

Report of Twelfth Biennial at Fort Dodge -1-

May 22 - 25, 1917-

Were one to express in two words the dominating impressions of the Twelfth Biennial, which remain in one's mind after the lapse of five months those two words would be "Hospitality" and "Patriotism." Had everyone here been privileged to attend the Biennial there would be no need to call to mind the memory of the thoughtful and gracious hospitality which the club women of Fort Dodge extended to their guests. Those who experienced it can never forget it, never forget the thoughtfulness which had foreseen and provided for every need of the visitors, nor the graciousness which proved to us that this consideration was as joyfully extended by our hostesses as it was accepted by us.

As soon as we left the railway station we saw a long line of motor cars, on the radiator cap of each of these fluttered a large bough of pale blue, indicating that these cars were at the service of the visitors to the Biennial. From the station we were taken directly to the Methodist Church where the sessions of the Convention were held and in the basement of which the Credential Committee and the Hospitality Committee had their quarters. The business of presenting our credentials was soon over, we were presented with a large envelope containing a badge, a program of the convention and picture post cards presented by the Commercial Club. From the Hospitality committee we received a card bearing the name and address of our hosts and the number of our automobile section. By going to the side of the church where this number was displayed

the delegates found cars in waiting to take them home after each session. It seemed incredible that a city no larger than Fort Dodge could possess so many cars and certainly the business of the city must have come to a standstill while the business men were whisking the delegates either and you in their cars. One woman who was walking to the church was stopped by the driver of a furniture van, who asked her to ride, assuring her that he too, wished to do something for the women.

The evening of the twenty second was given over to the concert tendered by the Local Biennial Board to the visitors. The instrumental numbers were by a young pianist, Pasquale Tallarico, who played a well selected program very pleasingly, while the vocalist Miss Ruby Helder is possessed of a most unusual tenor voice. The first impression is really startling and one can appreciate the dilemma of the freshmen at Grinnell College, where Miss Helder has recently been working. The young fellow passed the chapel, from the open windows of which a powerful tenor voice floated forth, but he could see only a slender young lady standing near the organ. With aroused curiosity he walked around the building and finally returned to his room to announce to his friends that "there was a fellow singing in the chapel, but he must have been hidden behind the organ because I couldn't see anyone but a girl." It is said that Miss Helder is soon to return to England where she will sing in an opera which is being written especially for her, in which she will take the part of

a boy.

No one attending the concert needed to be reminded that the day of the old fashioned club woman who pursued higher things to the detriment of grooming and grooming has passed away entirely. The audience to a woman was well and stylishly gowned while an attractive touch was given by the usher who wore light gowns and carried baskets of lilacs tied with green tulle and the pages who carried blue wands topped with tulle and pink roses. After the concert there was a reception in the church parlors which gave us an opportunity to meet the officers of the Federation and Mrs. Josiah Evans Cowles President of the General Federation, as well as to chat with the friends with whom we had been exchanging signals of recognition during the concert.

On Wednesday morning the serious work of the convention began, with Mrs. Whitley, the Federation President, presiding we listened to the address of welcome on behalf of the city by the Mayor, and a cleverly worded welcome from the Clubs by Mrs. Seth Thomas to which the Vice President made an appropriate response. A number of special committees were then announced and the reports of various committees read. The committee on Rules and Regulations, among other rules required each member addressing the chair to give her name and her address, this requirement coupled with an address on parliamentary practice by Miss Emma Fox, kept everyone on the qui vive to keep from making errors herself and to catch her neighbor in the act. Among the committee reports was that of the local biennial board, given by the chairman, Mrs. E. F. Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong gave us some idea of the efforts made by the Fort Dodge Clubs to have everything in connection with the Biennial thoroughly organized.

On behalf of the women of Fort Dodge she also presented the 4-
Federation with a handsome Iowa banner, expressing the
hope that it might wave at many Biennials.

More reports were made and accepted and greetings
were sent from Iowa to the Kentucky and Missouri
Federations which were holding their meetings
simultaneously. Mrs. Max Mayor then took the chair
and introduced Mrs. Whitley and Mrs. Whitley.

Our president gave a résumé of the chief events of her
administration, dwelling with especial enthusiasm on
the work of the several clubs which have grown so
greatly in numbers and influence during the past
two years. She told, also, of the Mississippi Valley
conference, in arranging which Iowa took the
initiative and whose influence did much toward
securing the amendment in New York which provides
a Director for the Federation from each state.

