

A CHRONICLE OR A REALISTIC PICTURE IN WORDS-OF THE ORIGIN FOUNDING AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE DES MOINES' WOMENS' CLUB.

MARCH, 31, 1920.

When an editor in search of news, sends out a cub he says "don't come back until you get a story", so my chief told me to stop at nothing, find out all you can and as Edna Fether would say, "I stuck my repertorial pencil through my "Psyche" and fared forth some six or eight weeks ago, first to the Historical Bldg., to read the daily papers of October 1885, then to the Club Custodian for the Secretaries books. As I pressed my club nose closer and closer, further and further into the past I found that if I painted a picture, in words of the early years of your club so that you might visualize all its, aspirations, hopes, failures, and successes, I must tell "Tales out of School" give away club secrets, but surely that is permissible here, right in the bosom of our own family. As I recall the volumes and newspapers I have browsed over and the women I have interviewed, I am reminded of the Bureau of War Risks and the information they are collecting. I read that the Bureau occupies ten acres of floor space, ^{on} a small farm. If the material I have gathered were placed end to end, as is the present day method of the statistician it would cover twice that space., and to go further with the comparison when the information I sought was precise, it was often not precise enough, like one John J. O'Brien in the Bureau who wished to identify himself, instead of giving his certificate ~~to us~~, simply wrote "I am the John J. O'Brien whose wife was Mary A., this helped a little, for there were only 175 John J. O'Briens on the list and only 50 of them had wives named Mary A., likewise in choosing which volume to consult I have frequently "run down" and adopted resolution only to find it withdrawn- A contract duly signed only to find it abandoned in a later volume, so I warn you, as my story progresses, you may note some discrepancies because if one women told me it was white and another assured me it was black, I was forced to put it half way between.

First, the background of the picture, perhaps a few of you can stretch your memories way back to the time of Charles Dickens' visit to America, in 1863--a dinner was given in his honor at the Old Aster House to which women were not asked. This was an affront, they resented and Jennie Jane Croly soon after this, issued a call and "Sorosis Sisters" was organized--Alice Cary being the first president.

The "New England Womens Club" was the first womans organization to be called a club--still in existence. A few years after Sorosis, came the organization known as the "Association for the advancement of Women"--A few of the intellectual women of the country dared to align themselves with this body. Mrs. Mary A. Livermore was first Pres., Lucy Stone, Mrs. Howe, Louise Alcott, Abbie May, Mrs Wolcott and many other noted women were among its members. The 13th congress October of 1885, was held in the Capital City upon invitation of Iowa's six members. These were, Mesdames Billington, Orwig, Hunting Callanan, Dr. Cleaves, & McCowan. During this congress Mills Wright and Durley joined the ranks. What a great event that was for Des Moines and for the whole State of Iowa. After one of the inspiring sessions a few women collected in the organ loft of Old Plymouth to discuss having a club. Dr. Cleaves invited them to her house for the 14th to further discuss it. Her guest Mrs. Wolcott of Boston would remain over in order to

assist them. Louise Alcott was expected, and Mrs. Orwig planned a wonderful reception in Lincoln Bldg., for all children of the City so they might shake hands with their beloved author of Little Men and Little Women. She failed to come and great was the disappointment of the little folks. The stimulus of these programs created a desire to study the conditions and needs of women and set them to thinking, as nothing had ever done before.

What good does the A.A.W. do? was no longer difficult to answer. October 14th found twenty women gathered at the home of Dr. Cleaves on High Street, eager to be a part of the new organization. They organized by electing three officers and decided that only the A.A.W. members should be called charter members. The dues were placed at \$1.00. Tuesday from 2 to 4 chosen as club day. Twelve women were appointed to act as directors. Privilege was given each one present to ask a friend to join. They discussed establishing Coffee houses as their first work. October 27th club day found only eight women present, not one of whom is now in the City. At this meeting the name was chosen. The constitution of the New Century Club of Philadelphia was taken as a model and the committees of the New England club of Boston were adopted, as follows: Art and Literature, Work, Education and discussion. A fund of \$350.00 was reported from the sale of tickets to the congress just closed.

At the third meeting Mrs. Patchin read a paper on Art & Literature, the first ever read before the club. It was received with great interest and enthusiasm by the 16 members present. The President announced at this meeting that she was having difficulty in finding chairmen for the committees. No one was willing to assume responsibility, also only six members had paid their dues. After this astonishing statement Mrs. Callanan moved that the six charter members be asked to come to the next meeting and make an effort to see all of those who had not paid and try to learn if possible, just who intend to be members of this club. Nine more dollars came in that day.

