

The Monticello Friday Club

On April 23, 1887, twelve women of literary tastes met at the home of Mrs. H. D. Sherman in Monticello, Iowa, to commemorate the birthday of William Shakespeare. This festive occasion was the climax of a systematic study of the great dramatist and poet. "According to their rules," reported the Monticello *Express* of April 28, 1887, "no other subject was to be mentioned by any one present, under penalty of a fine. At the close of the meeting the fines which would have been imposed against each member were remitted by universal and mental consent".

For three years this group had been delving into *Harper's Study of Shakespeare*, and felt they had exhausted the subjects of greatest interest to them regarding the Bard of Avon. Accordingly they decided to broaden the scope of their discussions and organize a literary club with a constitution, officers, and avowed purposes. The object of the ladies was to form an organization to promote better understanding of literature and social culture. And so, on the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, the Friday Club was formed in 1887. The motto adopted by the twelve charter

members, "After the education of the school, the education of the hearthstone", has guided the club to the present time. Having begun spontaneously and having followed its own inclinations for many years, the Friday Club of Monticello has never lost its independence and become a literary section of the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs.

At the first meeting, Sarah Secrest Sherman was elected president. She was one of the oldest of the group, a graduate of Cornell College, an ardent reader, and a student of the arts and history. Kate Curtis Mirick was chosen vice president. She also possessed the important quality of being learned, for she graduated with highest honors from Iowa State College in 1877. Interested particularly in nature, especially geology, Mrs. Mirick collected interesting specimens which were presented to the geology department at Iowa State College. Mary Farwell Carpenter was elected secretary. She has always been most active in the civic affairs of Monticello. Her education began in a country school from which she entered Iowa State College in 1875 and graduated in 1877. While she was at Ames, she was a member of I. C. Sorosis which became the Iowa Gamma chapter of Pi Beta Phi sorority.

There was no treasurer when the club was founded because no expenses were contemplated.

The matter of dues was warmly discussed but the Friday Club decided against having any. Sometime later dues of a very small amount were assessed, varying according to needs. Mrs. Carpenter, Mrs. Mirick, and Mrs. Davidson wrote the constitution which set a limit of fourteen members. It has since been changed to allow sixteen.

Only four of the twelve charter members are still living. Mrs. W. A. Mirick (1858—) of Boone, Iowa, and Mrs. Henry M. Carpenter (1860—) of Monticello, Iowa, have already been mentioned. Another living charter member is Olive McKean Howard (1869—), a graduate of Lenox College, and one of the six charter members who were born in Iowa. Mrs. George B. Howard now makes her home in Baltimore, Maryland. The fourth charter member who is still living is Lena Spaulding Wurzbacher (1866—), who now lives in Seattle, Washington. She was born in Anamosa and attended Oberlin College. In 1900 she and her husband, Frank B. Wurzbacher, went to Alaska where they lived for fifteen years. The eight other original members were: Adaliza Dean Davidson, Franc Bush Davis, Jessie Fawcett Doxsee, Agnes Mathews Noyes, Sarah Penniman Perley, Sarah Secrest Sherman, Elizabeth Cowles Stillman, and Luna Farwell Templeton.

A brief glimpse of the backgrounds of the remaining charter members reveals some unusual qualities. Adaliza Dean Davidson (1841-1923) was intensely interested in horticulture and fossils. At the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, she was awarded the medal of honor at the Women's Building for her fossil collection. Mrs. James Davidson was born in New York and graduated from Ingham University in LeRoy, New York, in 1861. In 1864 she moved to Iowa with her husband.

Sarah Penniman Perley (1839-1900) came from sturdy Puritan stock in New Hampshire whose ancestors had landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. In 1856 she came to Iowa and lived with her family on Bowen's Prairie until she went to Mount Holyoke for her college education. She married C. C. Perley. Another one who came to Iowa from New Hampshire was Agnes Mathews Noyes (Mrs. Matt Noyes) whose short life (1851-1894) suddenly put an end to her creative writing and her pleasure in reading.

