

Sara Greiner Leffler

By Jo Ellen Litz 2006

In 1902, Sara Greiner Leffler was born in Lebanon PA to Jere and Abby Greiner. She married Earl J. Leffler, a self-employed printing engraver, in 1927. They had one son, Jon Leffler.

Henry Homan, Up The Snitz Creek columnist, once wrote that Sara, "made a special effort to keep Lebanon County free from gambling and to reduce the number of kids playing hooky from school.... Slot machines...were a fixture in the back rooms of certain gas stations...." She must have enjoyed politics. Beginning in 1948, for eight years Sara served as Vice Chairman of the Republican State Committee of Pennsylvania. In 1956, Sara served as the female delegate to the Republican National Convention from Pennsylvania.

Before that, Sara (Sue) was on the editorial staff of the Lebanon Daily News from 1925 until 1947 when she decided to run for mayor of the City of Lebanon. Leon Miller wrote in a letter to the editor of the Lebanon Daily News, the newspaper "forbade its employees to be involved in politics, and Sue had to resign." That took conviction to quit her job and act on her vision for the City. Unfortunately, Sara lost the mayoral race to a Doctor William Focht by about 1000 votes.

Using her editorial skills, in 1940, Sara edited a Souvenir Program for Lebanon's Bicentennial.

Jon, her son, fondly recalls how his mother exemplified tough love. "She really loved and understood people. She worked both with the rich and poor, governors and people in trouble. She looked at everyone as a person. We're all taught that, but she believed it in her heart. She realized that some people don't change unless they get a kick in the butt. She did that only when it was required. She'd work within the system to get things done."

Jon continued, "She was a (1924) Lebanon Valley College graduate with a teaching degree. In the 1920s, she worked at Reeds Settlement House, Philadelphia, where they assisted poor immigrants."

"Then she was a police reporter." Eventually, according to a Daily News article, she became the first badge-carrying police woman, "with all the powers, but without the pay." As a reporter, she'd go along on police raids. She'd tell of her adventures under a pseudonym of "Jane Frail."

Jon added, "Eventually she entered politics. Finally, she was a home and school officer, a truant officer, for 20 years in the Lebanon School District. She did it her own way. She had the experience and knew how to help people in need. She'd help them find jobs. She contacted her friends in business for donations to help

other people. The Daily News clarified, “Undaunted by her inability to drive a car, she made her visits by taxi.”

Jon concludes with, “She worked hard for President Eisenhower (campaigning in all 67 counties) and Governor Duff, and then she retired. It's a gift to know when to be kind and when to be tough with people, but she had that gift of intuition. She'd meet them on their level to help them. Even if she gave them hell, they still liked her.”

Joe McDonald was her neighbor at Walnut and Gannon Streets. “She lived in a brownstone building. It's still there today. Her dad had an office in that building. He had a construction company. I remember that she was a truant officer and a good neighbor. I was a kid. She got along well with my parents. She was smart in politics, and well-respected.”

Sara had chutzpah that received statewide recognition. In 1954, from Governor John S. Fine, Sara received the Distinguished Daughters of PA award, which recognized her leadership and contributions to the state. Per a Daily News article, “In 1961, she was appointed to the first Civil Rights Commission....In 1969, she received a Service to Mankind Award from the Lebanon Sertoma Club. The quality of her achievements was above reproach.”

Sara also had a theatrical side. Nationwide, she helped promote a movie with actor Jimmy Smith who performed locally on two occasions at the Mt. Gretna Theater.

In 1983, a Lebanon Daily News feature by Nancy Frye stated that she was a, “feisty, free-spirited female, a woman...declaring her independence.”

In 1986, the Lebanon County Republican Committee, at a dinner dance in the Prescott Fire Hall, honored Sara. In 1987, she served as Mayor Betty Eiceman's campaign manager.

She passed away in 1987. A Lebanon Daily News editorial writer wrote, “Mrs. Leffler...was a pioneer on several fronts.” Russell K. “Flash” Light said, “Sue Leffler didn't have women's lib...She made her own rights. She walked that path and no one walked in front of her.... Sue Leffler is small in physical stature, but she stood tall, as tall as anyone in the state of Pennsylvania.”