At the Fourth meeting a member was to read a paper on Woman's Dress, but she failed to appear. The time was filled by each member giving her idea of the meaning of the committees "Work" and "Discussion". What are the duties of these committees? Some one suggested she would write to Abbie May of Boston and find out. In looking through the Nov. Daily News of 1885 I found a copy of her letter in reply. I wish I could give it all to you, it was so quaint and interesting and kindly, she said. "You should study the different kinds of work in which women are engaged and the conditions in which they are doing their work."

"Discussion"-The committee is not expected to do the discussing but to choose the subject and appoint the members to prepare and be sure to hear both sides of a question, get the other side, always, she said. Then, she said, "our club has one feature that I cannot refrain from telling you about, our meetings are free from gossip and she closed with this greeting. "All Hail to our sister-work center in Des Moines, may it live long and prosper."

At the next meeting Mrs. Orwig read a paper on Domestic service and there was a topic on which every woman had ideas, and wanted to share them. During the year the club petitioned Legislature to pass a bill making the selling of tobacco to minors an offense.

"A news Boys benefit was talked of. A resolution was ^{passed} ~~made~~ declaring that "great injury is done the young by too much society." A committee was appointed to consider starting a Womens exchange. A paper of sanitation, a very scholarly discourse, was given with only six members present. All meetings were held in homes. Year closed with 34 members.

The second year the club day was changed to Wednesday and various places were tried out. An offer from a woman lecturer was given this reply, Resolved "that the Club deems it ^{of} more importance that the talent of its members be developed ~~and~~ that outside lectures however excellent, be employed" A resolution was sent to the Board of Education recommending that Industrial training be put into the schools. A paper on reform and morality of dress was given, one on Christian Science, one on Woman in Politics, two new Committees were added, social and miscellaneous.

A Critic was appointed for each meeting and current events were introduced. Eleven new members were added this year.

The third year opened with a prospect for a club home. A member of the building Committee of the Y.M.C.A. presented their plans with a request for the support of the club. A committee was appointed for consultation and later club decided to give no financial aid as a club, but individually, to do as much as possible to further the project. A resolution was offered that the club constitution be read once in three months in open meeting. A petition was sent the legislature to establish a state Board of Charities. At this time a very good friend of the club who was not at all interested in the Y.M.C.A. project, was solicited for a contribution for the Bldg. fund. He refused it and said he would give a thousand dollars to the Womens' Club to aid them in establishing an art collection on no conditions were placed on that gift. *They could use it as they saw fit.*

In the fourth year the club was limited to 100 and a by law passed that "A taste for good literature be the necessary equipment for applicants. A paper on Henry George and his land theory was given. I refer to the topics of the club papers to indicate the mental caliber of the early membership. The club was transformed into a Stock Co., \$3.00 per share limited to 1000 shares. At the end of this year the Treasurer was instructed to make a judicious interest bearing investment of the \$100.00 in the treasury. Stanley the African explorer, ~~was not here~~ to lecture, by the club. About this time a contract was made with Y.M.C.A. ~~Board~~ ^{to} occupy the fifth floor of the new bldg. On april 23 a called meeting was held to discuss buying some works of Art for the new club rooms, At the suggestion of President Windsor. Also each member was asked to contribute a cup plate and spoon, Tables and chairs were bought at an expense of \$24.00. Mrs. Conger made the first gift to the club, two art windows which were placed in the rooms. The meetings thru September, October and November were held in "our Club rooms near the sky, as secretary Risser put it, with no elevator and in such an unfinished condition, that they seemed entirely inadequate. A Public reception was given there on the opening of the new Bldg. The chief topic of discussion at the board meetings, was the contract with the Y.M.C.A., and the remainder of the year, meetings were held in Church parlors. The lack of funds seemed a great draw-back and this time who should come to the rescue, Who? but that versatile "all round" club woman, Mrs. Hillis, whom we still have

with us, always willing to do whatever she is asked...she proposed to give an Author's Carnival, she was appointed chairman of a Committee and she engineered the first entertainment given by the club to raise money. The result was \$597.00 added to the treasury. Great dissatisfaction was felt with the Y.M.C.A. management, as they evidently tried to monopolize some of our quarters. An indignation meeting was held and a resolution passed to take whatever steps seemed necessary to preserve, inviolate our rights. Later they decided to close off the stairway by injunction. Then the Y.M.C.A. Board offered a ten year lease of their auditorium and parlor free of expense, if the club would relinquish all claims to the fifth floor. This was declined.

