

An Interview with Mary Lee Sargent  
Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
Oral History project

Interview # ISE-A-L-2019-061

Mary Lee Sargent, teacher and activist for civil rights, LGBT rights, women's equality and peace was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *ERA Fight in Illinois* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location: June 28, 2019. August 8, 2019. ALPL.

Dates: Jun 28 & Aug 8, 2019

Location: Telephonic interview with Mary Lee in  
Bow, New Hampshire

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Dr. Jan Droegkamp, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview being  
processed

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 1:52 + 2:36 / 1.87 + 2.6 = 4.47 hrs

Session 1: Early life and beginning a life in activism and move to Illinois

Session 2: Mary Lee's involvement in the ERA fight in Illinois

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 4,  
2019.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,  
Illinois.

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## Abstract

Mary Lee Sargent, *Illinois Statecraft – ERA*, ISE-A-L-2019-061

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Mary Lee Sargent was born to parents Benjamin Sargent and Dorothy Herald Sargent in McAllen, Texas, in September 1940. Her father was an advertising manager and her mother worked as the executive director of several non-for-profit agencies. Mary Lee graduated from high school in Dallas, Texas. She received her BA degree in History from Southern Methodist University in 1962. She went directly on to graduate school and received her MA and ABD in History from the University of Texas-Austin. She moved to Illinois and spent most of her career as a history and women's studies professor at Parkland Community College in Champaign from 1968-2003. In her final years at Parkland she served as Director of the Office of Women's Programs and Services (2002-2003). She continued teaching after retirement as an adjunct professor in New Hampshire at Southern New Hampshire University, Plymouth State University and New Hampshire technical Institute.

Mary Lee Sargent started her social and economic activism in college working on civil rights issues. She is a lifelong member of NAACP, Women Against Racism and Students Non Violent Coordinating Committee (to 1976). Her feminist activism began in 1970. She was a founder and board member of A Women's Place, a domestic violence shelter in Champaign. She was co-founder of A Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens (1981-1993), advocating for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the Illinois legislature in 1982, She was a co-founder of Women in Resistance (1993-present) and co-founder of Women Against Racism at the University of Illinois (1990's). Her third area of activism was LGBT rights from 1970's to present, including organizing the Lavender Prairie Women's Center in the 1980's and co-founder of the 85% Coalition in 1988 to lobby for inclusion of sexual orientation in the Illinois statutes. Her peace activism spanned the 1960's to present, including serving as chair of the New Hampshire Peace Action (2005-2012). She is a sought after speaker and has written extensively on her experience on ERA and other causes. She is living in New Hampshire with her wife Ann of twenty five years. They have two children and grandchildren.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** fight over passage of ERA; University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana; Parkland Community College; Southern New Hampshire University; New Hampshire Technical Institute; NAACP; Women Against Racism; Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee; Women's Studies courses; National Organization for Women; A Women's Place, A Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens, Lavender Prairie Women Center, 85% Coalition; New Hampshire Peace Action; Radcliff Institute for Advance Study at Harvard University; Suffrage Movement.

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