The most musical one among the charter members was Luna Farwell Templeton (1867-1939). She was educated at Iowa State College, and while she was there she conducted the orchestra. Mrs. Edward Templeton was a younger sister of Mrs. Carpenter.

Jessie Fawcett Doxsee (1861-1928) came to Iowa from Ohio in 1887 as the bride of J. W. Doxsee. Her greatest pleasure was in travel, especially during the later years of her life. "She regarded it as a religious privilege to travel the roads that Christ had trodden and to drink at the well where he announced that he was the Messiah."

Franc Bush Davis (1863-1936) was born in Iowa and at the age of eleven she had to assume the management of the household because of her mother's death. However, at sixteen she entered Lenox College, from which she graduated. Mrs. Dan L. Davis is survived by her husband who lives in Ashtabula, Ohio.

In the early 1850's, Elizabeth Cowles Stillman, a Mount Holyoke graduate, came to Iowa from Massachusetts. She lived on Bowen's Prairie, near Monticello, in a house located on the old Military Road.

Although the minutes of the Friday Club meetings have always been completely and accurately kept, a devastating fire at the home of Jennie Babcock Rohn on December 26, 1894, destroyed the records up to that date. Much of the information about the club prior to that time has been obtained from Mrs. Carpenter, for she is the only charter member who has been continuously active.

Throughout the fifty-six years of the Friday Club's existence there have been only forty-nine members. All but five have had college training, and half of them attended universities or colleges in Iowa. In addition to their own educational experience, the Friday Club ladies have enjoyed the advantage of husbands who have been prominent in the community. Ten have been professional men, another ten have been merchants, six have been farmers or cattle buyers, five have been bankers, four ministers, and four superintendents of schools. Obviously the first part of the club's motto, "education of the school", has been well recognized.

A survey of the programs for many years indicates that the Friday Club has faithfully observed the rest of the motto pertaining to "education of the hearthstone". At first the programs were planned for only three months at a time and were not printed. For the past fifty-two years, however, they have been printed for the entire year. Each year three or four club members take their turns in arranging the schedule of meetings. The general subject of study for 1891 was "From Maine to California". This program carried the members through New England to Washington, D. C., thence to the Southeast, then to the Middle West, the Deep South, the Southwest, and finally

to the Northwest. The annual programs as a whole show that literature, the theater, and art were the favorite subjects. Music was combined with many of the individual programs, particularly when it was appropriate to the topic under discussion.

From 1906 to 1913 there was a trend toward studying American literature. Then, with the World War looming on the horizon, the members began to learn of the geography, history, religion, music, literature, and art of Germany, France, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries. This type of study and the trend of world affairs seems to have had an expansive influence upon the club. For example, for the season of 1919-1920 the subject selected was "Our New Possessions". Included in this globe-encircling excursion were stop-overs at Alaska, Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippine Islands, the South Sea Islands, and the Virgin Islands. The history of these picturesque regions, the life and customs of the inhabitants, and the importance of each to the United States were all considered. Music pertaining to the countries was played, and the flora, fauna, and climate were described with the aid of maps.

For three years following the war, the club continued its study of geography. Literature cropped up again during the years 1923 to 1925. Since

then there has been a more varied course, including studies on women and social economics. From 1931 to the present time it has been the idea of the Friday Club to associate the programs with new books, using a book title as the keynote for the year and supplementing it with articles on the same subject. Thus, in 1937-1938 Van Wyck Brooks's *The Flowering of New England* supplied the theme and much of the material. For example, at a meeting in October at the home of Lillian Kendall Northrop, the literary program consisted of a sketch of Henry Thoreau, another on Thoreau at Walden, a reading of "Baker Farm", and a poem — "The Fisher's Boy".

