

THE PALIMPSEST

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Historical Beginnings

Early in 1868 the Press Club of New York City tendered a farewell dinner to Charles Dickens, who had just concluded a successful reading tour of the United States. Women members of the press, eager to attend the brilliant literary affair, applied for but were denied tickets for the dinner. Among them was the well-known writer of that day, Mrs. Jennie June Croly, whose indignation at this slight to her sex prompted her to call a meeting of women leaders at her home. Out of this meeting in March, 1868, came the organization of Sorosis, a club exclusively for women.

The rapid movement westward of the American frontier in the fifties and the quickening experiences of the Civil War were beginning to give women a sense of their own value and with it a hope that they, too, could make a contribution to both the culture and the welfare of mankind. They were inspired by the writings of Sarah Josepha Hale, Louisa May Alcott, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. They were equally thrilled by the work of

Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, and of Annie Wittenmyer and Clara Barton in the Civil War.

They were not expected to attend the Dickens dinner, indeed! We can see them in their tiny bodices, voluminous skirts, and dainty bonnets, gathering in prim meeting, but what they had to say was said with emphasis.

Sorosis grew and flourished, proving a great satisfaction to its members. In March of 1889, when the club's twenty-first birthday was in prospect, the members felt a celebration was proper. Invitations were forwarded to all known literary clubs in the country, asking them to send delegates as their guests. Ninety-seven clubs were invited, and sixty-one responded. Two Iowa clubs, the Tourist Club of Cedar Rapids and the Marshalltown Woman's Club, sent delegates.

The birthday party was delightful in every way, and the exchange of ideas was most inspiring. The conviction grew apace that it must happen again — in fact, it must happen regularly. Plans were made to meet the next year to effect an organization. Accordingly, at a meeting in New York City in 1890, a constitution and bylaws were adopted, officers were elected, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs came into being. Five Iowa women were present — Mrs. W. W. Walker, Cedar Rapids, Ladies Literary Club; Miss Albright of the Cedar Rapids Tourist Club; Mrs. Mena Erz, Ladies Literary Association, Dubuque;

Mrs. Ellen G. McClain, Nineteenth Century Club, Iowa City; Mrs. E. W. Getz, Woman's Club, Marshalltown. Mrs. Charlotte Emerson Brown of East Orange, New Jersey, was the president.

The federation idea, unlike some others, traveled far and fast. Each delegate carried it back to her home state and began to work enthusiastically for federation there. Mrs. Anna B. Howe urged her club, the Marshalltown Woman's Club, to celebrate its seventh birthday in 1892 by inviting all of the Iowa literary clubs they could find to be their guests. Invitations went out to all known clubs; others were sent to postmasters, who were asked to deliver them to any woman's club of which they knew — which accounts for one invitation falling into the hands of a woman's suffrage club. Suffrage was not yet a subject which ladies' literary groups discussed.

The would-be hostesses waited anxiously for the day to come, fearful of the response. Great was their joy when, on a day in December, eighty delegates representing thirty-five clubs arrived in Marshalltown to share in the celebration, ready to entertain ideas of great import.

They met in the Congregational Church. The guest of honor was Mrs. Jessie Malory Thayer of Chariton, who was a member of the General Federation's committee of correspondence. Mrs. J. M. Whitaker, president of the hostess club, gave the address of welcome, and guests were asked to give

short reports of the work of their clubs. Even the suffrage club delegate responded, saying that she "felt like a lion among lambs." At the close of the meeting an encouraging letter from the president of the General Federation was read. Mrs. Thayer appointed an Iowa committee of correspondence to carry on the work. In the evening the members of the Marshalltown Woman's Club received their guests in the charming, flower-decked home of Mrs. G. F. Kirbey, where they became acquainted and where many life-long friendships were begun.

Four months later the state committee called a meeting with the definite purpose of organizing an Iowa Federation. An invitation was extended by the Des Moines Women's Club to meet on April 27 and 28, 1893, at the Christian Church of Des Moines. This time plans were made with a confidence which was justified on the afternoon of April 27 when eighty-eight delegates from thirty-seven state clubs, and many visitors from the city clubs, gathered expectantly. Mrs. James G. Berryhill, president of the Des Moines Women's Club, presided graciously, welcomed the delegates, and stated the purpose of the convention.