She spoke particularly of the Baby Week work, so
recently begun but so far-reaching in its effects, for she
felt that it was largely owing to its Educational
influence that the Vital Statistics Bill and the Child
Welfare Research Station Bill were put on our statute books.
Along other lines the legislation advocated by the
Federation met with more opposition and the
Reformatory Home and Home and the Library
Commission were nearly put out of commission by
the legislature. Only by earnest work on the part of the
women of the Federation was this calamity avoided.
The work devolved upon the Legislative committee was so
great, however, that she urged its reorganization and the
formation of a sub-committee especially for Woman Suffrage.
Mrs. Whitley considered all these events the signs of
an increasing recognition of the value of Federation.

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influence and co-operation," not by legislators alone but by visionaries and promoters as well, which should make us very careful to know absolutely to what the Federation name is attached." She herself had been asked to endorse everything from a missionary training school to an egg-beater.

In conclusion she spoke of the great national crisis which was before us, and of the eagerness of the women for service, coupled with the uncertainty as to what service they might best render in these times. "While American womanhood would rally to the service, let us avoid the temptation to superficial, ill-considered action, to seek out some new and unusual work when those best advised tell us how needful just now are the acts which are our age long inheritance. We shall then set ourselves to the practical and prosaic tasks of food production and conservation which we are told will make women's work in the home as patriotic and valuable as man's on the battle-field." Perhaps for the possibility of just such splendid service to our nation and the world, she concluded, had women for a quarter of a century been organizing, learning to study together and to work together shoulder to shoulder.

After the close of the morning session the district caucuses were held for the purpose of electing a delegate to the G. F. W. C. convention at Hot Springs, Ark. in 1918. Our district had occupied a section on the main floor and had expected that our meeting would be held there but this belief was soon destroyed and we wandered about in great uncertainty seeking our oriflame in the shape of a large H - this presently was displayed in one of the balconies and we were soon grouped about Mrs. Cory and ready for business. The

Honor of representing the Eleventh was accorded to Mrs. Stolbrook of Omaha. The delegates then enthusiastically adjourned for the discussion of luncheon at the hotel or at one of the District dinners.

The afternoon session began promptly at one-thirty and it behooved one to be on time as no one was allowed to enter the church during an address. The report of the Department of Literature and Library extension came first on the program, after which the Chairman introduced Mrs. Thomas G. Winter of Minneapolis who gave a splendid talk on "Literature and Life". She showed how intimately the works of the great literary craftsmen are bound up with our lives, so that what Homer wrote of the tragic lives of the conquered Trojans is repeated today in Belgium, where the captives bear the children of their conquerors. This address which made the connection between the great events of today and the great literature of the past so close was one of the most impressive of the convention, since it showed that however necessary is the practical expression of sympathy to those innocent sufferers from the great war, it is through literature that we may best acquire the comprehension of their sufferings which will urge us to greater benevolence.

The address by Mrs. Coules, president of the G. F. W. C. was an event to which all had looked forward and we felt how fortunate we were to have her at the Biennial especially at this time when so much new work was coming up in connection with the war. Her delivery was entirely matter-of-fact and quite without oratorical embellishments, while it was at times exceedingly difficult to follow her owing to the imperfect acoustic properties of the church. The subject matter of her address was, however, intensely interesting and pertinent. She had only just returned from Washington whither she had been summoned to act as one of the Woman's

Committed of the Council for National Defense. All members -7-
of the Council took the federal oath and these women were
thus the first in the history of the country to assume such
a responsibility. She told us of the sudden change in her
plans caused by her attendance at this meeting of the
Council, involving a trip from Los Angeles to Washington
on the shortest possible notice and warned us that we
must all expect to be forced to give up cherished plans for
the paramount duty of war work. Her entire address
directed a high note of patriotic service. She reminded us
that the privileges we had enjoyed had entailed upon
us great obligations and that she relied upon the women
of the Federated Clubs to act wherever it seemed that the
machinery of the existing organization might be of use.
At this time the plans of the council had not been worked
out but it was evident that women would be asked to
assist with food production and conservation and with
regulations governing the unprecedented entrance of
women into unusual occupations following upon the
war. There was also a plan for registering all women for
war service and most important the safe guarding of
morals to counteract the effect of war and prevent a
weakening of the moral fibre of the nation.