Another literary program, given at the home of Lisle Richardson Lovell in November, 1924, was concerned with contemporary writers. A sketch was given on William Lyon Phelps, and Ethel George Fraser read two essays — "The Way of the Best Sellers" and "Does It Pay to Advertise?". On the same program a sketch of Hilaire Belloc and an illustrative essay by him were presented.

The Friday Club has frequently used the drama for the basis of its programs. In March, 1934, for example, at the home of Alice Kint Stuhler, Mary Farwell Carpenter read "Elizabeth the Queen" while Lou Densmore Carpenter presented

a paper on Lynn Fontaine. Another example of a drama program paper was "The Theater on the High Seas" by Lillian Haley Stuhler.

Thoughts of the dance have also invaded the minds of the members of the Friday Club. A typical program on that subject was given in 1934. It included such contributions as a paper on "The Dance and its Place among the Arts" by Chloe Carson Skelley, and a poem, "Pavlova", by Selma Prahm DeShaw.

Music should perhaps be mentioned in connection with the dance. An example of a musical program is one held at the home of Imogene Dunham Stuhler on July 4, 1924. It took the form of a book review of *My Musical Life* by Walter Damrosch, a sketch on "American Indian Music and Composers" with vocal selections by Eloise Brainerd Thomas, a sketch on "Edward MacDowell, an American Nature Composer", with piano selections from his "Woodland Sketches".

Graphic art, too, has occasionally occupied the attention of the club. One program included an essay on "Culture and Painting", a paper on "American Men of Art", and a pageant of American art.

Poetry has always figured prominently in the programs of the Friday Club, for there is no end to the study of that branch of literature. Appro-

priate poems are often read in connection with particular subjects, but a whole session is frequently devoted entirely to poetry. Emily Nichols Richardson was hostess for an interesting program on lyric poets in January, 1925. On that occasion Jennie Babcock Rohn presented a sketch on Louis Untermeyer with criticisms of his works and a reading of selected verse. Gems from various other poets were also read.

Economics and politics are timely subjects for any program, and so the Friday Club ladies have occasionally varied their literary studies with current problems. Since such subjects are likely to be dull for persons with no pretense of expertness in government or economics, the club programs have usually been designed to stimulate interest. Once a program on economics began with a story by O. Henry entitled "The Discounters of Money". This was followed by a formidable "Compendium — The Horoscope of Taxation". The concluding contribution on this program was a reading entitled "Wanted — An Income Taximeter".

The Friday Club convenes at the home of a club member from three to five o'clock on every other Friday from June through April. Although it is a literary club, there have been occasional social events such as guest days and dinners for

the husbands. The yearly anniversary tea is held on the Friday on or before April 23rd. Original entertainment is presented by the committee members who contrive to show their talent, either in a serious or comic manner.

Occasionally Shakespeare has reappeared on the programs of the Friday Club. Two pantomime scenes from his plays were presented by the committee, consisting of Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Templeton, and Miss Mary Jarman, at the twenty-third anniversary tea in 1910. "The Ghost Scene from *Hamlet* was effective and thrilling", according to the minutes for that day. "The expression on Hamlet's face, as he at length broke from Horatio's restraining hand to follow the ghost who still waved him forth, was one of willingness, even eagerness. The Witch's Scene from *Macbeth* showed much skill in its production. Gesture, expression and costume united to make the gruesome dance of the weird sisters around the seething cauldron a fitting introduction to the tragedy of Macbeth." On April 23, 1915, Shakespeare once more provided the substance of the program when parts from *Romeo and Juliet* were presented for entertainment. Imogene Dunham Stuhler and Jennie Babcock Rohn, dressed in Shakespearian costumes, wistfully sang "In the Spring".

The table decorations at the teas are also indicative of the imagination and ability of the committee. The waiters for the teas have always been the young daughters or sons of the members, who, besides serving, occasionally help with the entertainment. At the close of each tea "Auld Lang Syne" is sung by the members, ending for another year the happy association of the Friday Club.

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