Delegates from forty-four clubs answered the roll call and gave three-minute reports of the work of their clubs. Temporary officers were elected, and committees on permanent organization, credentials, and constitution were appointed.

Having completed the preliminary work of organization in the afternoon, the delegates were ready to enjoy the hospitality of the Des Moines Women's Club that evening, when the "elegant home of Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Hubbell on Terrace Hill, Grand Avenue" was opened for a reception. It was spring in Iowa, and not only was nature burgeoning, but these women were filled with joy at being present at the budding of a great organization. Their mood was fully met by the flowers, the music, the program, and the warm cordiality of all present.

The next morning, April 28, business proceeded smoothly at the Christian Church as the proposed constitution and bylaws were submitted and adopted. In them the stated object of the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs was "to bring into communication with one another the various Women's Clubs throughout the State, that they may compare methods of work and become mutually helpful." The usual officers were named, with this difference: "The President of each Federated Club shall be Vice President of the State Federation, or the Club may appoint another member as Vice President." Groups applying for membership in the Iowa Federation were required to show that no sectarian or political test was required, and that while distinctly humanitarian movements might be recognized, their chief purpose was not philanthropic nor technical, but "social, literary,

artistic or scientific culture." Meetings were to be held every two years in May beginning in 1895, and the dues were \$2.00 per club for a biennium.

The following thirty-five clubs signed the constitution and bylaws in the order indicated, thus becoming the Charter Clubs of the Federation. Those starred are still federated.

- Boone* — Lowell Club, Monday Club.
Cedar Falls — Tuesday Club.*
Carroll — Clio Club.*
Clarinda — Study Club.
Cedar Rapids — Ladies Literary Club.
Council Bluffs — Thursday Club.
Clarence — Columbia Club.
Creston — Ladies Literary Club.*
Des Moines — Monday Club,* Conversational Club,
 Tourist Club,* Women's Club, Review,* Unity Circle,
 Frank Russell Circle, T V Club.
Grinnell — History Club.
Iowa City — N. N. Club.
Indianola — Monday Club.*
Jefferson — Friday Club.*
Marshalltown — Witenagemote,* Woman's Club,*
 Hawthorne,* Calisopian, Entre Nous, Shakespeare.
Manchester — Thirteen Club.*
Nashua — Isabella Club.*
Newton — Friday Club.
Nevada — Women's Club.*
Oelwein — Tuesday Club.*
Ottumwa — Shakespeare Club.
Webster City — Wednesday Club.
West Union — Tourist Club.*

Officers elected for the first biennium were:

President — Mrs. Virginia Berryhill, Women's Club, Des Moines.

Vice-President — Mrs. Mary W. Cogswell, Ladies Literary Club, Cedar Rapids.

Recording Secretary — Mrs. Margaret E. Greig, Columbia Circle, Clarence.

Corresponding Secretary — Mrs. Anna B. Howe, Woman's Club, Marshalltown.

Treasurer — Mrs. Maria Weed, Tourist Club, West Union.

Auditor — Mrs. Adaline M. Payne, Women's Club, Nevada.