At the conclusion of Mrs. Coulter's address she left to
board an afternoon train for Minneapolis and the
General Federation reports were given. In considering
these reports I shall take a leaf from the book of the
congressman who "begs leave to print" referring you
to the 1917 Year book, where they will be found in
extenso. I shall hasten, as we in reality did to the
motor cars waiting to take us to the hotel at the Country
Club. That nothing might be lacking to the perfection of
the Twelfth Biennial, the weather which had been
giving us the usual May assortment of chilly winds
and chilly rains, had on the opening day of the

Convention turned fair and comparatively warm. The drive was a pure delight after a day spent in listening to speeches and reports however interesting and preserving the intent attitude of the delegate who must at least look as if she is absorbing every drop of information to be carried home to her club.

The way led first through Olsen Park a lovely piece of broken woodland, still in a pleasingly natural condition, over the river and up the hill to the pretty Country Club with surrounding woods flushed with the vivid pink of the wild crab apple. We were among the early arrivals so that we had time to chat with many friends whose presence we had just discovered and enjoy the delicious tea and sherbet before the exhibition of interpretative dancing by Miss Powell. After having seen similar exhibitions on the stage with all the illusion of light and distance it seemed strange to be so near and to see so clearly. The dances were exceedingly well done however. The one that remains most vividly in my mind is her interpretation of Cuitre's Tasse.

While numbers of the delegates had been enjoying the tea at the Country Club, others had been guests at two homes in the city. Upon our return some ²⁰⁰ attended the Suffrage Dinner in the parlors of the Methodist Church.

The evening session was marked by more reports, notably that of the Department of Education given by the chairman Miss Myra Call, the feature of which was the presentation of a marble bust of the Heroes of Proximites to the Kellogg High School. This prize was given to the school sending the greatest proportion of its graduates to college and was received by the Superintendent of the School, a nice young man who made a nice young speech, tho' obviously fussed by his large and exclusively feminine audience.

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The principal address of the evening was by Dr. Shailer Matthews of Chicago University. "The School and the Citizen" was the subject of his address as announced in the program and it proved to a glowing tribute to Democracy and a scathing denunciation of Autocracy, particularly of Prussian autocracy. He emphasized the school as a preparation for life and for the right kind of life as opposed to the idea of the school as a place where unrelated bits of information were packed into one's mind. He believed that the school system of Germany had been deliberately made use of for years to instill into the hearts of her people a hatred of other nations and a devotion to all things Hohenzollern. He believed that in the long run democracy was more efficient than autocracy, citing the example of England whose war forces, unprepared at the beginning, have now reached a high degree of efficiency. Even granting that an autocracy is more efficient, he said, all the blunders and muddling progress of democracy with its opportunity for individual development are preferable to the quick efficiency of Prussianism with its stifling of individuality. The German idea is that of the ancient Romans, that the people exist to advantage the state, while the democratic idea is that of persons co-operating to get the most out of life.

Dr. Matthews address was followed by reports on conservation and natural scenery and an address on "Iowa's Ministry of Beauty" was to have been given by Mr. Lazzell of Cedar Rapids. Something happened to Mr. Lazzell, I have never learned what, but one delegate has never ceased to be grateful to Mr. Lazzell for his extremely opportune absence which enabled her to enjoy the ministry of her bed at an hour much earlier than she had hoped.

On Thursday morning came the reports of the District

Chairmen; limited as to time as there were, they were snappy to a degree, giving in briefest language the most important happenings in each district. The reports were as varied as the women who gave them; some being witty, some eloquent some glowingly patriotic and some intensely practical. However after listening to ten other reports we of the Eleventh were able, when Mrs. Cory had finished, to nod at one another with satisfied expressions which signified "This is the best of all."

In these reports all of the efforts of the clubs along lines of study, social service and civic improvement were noted but in closing each chairman emphasized the fact that the war was bringing to all of us new duties along the lines of conservation and Red Cross work until, as Mrs. Cory said, "the dominant idea in the hearts of all women" was to give efficient prompt service to a country at war.

The final report of the Chairman of the Credential Committee, Mrs. L. W. Wheeler, given at this time showed that the voting strength of the Convention was 495, altho' it was reported that over eight hundred club women attended the convention - a generous representation when one considers that the number of federated clubs in the state is only 683.