The sixth year opened with a ^{paper} Living Lamps or Literature that endures, by Mrs. Billington, which was received with great enthusiasm. Also an able paper was given on Theosophy, by Mrs. Stewart Goodrill which brot, forth animated discussion. This year Mrs. S.A. Robertson opened her home and invited the club to hear a talk on Russia and her her needs, by Miss Alice French, This resulted in the giving of charity a Ball for the benefit of the Russian relief fund. On September 27, 1893 Mrs. Clapp in her inaugural address made the first public mention of art as the object of the club she appealed to the members "to bear in mind that the establishment of an Art collection and a place in which to exhibit pictures is the object of this club". Three years later during Mrs. Peters administration, 12 years after the organization, the articles of incorporation were amended and the words "Benevolent purposes" inserted, this ~~offending~~ ^{variety} of interpretations. Many lively discussions were held in the privacy of the Board meetings. Is a free art gallery a benevolence? Yes! of the highest type said some, but the more practical minded members who longed to ~~feed~~ ^{clothe} the hungry and clothe the naked said "it is far cry from Art to Philanthropy."

At the Presidents house a social meeting was held in the form of a "progressive conversation" the topics being placed on the tables after the guests were seated in order to have the talk strictly unpromptu. It was said that speech flowed freely from the tongues of those club women proving that nine years more or less of club discipline had been effect ~~The year closed with 157 members.~~

In 1894 Miss Elisabeth Matthews introduced the subject of child study a comparatively new science, telling of the first mental tests to be made upon children entering school. Socialism was a much discussed topic as Kellys army was marching down upon us from the west. Everybodys mind and heart were taxed to the utmost to keep sane and reasonable. We occupied five different rooms during this year and closed with 157 members.

In October, 1895 we celebrated our tenth anniversary, by asking our husbands to an evening program. It was a gala affair. Our beloved and gracious president, Mrs. A.B. Cummins had charge of the program which we all thought at that time was very brilliant. This party was held at our circle Hall which was our temporary home. Behold it now, "How are the Mighty fallen!"

Another memorable occasion of this year was the meeting of the State Federation of Womens' Clubs, the Pres. of the General Federation

Mrs. Ellen M. Huntington

being with us for all of the meetings and our club gave a banquet in her honor. Three Hundred women sat at that ~~board~~ board in Hotel Savery- presided over at that time by dear Mrs. W.L. Brown. After it was over the fault finders, the critics, who said it could not be done were forever silenced as they heard of the brilliant program of toasts, filled with wit and wisdom, humor and pathos. Since that day a woman's banquet is no longer a novelty. A dramatic Committee was added to the list this year and the first entertainment they gave was a decided success and a great surprise that the club really had so much histrionic talent. The largest attendance of the year was recorded on that day. The secretarys annual report showed that she had been present at every meeting of both club and board during the year which statement was applauded but still greater applause came when Mrs. Kennedy rose and said she had not missed a meeting in five years.

In 1896 the first entertainment committee was appointed, Windsor, Clapp and Reichard. Their first attempt was a series of three lectures by WM. Hamilton Gibson a most delightful writer and an entertaining speaker. It was a financial failure resulting in a deficit of \$95.00 but a great intellectual treat and I would call it a benevolence as we were creating public sentiment, educating the people to take interest in the higher things of life. The first picture was bought. The Dancing Girl by Baldwin a local artist, he later suggested "A Fantasy" as a better title. We paid the munificent sum of \$20.00 for it. Later we bought three Blue Pictures and they were all hung in the new library building as we were holding our meetings in church parlors. Club colors were chosen, current topics were dropped as a member suggested we were all too well read, too well informed to listen to a review of daily news at the club. The Committees were re-named and club dues raised from 2 to 5 dollars. I think it was here that the musicians of the club felt the need of a piano and Mrs Edith Parsons stood at the Ball Park Gate and sold tickets for a Com. to start a piano fund, She turned over \$33.00 which the Board accepted but gave it to another fund, they said, what do we want of a piano, and where would we put it if we had one? We had a lecture from Hon. John A. Kasson putting \$47.00 into the treasury, a paper on Ideal Municipal Government was given, a resolution offered by Mrs. Hillis was sent to the legislature, appealing for a compulsory education law. Mrs. Rover spoke before the club and the Rev. Father Nugent.