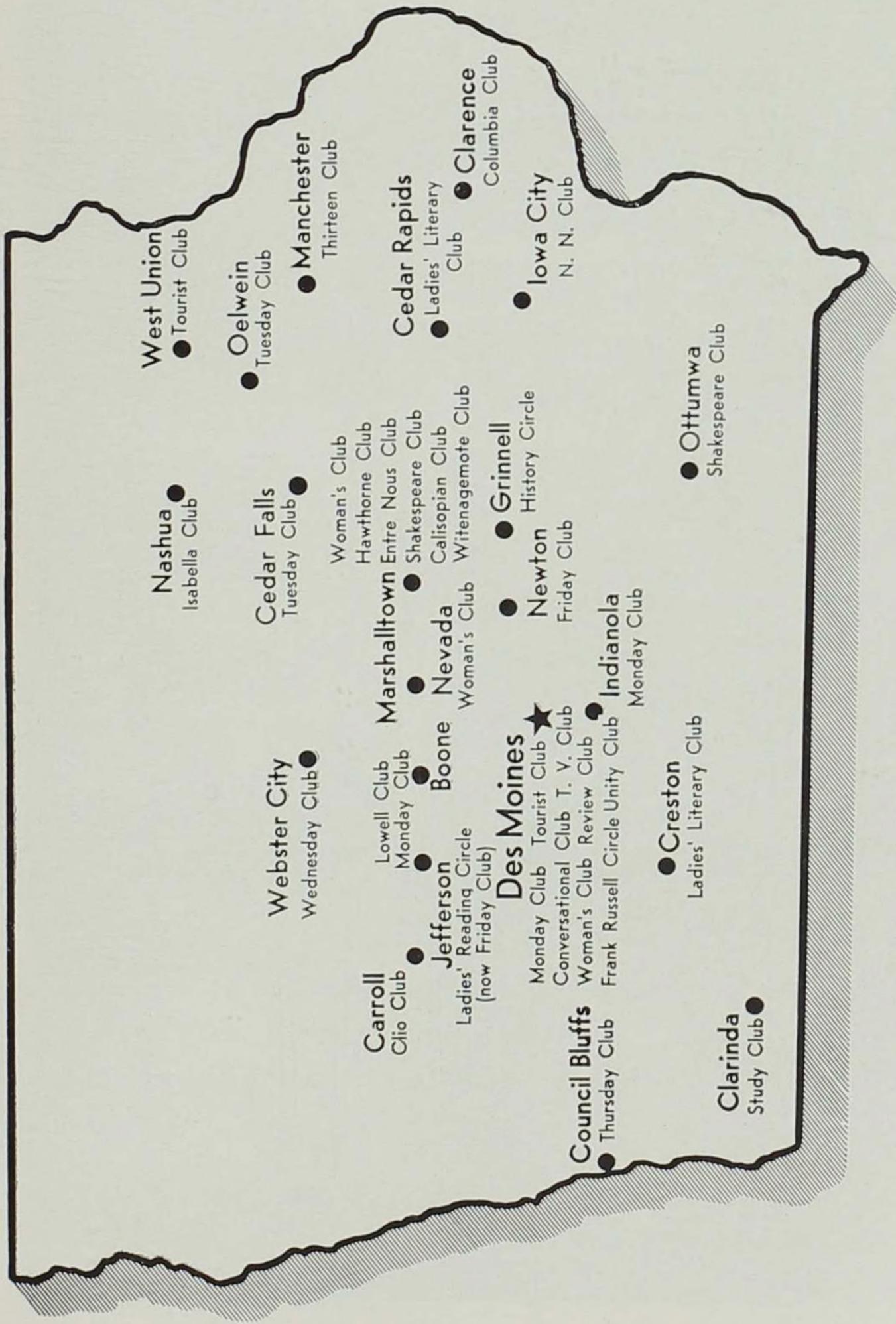
Feeling that they were leaving the infant Federation in safe hands, the delegates returned home to report their achievement.

Twenty-one days later, on May 19, at the meeting of the General Federation Council in Chicago, the new Iowa Federation was received into membership, being the first state Federation to join the General Federation. Mrs. Berryhill not only presented Iowa's application for membership, but was acting president at the Council meeting — a fact which later caused her to be named honorary vice-president of the G. F. W. C.