The President introduced Mrs. Albion Fellows Bacon who was to speak on "The Home and the Community." This talk made on me the deepest impression of any thing heard at the Convention and many others have told me that they felt similarly about it. Mrs. Bacon is a dainty little person, not at all the type one would expect in a woman who is an authority on housing conditions, an acknowledged oracle in the field of sociology and who has forced through the Indiana legislature what is admitted to be one of the best housing

laws on the statute books of any state. She began her -11- address by showing how closely related are crime and bad housing conditions and described vividly some of the miserable homes she had visited that are realized that the preservation of moral and physical cleanliness amid such surroundings would be simply miraculous. She frequently visited cities whose boast was that they had no slums, but investigation always showed conditions that amazed and appalled the citizens. She urged the club women to investigate matters in their own cities, since only with a knowledge of the seriousness of the situation could public sentiment be aroused to the point of demanding an adequate housing law for the state. She reminded us that the correction of bad conditions was desirable even from a selfish standpoint, since every citizen pays directly or indirectly for the ravages of criminals, while in such places are bred the epidemics of disease that spread over an entire city.

Mrs. Bacon's efforts to secure good housing laws in her state began with her friendly interest in the poor and with efforts to improve their condition. She soon discovered that most landlords were quite indifferent to the condition of their tenants and refused to make changes in their houses other than those demanded by law. Faced by this situation she took up the wider work which has made her an authority on housing conditions and has resulted in much improvement in conditions in her own and other states.

After the enthusiasm over Mrs. Bacon's speech had subsided Mrs. Thomas Healy gave the report of the committee on Social and Industrial Conditions. She told of much accomplished, the Child Welfare Bill, the Vocational School Bill and the Vital Statistics Bill - the latter

however not in the desired form - but she repeated what every woman working along such lines has experienced - that without the ballot we proceed slowly and laboriously - for real accomplishment along legislative lines we must have suffrage.

The report of the nominating committee followed with Mrs. Maltby the sole nominee for president and Mrs. M. C. Wither as General Federation Secretary, both of these names were enthusiastically applauded. The President then asked for nominations from the floor for Delegates at Large to the next Federation Biennial, and an exciting time followed with each club or district presenting the name of its favorite daughter - each name being greeted with applause by the nominees' friends.

The Thursday afternoon meeting with the Vice-Pres. Mrs. Max Mayer presiding was occupied with the reports of the departments of Rural Life, Scholarship and Loan Fund and Public Health with interesting addresses on these subjects. Mrs. Curtiss, Chairman of the Rural Life Sub-committee told of the endeavors of this committee, much less than a year old, to arouse interest in the formation of rural clubs and bring those already in existence into the Federation. Her report was very brief and she then introduced Miss Essie Hathaway who gave a talk on "Pageantry", telling something of the development of the idea in this country, and of the possibility of rousing interest and community spirit by giving the local history in pageant form. Rev. W. W. Diehl gave a talk on "Rural Social Life" which is so important if the young people on the farms are to be satisfied to remain at home. Much is being done to stem the tide toward the city through Community Clubs, Rural Life Centers and particularly through the recently revived interest in rural churches.

Miss Lake gave the report for the Scholarship and Loan fund, a report which always arouses deep interest since so many individual clubs have contributed to the fund. A new Iowa song was sung, the words and music being the composition of a young lady who was helped to receive her musical education through the Fund. Miss Lake was able to report that most of the girls aided in this way had made every possible exertion to get the most benefit from their college work as well as to repay the debt directly they began to earn money.

Dr. Velma Powell gave an interesting report for the Public Health Committee, devoting especial attention to the child welfare work as expressed in Baby Week observations, Baby Health Conferences etc. She then introduced Dr. Rachelle Yarcos who talked upon a topic whose importance at this time cannot be overestimated "Social Hygiene in War-time". Ever since the enormous spread of ~~venereal~~ ^{in the 16th century} disease when the Spanish armies over-ran Europe, it has been regarded as one of the greatest of war's disasters alike to soldiers and to the civilian population, but never before has the problem been approached with so good a chance of solution. A frank educational campaign and a recognition of the need of our fighting men for wholesome amusements promise much. Dr. Yarcos gave statistics to show the appalling prevalence of the disease and from history even as late as the Mexican border campaign she made alarmingly revealing statements. The ballot was then taken on the names placed before the convention by the nominating committee at the morning session.

How this afternoon, also, delightful has had been arranged and those of us who had attended the Country Club tea on the preceding day had the

pleasure of attending a tea in town. Mrs. Ringland was one of the hostesses who opened her charming home to the Federation visitors and here we passed a delightful hour with "a dish of tea and gossip" - only instead of gossip we had for comment all the interesting talks we had heard at the convention, and all the courtesies we had received at the hands of the people of the city.

