

CHESTER TIMES – June 29, 1908

INTERESTING HISTORY OF MEDIA, W.C.T.U. – Account of the Work of the Women's Temperance Organization Since Its Inception

“The following interesting history was read by Mrs. Clara B. Miller at the last meeting of the W.C.T.U., which was held at the home of Mrs. Henry C. Bishop.

“The date of the first recorded meeting of Media Women's Christian Temperance Union is April 12, 1888. Prior to this date, there was held a preliminary meeting at the house of John M. Broomall, at which Mrs. Susan S. Fessenden of Boston, national superintendent of franchise, presented the work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which had been organized fifteen years before and which by this time had branches in most of the states.

“Sufficient interest was aroused in the movement by Mrs. Fessenden to warrant a call for a public meeting in Institute Hall on April 12. This was well attended. Eliza J. Brewster, then principal of the Media High school, presided. John M. Broomall gave the opening and Grace Anna Lewis, the closing address. Mrs. Fessenden told of the scope of this work, and the need for concerted action against the enemy of our homes, and the menace to our nation. Miss Peirce of Philadelphia gave two recitations.

“At the close of the meeting sixty-seven persons signified their willingness to become members of the Union. When, however, it came to signing the constitution only forty-eight appended their names. Of these, nine are still in membership.

“After this very promising meeting, there seems to have been an interval of nearly two months before the second meeting was held. At this time Mrs. Miller gave a brief resume of the origin and purposes of the white ribbon movement. Miss Brewster told of the young woman's and L.T.L. work. The proposed constitution was read and superintendents were appointed for local and school work, literature and flower mission. On September 25, our county president, Mrs. McCauley, was present and conducted the exercises. The constitution was adopted and the following officers were elected: President, Mrs. Clara B. Miller; vice presidents, Mrs. S.D. Hibbert, Mrs. R.L. Fussell and Mrs. Elizabeth Rowbotham; recording secretary, Grace Anna Lewis; corresponding secretary, Miss E.J. Brewster; treasurer, Mrs. C.L. Broomall. Of these officers your secretary remained in office until 1895. Your president till 1905 and your treasurer until 1906.

“We were now an organized body and must have felt very strong at one of our first efforts was to entertain our county union. We could do it more easily in those days because of the smaller membership, and the expenses taken from our treasury, sound remarkably small in comparison with the present extravagant methods of entertaining. Since that time the county union has been held here four times.

“Our meetings were first held at the homes of the members. In 1891 we met in Institute Hall, where we continued to meet with some exceptions until First month, 1908, when the Borough Hall was freely granted for our use.

“As need grew for more branches of work, purity, scientific temperance instruction, mothers' work, franchise, mercy, Sabbath school, evangelistic and press work were added. Prior to the presentation of the prohibition amendment in 1889, we held six Sunday afternoon meetings in the courthouse. These were so well attended that collections almost paid expenses. We distributed campaign literature and assisted the Darby Home Protective Association in holding meetings in Media.

“It was during the same year that our Union was given the privilege of planting flowers in the Courthouse Square. This was for the double purpose of beautifying the square and providing flowers for the hospitals. The Commissioners assisted in defraying the expenses of the work. We felt a personal ownership in the square. Miss Lewis, the faithful superintendent of the Plower Mission, organized a band of youthful workers, and together they labored for several years. We recommended that the square be better lighted in order to prevent undesirable persons from congregating there.

“The destructive flood at Johnstown called forth our sympathies, and through the Woman’s Belief Association of Philadelphia, we sent a contribution for the sufferers. Again when Galveston suffered from a similar catastrophe, we made a like contribution.

“The county fair, then of yearly recurrence, gave opportunity for work for our members. We sent literature for distribution and helped to make attractive the tent our County Union erected on the fair grounds.

“We voiced our protest against the admission of boys to the courtroom during criminal trials and sent a petition to the Judge against the granting of a license of the Black Horse Hotel. Our last protest against the transfer of the same license is fresh in the minds of all, and most of you attended the mass meeting in the courthouse a few months ago, when that protest was voiced.

“Returning to our early history, I find that the Burgess of Media, at our suggestion, ordered the closing of the cigar stores on Sunday. Personal visits were made to the proprietors of these shops who were furnished with copies of the anti-cigarette laws.

“The division in the ranks of the white ribboners in 1889 gave cause for regret, but we were unmoved by this disruption, believing with Francis Willard that “our society stands for three great principles, no sectarianism in religion, no sectionalism in politics, no sex in citizenship.

“As I read the president’s annual reports for the first few years, I am impressed with the fact that the Union was alive to the work it had pledged itself and on the alert to see wrong doing in the neighborhood. The help of the clergymen whenever we appealed to them was always freely given. We gratefully appreciated their labors and often sought their counsel and advice.

“When the County Teachers’ Institute arranged to have Mary H. Hunt whose name will always be revered for her work in school temperance, speak before the teachers of Delaware County, our Union had her speak at a public meeting in the courthouse. We assisted the Delaware County Suffrage association in giving a lecture in the Presbyterian Church in Media where Dr. Anna Shaw was speaker. Other lecturers who came to us at different times, were Clara Hoffman, Joseph Acherman, Cora Seaber, Mary T. Lovell, Elizabeth J. Yates, Helen G. Rice, Mabel Conklin, Deborah Leds, Elizabeth E. Thomas, Charlotte Draper, Olive Pond, Amies, Ella Dayton Blair, Sarah B. Filtcraft, Ethel Shrigley, Mary S. White, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred F. Reid, Thomas Needham, Aaron Powell, Susanna M. Gardner, Charles S. Hamilton, Chares Wesley Burns, Mrs. Fulton, Major Hilton, Elizabeth Gordon, Miss Tingley and most of the clergymen of Media.

