

Thom, Doris A. (1920 –) When World War II broke out, Thom took a job with Gilman Engineering in Janesville, WI. She began attending Machinist Local 1266 meetings and in 1941 became the first woman elected to the executive board, as recording secretary. When Thom became pregnant with her second child, she was immediately fired with no opportunity to return. After several years, Thom took a job in the cushion department at the General Motors Automobile Assembly Plant in Janesville, the only section where women were employed. In 1960, she agreed to serve as alternate committee woman for her Local 95 Union, then ran for the executive committee as recording secretary in 1961—another first for a woman. Thom held that position through 1968, during which time she was sent to regional meetings with women from all over the Midwest. There she discovered that women were holding jobs throughout their plants, not kept in just one department. When Thom asked why this was not the case in Janesville, she was told that keeping the women separate was “past practice.” But it was 1965 and the Civil Rights Act had passed, initiating the EEOC. Thom contacted both the Wisconsin and federal EEOC and successfully changed the practice at her plant. “I was not very popular then,” says Thom. “My first year out in the plant was hell. Now (2004) there are 380 women working in every department of Janesville’s G.M. plant, and they comprise nearly one-third of the workforce.” In addition, Thom was a founding member of NOW, and was one of five founders of the Blackhawk Community Credit Union in Janesville (1965). She served on the Wisconsin Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women (1971 – 1975), and was president of Rock County (WI) Democratic Women for 15 years. In 2001, Thom, who has three children, received the Catherine Conroy Award honoring Wisconsin women dedicated to the rights of women and labor. Archives: Thom’s oral history, recorded in 1990 for The Women of Wisconsin Labor Oral History Project, is at The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI. (ABS)