The evening meeting began with splendid music by the Adolphus Swedish Chorus. An invitation was then read from the Des Moines Federation of Women's Clubs, the Mayor and the Chamber of Commerce to hold the next Biennial meeting in that city. Following this was the report of the Civic Committee and of the Sub-Committee on Municipal Recreation, revealing a satisfactory growth in these lines of work. In connection with the nation wide movement for conservation, special stress had been laid on the planting of drift gardens. The work along Municipal Recreation lines had concerned itself largely with the improvement of the motion pictures, which have suddenly become so important in all communities. Mr. Allen W. Gilbert then gave a very illuminating address on "The Towns of Iowa."

Mrs. Faville, Chairman of the Home Economics Committee, gave her report covering the wonderful work accomplished by this committee, along many lines of the most vital importance to every home. The speaker placed especial stress on the necessity of instruction in canning fruits and vegetables to conserve the food supply produced by the unusually large number of gardens cultivated this year. She then introduced Dean Curtis of Ames who amplified the idea of food conservation in his address, "How Women Can Help Win the War."

Your reporter asks for leniency if there are deficiencies in the account of the Friday sessions as she was obliged to leave on a morning train. She understands, however, that her attempt to average a report from her recollections and notes of others is not unheard of even among bonafide members of the Fourth Estate. The early part of the session was occupied with business, the reading and approval of the minutes of Thursday's sessions, the revision of some of the by laws and the reception of invitations for the next Biennial from Ceres and Council Bluffs. Miss Sawtrey, State Chairman of Woman Suffrage, gave a brief talk on that always pertinent subject.

Followed the report of the Committee on Civil Service Reform, after which the Chairman, Mrs. Mahner, introduced Mr. Charles Grille who gave an address on "Prison Reform". Mrs. Homer Miller gave the report of the Legislative Committee and introduced Mrs. G. W. Plummer, of Illinois, director of the General Federation Board. Mrs. Plummer's address was received with enthusiasm, she spoke of the supreme sacrifice which women make in sending their sons and husbands to die for a principle. It lay with the women to keep up the spiritual side of life under the relaxing influence of war conditions. The return for their service as custodians of the spiritual ideals and moral soundness of the country they must demand of the government that every effort be put forth to return the boys who take part in this war to their homes uncontaminated by the influence of those included under the contemptuous term of "camp followers".

The report of the music committee by Miss Childs was followed by an address on "Community Singing".

Democracy and Art." by Prof. Wy Kenna of Wisconsin -16-
University. At the opening of the afternoon session Prof.
Wy Kenna led the audience in singing familiar songs,
giving a demonstration of the proper method of conducting
community singing.

Miss Drake, ^{whose departing from our state we all deeply regret} followed with a brief report of the Department
of Art and then introduced Mr. Dudley Crafts Walker
who gave an address on "Art Appreciation and Production
for All the People" - telling in detail of work accomplished
among the Minnesota farmers.

The report of the Resolutions Committee was then given;
the second resolution, indorsing the high moral stand
taken by the War Board and asking the appointment of
a committee to co-operate with other agencies in the
state showed the deep impression made by the addresses
of Dr. Yarrow and Mrs. Plummer. The last Resolutions
expressing the appreciation of the Federation for the
entertainment offered by our Fort Dodge hostesses and
for the work of the Biennial Board found an echo in
the heart of every woman present at the Convention.

The last hours of the Convention were given over to
remembrances from past presidents seven of whom were
present. Mrs. Henry Howe of Marshalltown who was in the
office from 1895 to 1897 gave a most interesting talk
telling of the growth and development of the Federation
and the wide range of activities taken up by clubs
which were at their inception purely study clubs.
The little grand daughter of Mrs. Whitley then brought to the
platform a tray holding gold pins which were presented
to each Past President. These pins have the name of the
owner and the date she was in office engraved upon
them.

Just before the adjournment all members of all
committees of the Biennial Board were summoned to
the platform where they received sincere expressions

of gratitude from Mrs. Whitley.

The new officers were then presented to the convention and all were greeted with enthusiastic applause. When Mrs. Edmund Armstrong, the new treasurer, who, as chairman of the Local Biennial Board, had won the outspoken admiration of everyone, was presented, there was a tremendous demonstration and the entire body of women rose to salute her.

This marked the formal closing of the convention. As there were still pleasant tea hours for delegates who remained until evening or until the following morning. Your reporter cannot of her own knowledge compare this convention with previous Biennials since it had for her the never-to-be-recaptured charm of the very first. From the remarks of others more experienced she feels safe in saying that it ranked among the most delightful of Biennials. It was more than that, however. It was an occasion which stimulated our intellects, enlarged our ideas of hospitality and kindled to blazing flame the smouldering fires of our patriotism.