

**McLean County Museum of History**

**Luellen Laurenti Collection**

Processed by  
Summer 2024

**Collection Information**

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1939-2006
RESTRICTIONS:	None
PROVENANCE:	Gift of friend James Crisman, summer 2024
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	See also: Oversize for pencil drawing of Laurenti, poem lauding her, rendering of Sen. Paul Simon. Library: <i>Illinois Women Legislators</i>

## Brief History

Luellen Laurenti was born in West Virginia in 1939, the daughter of Steve Watson and Alice Counts. She attended Marietta College in Marietta, Ohio and the University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois where she earned a master's degree in foreign languages. Luellen married Joseph L. Laurenti in 1967 and joined the Illinois State University faculty where she taught Spanish and women's studies.

Soon after settling in Normal, Illinois, Luellen began to participate in efforts to promote women's rights. She joined and later led the local chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in their efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois. Laurenti worked tirelessly to organize local meetings and rallies in support of the ERA in Illinois.

On April 9, 1975, Luellen was among 100 other local supporters who rallied for the ERA with thousands of other Illinois supporters in Springfield. The following October, Luellen kicked off a drive to get 10,000 McLean signatures in support of the ERA with a rally at Bloomington's Wesley United Methodist Church. She pressed the legislative measure, which had already passed in the Illinois House.

*"It is time for the Senate to join the House and carry out the wishes of the majority by ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment this year."*

— Luellen Laurenti, Bloomington

Undeterred, Luellen joined the Women's Political Caucus, whose goal was to elect legislators who would vote for the passage of the ERA. She became the 44th district coordinator for ERA Central, a statewide group supporting ratification of the ERA, and later the legislative coordinator of the McLean County chapter of NOW. Her dedication to these efforts resulted in her election as president of the Illinois branch of NOW.

Luellen was also the executive director of the International Women's Year Conference in 1977. Hosted at Illinois State University, an estimated 1,300 women attended and participated in workshops that explored such topics as leadership skills, the legal status of women, employment opportunities, sexual discrimination in education, women and politics, crisis in childcare, finance and credit, and more. The conference also featured speakers, films, and discussion panels.

On May 10, 1980, Luellen was among more than 100 McLean County residents who participated in the Chicago national ERA march.

Pro-ERA supporters breathed a sigh of relief in the fall of 1978 when the United States Congress extended the deadline for ratification of the ERA to June 1982. Unfortunately, even with the extension, Congress was unable to get the legislation passed.

Luellen worked as a Democratic Central Committee woman for the 15th Congressional District from 1984 to 1998. In 1988 she worked in Springfield as a lobbyist for Illinois NOW, the America Association of University Women (AAUW), and the Governor's commission on the Status of Women in Illinois.

At the time of her death in 2000, *The Pantagraph* proclaimed her a "tireless worker for women's equality. She dedicated herself to legislative and electoral issues to advance the status of women and create opportunities for the next generation of women."

-- from *McLean County Museum of History Women's History Month March 2024*

## Scope

The collection includes assorted correspondence, photographs, news articles, baby books, ISU memorial scholarship documents, etc. Most relate to Luellen; some to her husband Joseph and his kin.

### Box and Folder Inventory

#### Folder 1: General

- 1.1 Obituary, *Pantagraph*, 2000 June 20. Laminated.
- 1.2 Pencil sketch of Laurenti by "Andre" 1966.
- 1.3 "Thanks Newt" captioned photo of lobbyist Laurenti protesting against Contract With American on ISU campus, *Daily Vidette*, 1995 March 30.
- 1.4 "Newsmakers: Luellen Laurenti" *Pantagraph*, Aug 26, 1997. Interview and photo.
- 1.5 "Laurenti's legacy cited: NOW activist lauded as role model," *Pantagraph*, 2000 June 23.
- 1.6 US Passports: 1966 and 1971.

#### Folder 2: Birth Records & Baby Books

- 2.1 West Virginia birth certificate, Charleston General Hospital birth certificate, US Dept of Commerce birth registration notification, 1939.
- 2.2 Nursery Dept Certificate from Calvary Baptist Sunday school, 1939.
- 2.3 Hair snipping in tissue paper, nd.
- 2.4 Early childhood correspondence, greeting cards, etc.
- 2.5 Three baby books.

#### Folder 3: Childhood & Youth

- 3.1 Seven dance recital programs in which Luellen Watson participated in Charleston, West Virginia, 1946-1950.
- 3.2 Letter to parents at home while she is traveling, August 1954.
- 3.3 Catholic Church confirmation certificate, May 1961 at Marietta, Ohio.

#### Folder 4: Personal Correspondence

- 4.1 Luellen to parents from Marietta College, Oct 9, 1957.
- 4.2 Luellen to parents from college, Feb 1, 1959.
- 4.3 Six letters from Joseph Laurenti teaching summer school in Normal to Luellen Watson in Madrid, Spain. (He's travelling to Madrid after the final letter.) Jul 1-Aug 6, 1966. Primarily in English but bits in Spanish.
- 4.4 Two telegrams from Luxembourg & Argentina congratulating on marriage, Jun 1967. Marietta College President Duddy to Luellen congratulating her on her recent marriage. July 19, 1967.
- 4.5 25 sheets of letters in Italian, 1961-1980.

#### Folder 5: Women's Rights Activities

- 5.1 Booklet: The Legal Status of Homemakers in Illinois by National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, Feb 1977. 40pp.

- 5.2 Illinois Times newsletter of Illinois NOW, Jan 1986 Includes article with photo of Illinois NOW president Laurenti at Governor's signing of Spousal Health Insurance Bill.
- 5.3 Letter from President Laurenti of Illinois NOW on Walk for Equality, Aug 1987. Original & photocopy.
- 5.4 Bumper sticker, "Elect Women for a Change" from National Organization for Women (NOW), 1992.
- 5.5 Letter from Laurenti as Democratic State Central Committeeman of 15th Congressional District in memory of Joy T. Perry, May 1996.
- 5.6 Women's Voice newsletter of ISU Women's Studies program, Sept 1999. Includes article on Women & Employment event that include Laurenti's presentation & photo.
- 5.7 Condolence letters from Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, Governor George Ryan, Treasurer Judy Barr Topinka, June 2000.

**Folder 6: Memorial Scholarship at ISU**

- 6.1 Correspondence, gift acknowledgements for the family, financial summary, etc. 2001-2006.

**Folder 7: Miscellaneous**

- 7.1 2024 Museum gift agreement
- 7.2 Assorted papers about ceramicist Prof. Pedro Ara, photo of Mademoiselle Adeline Presit, obit for Mary Mondin of Hillsboro IL, Lina Wertmuller filmography with notes, Luxembourg tourist literature, unattributed poem, etc.

**Folder 8: Photos**

- 8.1 Photo prints including several of Luellen at women's right rallies, photos taken with Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, Tipper Gore, Gov George Ryan, Gov. Jim Edgar, Treasurer Judy Barr Topinka. Also includes photo endorsed from Bill Clinton and unsigned photos Sen Dick Durbin, Paul Simon, Carol Mosely Braun.

**Loose Books**

Daybooks (calendars and diaries), dated 1958, 1963-1964, 1964-1965, 1977, 1981, 1982, 1983. 1958 volume is in diary form.