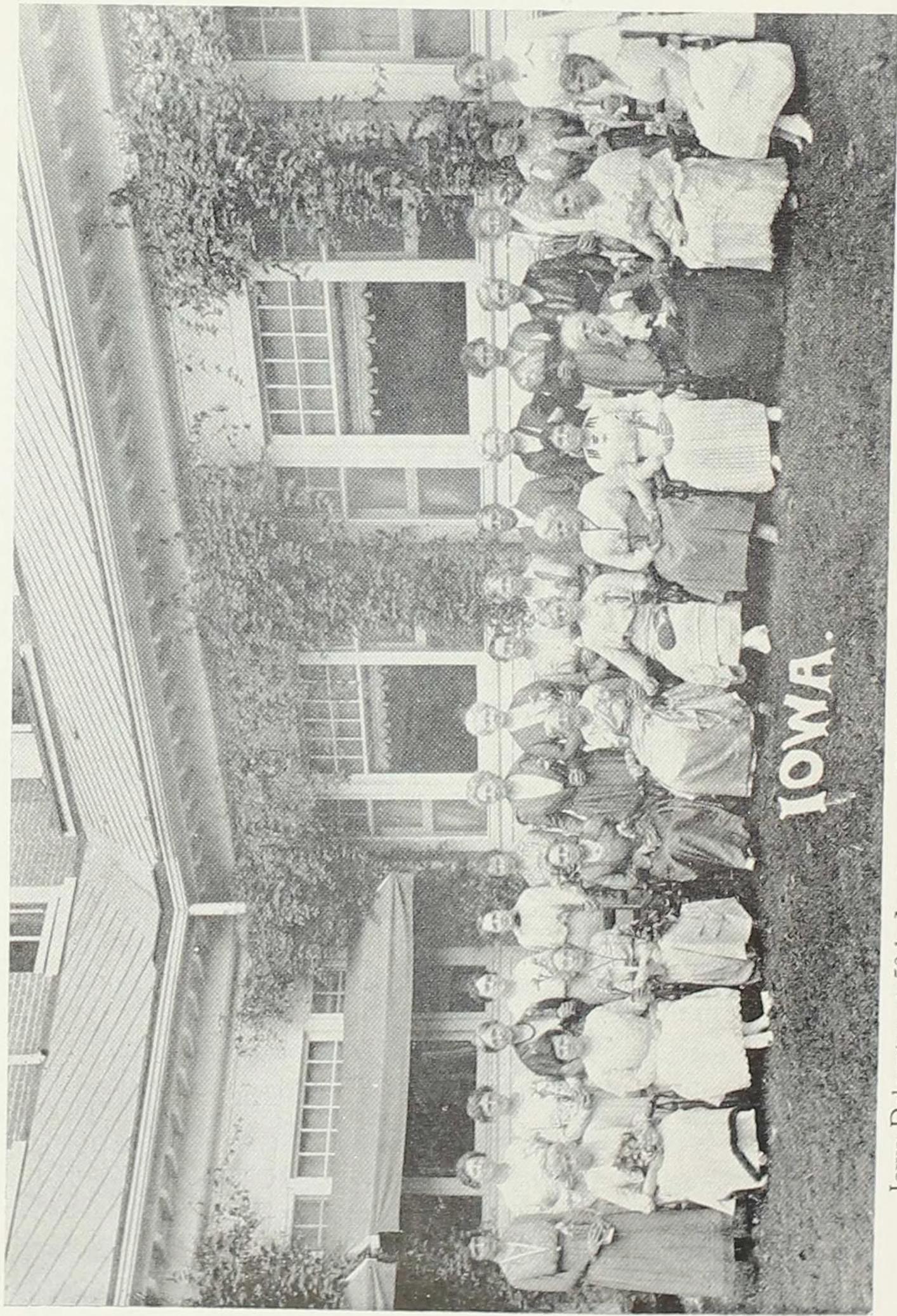
Moving fast, not permitting apathy to take hold of the new project, the officers were alert and active. Equally so were the member clubs as they spread the gospel of federation across Iowa. If at any time their faith in the future of the Federation faltered, it was never evident.

At the G. F. W. C. biennial meeting in Philadelphia, Iowa was in the van. Mrs. Thayer was appointed a member of the nominating committee. Mrs. Berryhill gave an address titled, "What Is Our Shibboleth?" and was elected director from Iowa. She also called a meeting of the officers of all state Federations, which was helpful to the new groups. But when Mrs. Thayer rose to make her report on the work in Iowa there was pointed discussion as to the necessity of hearing reports. Then up rose Mrs. Julia Ward Howe saying, "I think we had better let this little woman make her report; she won't say anything that will hurt us." Which established at one stroke the right of chairmen to give their reports in Federation conventions. A complete report of the convention was carried in the club organ, *The New Cycle*, and was mailed to each club president.

