



103 BALLOTS — Wisconsin's delegates to the 1924 Democratic National Convention, which nominated John W. Davis as the

party's presidential candidate after 103 ballots, are shown gracing the rear platform of their train.

—Historical Society Photo

# Mary Lou Burg / We unified the party

By MARC EISEN  
News Staff Writer

NEW YORK — West Bend's link to national politics will likely be severed next January when Mary Lou Burg steps down from her post as Deputy Chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

"Not everybody can say they accomplished what they set out to do," the 44-year-old daughter of former Washington County Sheriff Leo Burg said Tuesday afternoon in her convention office here at the Statler-Hilton Hotel.

Across the street at Madison Square Garden lay the proof of her's and other party leaders' diligent work, a brotherly, back-slapping, somewhat boring Democratic Party Convention making plans for the recapture of Washington.

It was a continent apart from the street fights

of the bloody convention of 1968, the year that Mary Lou Burg, as chairman of the Washington County Democratic Party, was first elected to the party's national committee. Two years later, her "long suit" and administrative work recognized, she accepted a paid position with the national organization.

"I spent six years in Washington. They were filled with crises, tensions and political struggles. It hasn't been easy, but we literally did what we set out to do," she told *The News*.

"We unified the party and provided not only a candidate who can win, but a solid party base for him to work with," she said with evident satisfaction.

"It wasn't like that in 1968 or 1972," she added.

So Mary Lou Burg, as the omens portend now, will be hanging up the spikes like a political Joe

DiMaggio, untarnished and a winner all the way.

In May, she announced that she wouldn't seek a fifth term on the national committee, citing both a degree of weariness with the job and the fact that the strength of the committee had been diluted by its enlargement from 110 to 360 members.

Last month, she said she would be stepping down as deputy chairman, explaining that the new party boss, to be selected after the November election, should be free to name his own assistant.

She denied that her retirement from the political life stemmed from any pressure from Gov. Lucey, who she differed with on the protracted dispute last spring over the state open presidential primary.

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## The Dems in 1924

The last national political convention to be held in New York City — the Democratic convention held in 1924 in the old Madison Square Garden — was recalled by two men who were there on a recent NBC 'Today'. Ben Gross, who covered the 1924 convention as a cub reporter (later an editor with *The New York Daily News*), remembered sitting next to Will Rogers in the press section.

Gross described that convention as "chaos" and recalled that Rogers said: "If you took a poll at a political convention, 98 per cent of the people would be sent to the insane asylum." And, referring to the length of the convention — 16 days, Rogers said: "New York invited these people to attend a convention; it didn't invite them to live here."

Martin Jelin recalled being a page at the 1924 convention.

Jelin remembered William Jennings Bryan at the 1924 convention — the first convention to be covered nationally by radio. Bryan, about to deliver a speech on the podium, brushed the microphone away, Jelin recalled, and exclaimed: "Take that instrument of the devil away!"

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Paul Newman

and

Mary Lou Burg,

back in 1968



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Burg also saw no connection between her decision to call it quits and similar action taken by Donald Peterson, Marge Pattison, and Frank Nikolay, all independent Democratic voices who on occasion clashed with the governor and who no longer hold party offices.

"It was unusual, but it wasn't orchestrated," the deputy chairman said of the recent turn of events.

"I've always been outspoken and independent," she said. And not necessarily sympathetic to the activist views of most women Democratic leaders in Wisconsin.

(She opposed the proposal by the Women's

Caucus that would have required half of the delegates to the 1980 convention to be female.

"I'm against quotas in any shape or form," Burg said. "I view equal rights as meaning equal access.")

"I never got into politics thinking it was a career. It was an avocation," Burg remarked, which seemed to explain her willingness to step out of the public limelight at a relatively young age.

What are you going to do?, she was asked.

"I don't know yet, I'm deferring that decision," she responded, adding that she wanted a job that would allow her to live either in Washington or Wisconsin.

Her indecision was understandable. Right now, Mary Lou Burg is putting in 18-hour days,

living on sandwiches and soft drinks, as she helps run the convention. And while the fierce demands of the political life are a major factor in her decision to retire, you couldn't see it from her calm demeanor Tuesday.

The deputy chairman was immaculately dressed in a blue seersucker outfit. She was cool and professional amidst the general convention craziness.

In fact, Burg doesn't look much different now than she did in a picture appearing in a recent issue of the Wisconsin Democrat, a party publication.

It was a snapshot of her with Paul Newman taken when he campaigned in West Bend for Gene McCarthy. The year was 1968 when Mary Lou Burg began her climb.