“Believing the intoxicants were kept in the courthouse, our Union sent a committee to interview the Commissioners and request a discontinuance of such doings as brought disgrace and dishonor upon our so-called temple of justice. We believe that our action was the power behind the throne that put an end to the disreputable business.

“Suggestions for change in the borough charter have given us some solicitude twice in the past twenty years.

“When greater municipal rights were desired, and it was thought necessary to change the charter, we protested against such action fearing the temperance restriction would be omitted or endangered. Again, when license was asked for by the Colonial we protested and made a canvas of the town, and obtained more signers on a remonstrance than were obtained on all the other petitions.

“In March, 1892, we held a bazaar of useful and fancy articles to raise money for local and emergency work.

“Our interest in the young people of the town was shown by the existence for some time of a “Y,” and later a Helping Hand Club was conducted with much success, keeping the same class of girls until they were obliged to take up occupations for themselves. Just how many years we had a L.T.L. I cannot say. It was first conducted in the Baptists school until a comparatively recent period. Children have always assisted in the Flower Mission and have done faithful work.

“The selling of beef from wagons has always been a matter of concern to us, and early in our existence we addressed a communication to the Town Council asking them to take measures to prevent this bringing of ‘speakeasies’ to our very doors. Later our president helped to formulate a bill for the Legislature the object of which was to restrain the sale and delivery of spirituous and malt liquors in prohibitive districts. A lawyer in Wayne, where the conditions are similar to those of our town, drafted the bill and helped to secure its passage. The clergymen of our town helped to obtain signatures in favor of the bill and one of the lawyers went to Harrisburg to further the work, but the bill never reached the House and no law has since been passed covering the intent of the proposed one, but I am glad to say that our town suffers less from the beer wagons than in the early days of our Union.

“We have observed red letter days and asked almost yearly for the observance of Peace Day in the churches. When this subject came before the world in the call for the meeting at The Hague, we put ourselves on record as endorsing the movement.

“Memorial meetings have been held and we have contributed to the national organizing fund. We have addressed Congress on all temperance measures for the abolishment of the canteen and the insertion of an anti-polygamy amendment in the National Constitution. We worked against the seating of Smoot. We urged the churches of Media to protest against the sale of liquors in Soldiers’ Homes, Government buildings and the District of Columbia, as we had already done as a Union.

“When the Anti-Saloon League was organized we offered our help, feeling that our work was identical, and we encouraged members to actively work in the league. We sent our president to the first Mother’s Congress in February 1897, and have always lent a helping hand to these bodies which stand for the work embraced in our departments. We contributed to the Country Week Association, to the Temperance Hospital, and as long as the temple was one of our branches, we sent our mite towards its support.

“During the Spanish-American War we helped the families of soldiers and sailors. We had a public meeting in the interests of the Rescue Home known as the ‘House of the Prince of Peace’, and our girls of the Helping Hand made garments for the babies there.

“We early subscribed for the Philanthropist, a purity organ conducted by Aaron M. Powell. This was circulated among our members until 1897 when it was discontinued.

Later the American Mother was subscribed for. From time to time books bearing on our work have been bought and passed among our members. Unlike curses, they have never come home to roost. I would suggest that our women look among their books to see if from a seldom looked for corner in their bookcases they can bring out these books and start them again on their mission of helpfulness.

"In 1898 in conjunction with the Woman's Club of Media, our Union urged the introduction of free kindergarten in the public schools here. We endorsed for election a woman on the School Board and were gratified by her election.

"At the semi-centennial celebration of the founding of Media, on May 19, 1900 our Union distributed literature and furnished ice water to those who paraded the streets. We petitioned Council to prevent the beer wagons from coming into our town that day.

"We presented the picture of Miss Willard to sandy Bank school and to some of the grades of our own school. We sent a barrel of clothing and money to the Mountain school at Hiadman, Kentucky. Our Union was the first in Delaware County to contribute to the Juvenile Court work and it still continues its yearly appropriation. Claims from National and State Unions have responded to as we could afford.

"As we review the work of our Union in the last twenty years we cannot help feeling that we have helped and not hindered the temperance work. This stimulates us to greatest effort in the future and inspires us to keep up our warfare against evil. There are times when we feel our own weakness but we must remember that we are but one link in an organized chain which is only so strong as each individual link.

"We feel that our crusade mothers built wiser than they knew when they arranged for doing temperance and reform work according to a plan. Thee 'Do Everything' policy has been steadily adhered to since our far sighted leader divined the efficacy of it, but methods of work have changed somewhat since the white ribbon movement began.

"Industrial agencies are fighting intemperance from a commercial standpoint. The fool light of science is showing the true character of alcohol and our children are fortified against its use and able to tell the reasons why it is a destructive and not a constructive agency. Physicians are testifying that it possesses no power to build up diseased tissues. Facts show that the productive capacity of a community is diminished by the presence of the saloon and that moral and financial prosperity following in the wake of prohibition.

"The sentiment for local option which is in the line of prohibition is growing all over these United States. Let us help the cause in every way and always be proud to identify ourselves with the woman's Christian Temperance Union."

Keith Lockhart Collection