This year marks the first move to beautify the river front a petition was sent to the council asking them to take steps to secure the land. ~~over~~ first fete day was held in a city park and the proceeds divided between the Home for the Aged and a River Front park fund.

We moved back to the Y.M.C.A. holding our club meetings in the Auditorium and occupying parlors on an upper floor, hung our pictures and in the eleventh year of our existence felt that we really had a home. The street was so noisy that our programs were often interrupted and we were far from happy. The first agitation of the pure milk question dates from a paper given by Mrs. E.H. Carter on Milk. Some people smiled and said what can be said about milk that's interesting. She showed us by giving us a paper that probably created more interest and discussion than any other topic ever presented to the club. Not only did Des Moines sit up and take notice, but from all over the state came requests to the author to "come and give it to our club". Mrs Green read a paper on the same day "The man

of the house he has not outlived his usefulness" and at the close drank a toast to him in a glass of good pure milk. The appointment of a state Dairy Committee and the certainty of clean milk on our table was certainly a result of this days paper. Then we had the National suffrage convention and our club entertained the delegates at a wonderful reception in our parlors, that day will long be remembered by those who heard the entertaining talks from Miss Anthony Mrs. Avery, Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Stetson and others. ~~of our~~ club was represented on the program the opening night by Mrs. Macomber. We had a lecture from Jane Adams this year which roused the philanthropic tendencies of the club to the highest degree, this and the talk by Charlotte Perkins Stetson gave us about the first intimation, that we owed duties to the worlds children"-caring for your own does not mean a good mother"- was something of a shock to the old fashioned home keeping devoted mother, but, said Jane Adams, "The power to help others is the most divine of gifts" Her message was eagerly received and the wave of altruism which was sweeping over the country hit the club at a most vital time in its existence.

I have intimated previously that we had two parties in the club, the one desiring to give aid and financial assistance to the ever increasing needs of our city, The other wishing to hold strictly to Art, eliminating everything else. We heard recently in our citizenship school that the two great political parties were not so far apart as they seemed. They always differ on some vital questions, but they are always aiming at the same goal namely good legislation, the best for the general welfare of our people, so it seems, our club, two parties, the one whose slogan is "All for Art" the other "Civic Aid and improvement", are aiming for the same high ideals., these questions upon which we differ, always adjusting themselves by the majority rule. We have had many a wordy battle in Board meeting over the choice of a picture in the disposition of certain funds, but we have grown and developed both individually and "clubly" and I often find myself wishing that the spirits of those dear departed women who first gave us the vision, who showed us the way, Mrs Mary A' Livermore, Mrs. Howe, Miss Anthony, and all the others could revisit us or could know in some way of the fruits maturing from the seed they sowed forty years ago. I wonder if you all read Bryan's recent tribute. It was a beautiful thing to say about the new Status of Woman, He said, "Just at this time when the most ~~powerful~~ influence ever known in politics, is passing out, never to return, Woman enters and adding her conscience to the judgment of man, hastens the triumph of every righteous cause- every cause that promotes the nations welfare".

In looking back over the years he who runs may read that the Des Moines Women's Club has been a great developing, educating, factor in the lives of the Women of our town and thru them of the families and the civic life. As James B. Weaver recently said here, we have many wonderful results, The compulsory Education Law, Child Welfare, The Public Play ground, the River front beautiful, the Boulevard System and others, thru our efforts many distinguished men and women have come to bring us great messages along all lines of advanced thought, too many to name, and now as the two great reforms, Prohibition and suffrage, so nearly attained and for which many of our noblest women have so long struggled, can we not, in this generation, get back of the support of W.J. Bryan in his latest moral reform, The single standard of morality for the sexes, he says, "The larger task will be to correct the inequalities in the law and put man and woman upon the same level in the matter of punishment.

As the punishments enforced by the law will increasingly influence public sentiment, which ~~these~~^{has} heretofore made glaring discriminations between the sexes."

Education usually precedes the law. We as a club can be a great power here, in our own City, in the way of molding public opinion. Shall We do it?

Live at Gay Sherman Place for
Home's Club on Welfare Day
March 31st 1920.