TELL US HOW YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT AND IN THE LEAGUE PREPARED YOU FOR WHAT YOU WERE DOING WHEN YOU CAME TO MADISON?

Mrs. Himstead I never could have had better experience in my life than I had in Montgomery County, both in the League and in county government. Because soon after I came here, I became editor of this small town newspaper, The Madison Shoreline Times, and as such I attended all government committee meetings, although the government is quite different. It's a very different form of government--town meeting government entirely. But I had the background I needed in zoning and finance, in local government that I learned in League participation and in putting that into action in County Council. And I can never imagine a better background for a newspaper editor than what I had in Montgomery County. And, it was fun.

HOLLAND- I THINK THAT'S FINE, AND I CERTAINLY THANK YOU.

Mrs. Himstead Well, I've enjoyed it. It was over 22 years ago, and it was kind of hard to remember all those things that happened.

June 29, 1972

Shore 'Nuff



By Dorothy Himstead

We are at a loss to understand the action of the majority members of the Board of Selectmen in dismissing the report of the Health Council Study Committee before the public hearing, called at their and the Committee's behest, was held.

The report seems to be an innocuous one. Its aim is to involve more citizens in their government and to use their special talents for the benefit of the town.

Its function, as we read the report, is to act in an advisory and coordinating capacity. As proposed it would have no legislative or executive power and could in no way take over from elected officials. We feel sure that any official body responsible for solving knotty problems would welcome the kind of help a broad based advisory group could give. The advice needn't be followed.

Maybe there should be structural changes in the organization, but we would assume that, after hearing the wishes of the public, discussion which has been cut off could be reopened. Maybe it's a matter of semantics. Maybe "implement" a word to which the First Selectman objects, means to "implement" a study not to "implement" action since the Council would have no power to do the latter.

The Council, per se, would cost the taxpayer nothing, as we read it. It would employ the technical knowledge of volunteers in making studies, as the Committee has done in its requested survey of the drug problem.

In the words of Dr. Susar Spencer, former Director of Health, who in 1965 wanted, but did not get, an advisory health board, "In Madison too few people are attempting to manage too many matters, to solve too many problems, while there are in town many people of skill and knowledge who are willing to serve their community if asked or allowed."

We hope the majority members of the Board will reconsider their action so that the town can use the services of more of its responsible and knowledgeable citizens.

A reader who is waging a determined battle against junk mail and what she calls "a proliferation of bought up sucker lists" reports with pride a small measure of success. She has fought to a standstill the promotional campaigns of two well-known national companies by crumpling up and sending back coupons making them unfit for computer analysis. They have both dropped her from their mailing lists.

As for the flood of humanitarian requests, she notes the action of a clergyman who had received forty solicitations for "worthy causes". He wrote each explaining the channels through which he gave and ending with "If you happen to have paid for our address maybe you can use this letter to get a refund."