The first Iowa biennial convention held in the Congregational Church of Cedar Rapids in May, 1895, drew 200 delegates. A perfectly planned convention awaited them. They were to learn that the I. F. W. C. had grown from 35 to 98 clubs with 50 towns represented. The Dubuque Ladies Literary Association presented resolutions recommending that a petition be sent to the state legislature urging that body to raise the age of consent to 18 years. This was adopted, and thus started the trend of Iowa endeavor toward welfare work. At this meeting, too, Mrs. Thayer gave



MAP SHOWING THIRTY-FIVE CHARTER CLUBS OF IFWC IN 1893



Iowa Delegates at 50th Anniversary GFWC Convention in 1918 at Hot Springs, Arkansas

a stimulating address on village improvement, asking the question, "Where is that 'away' to which your town throws its tin cans and rubbish?" This was the beginning of the Federation's civic interest, and from it grew many civic projects and organizations.

This convention had attracted wide attention, for it was the first of its kind in the Midwest, and Chicago newspapers sent reporters to cover it. After all, these were the "Gay Nineties," and it was startling to discover in the midst of them this very serious, lofty-minded new movement, led by women.

Mrs. Anna B. Howe, whose initiatory idea had resulted in the I. F. W. C., took office as the new president in 1895, with the thought that the Iowa Federation was now ready to take on new responsibilities. Three new committees were appointed: legislation, library, and reciprocity. An historian was also appointed, and the Federation colors — turquoise and silver — were chosen.

At the Dubuque biennial in May, 1897, it was found that the number of member clubs had risen to 174. The clubs were generally small, about one-third having less than twenty members. The library committee reported that five libraries had been set up, three more were being maintained, and fifty traveling libraries had been established. The committee had been asked to aid in securing the passage by the Iowa legislature of Judge Hor-

ace M. Towner's traveling library bill. The prompt support of this bill by clubs helped to give Iowa its traveling libraries.

The legislation committee reported the failure of the bill to raise the age of consent to 18 years, but could report the raising of the age to 15 years at the second session of the legislature. In response to a request from the State Senate for advice as to the preference for a state flower, the convention decided on the wild rose, and so notified the Senate.

Two years later, at the Burlington biennial in 1899, Mrs. Emma M. Van Vechten of Cedar Rapids, in her president's report, noted that the I. F. W. C. was next largest to New York and Illinois, and had the club of youngest women of any state Federation. She found that the aim of the Federation was illustrative of the motto of the G. F. W. C., "Unity in diversity." Its objects were to compare methods of work, raise the standard of intellectual culture, encourage the progress of education in Iowa, broaden social life, and, above all, to be of special service and help to the local community.

Comprehensive reports were given of the work of the library, education, and art committees. Truly the Iowa Federation could be called the organization of the open book, for from its inception literature, libraries, and education have been its primary concern. The art committee had made

fine progress in encouraging the study of art in the public schools. The need for the study of home economics was so convincingly stated that a committee of home economics was promptly created.

The importance of journalism and the press was acknowledged by giving them a large place on the program. Miss Alice French (Octave Thanet) spoke tellingly on the "Perils and Opportunities of American Club Women." But perhaps the most amusing and yet enlightening remark reported was made by the governor of Colorado when he welcomed the G. F. W. C. to Denver. He said, "When the Israelites were broken with corruption and dissensions God gave a woman to judge them. Deborah ruled for forty years, and the Bible adds, 'then they had a rest.' "

Was the Federation a Deborah? It is very sure that it did not intend to give the people a rest, either at the end of the present sixty years, or forty years hence. But the nation had come through the Spanish-American War and was facing a new century. In Iowa the Federation of Women's Clubs was poised, ready.

HAZEL P. BUFFUM