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Brief Sketch of the  
Woman's Christian  
Temperance Union



REST COTTAGE

Former Home of Frances E. Willard

Evanston, Illinois

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## Brief Sketch of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union

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*They "Specialized on the  
Impossible"*

**D**ID you ever hear the story of the Women's Temperance Crusade? Frances Willard called it "the whirlwind of the Lord." Another has described it as "an anguished protest of home-loving, cultured, ballotless women in a superb attack on the strongholds of the liquor traffic." It began in the winter of 1873-1874 and, according to one chronicler, "In fifty days it drove the liquor traffic out of 250 towns and villages, increased by 100 per cent the attendance at church, and decreased in like proportion the attendance at criminal courts."

The Crusade was the cradle of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. To crystallize the sentiment aroused by that spectacular movement The Woman's Christian Temperance Union came into existence in 1874. Its purpose is expressed in these words:

"It is an organization of Christian women banded together for the protection of the home, the abolition of the liquor traffic, and the triumph of

Christ's Golden Rule in custom and in law."

The cornerstone of the W.C.T.U. structure is its educational work. This has never been allowed to descend to mere moral exhortation against drinking, but has demonstrated the findings of science as to the effects of alcohol, a narcotic poison, upon the human body. In 1882 the first temperance education law in all the world was enacted in Vermont, and during the next twenty years all the States of the Union had placed on their statute books similar laws requiring instruction in scientific temperance in the public schools, as well as those under Federal control. By the first years of the Twentieth Century scientific temperance instruction was not only recognized as a legal part of the educational system of the entire country but it had for its development a variety of textbooks whose teachings had kept pace with the scientific progress of the years, for such was the verdict of a committee from the American Academy of Medicine in 1904, after a careful examination of the laws and textbooks.

The work of the W.C.T.U. was characterized by Frances Willard as "dissecting out the alcohol nerve from the body politic" and the first step in

this "dissecting" process was the instruction of youth in the scientific facts concerning alcohol, for in the words of Mary H. Hunt, first superintendent of the department of Scientific Temperance Instruction, "The star of hope of the temperance reform hangs over the schoolhouse."

From the beginning the Woman's Christian Temperance Union had a distinguished leadership. Its first president was Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, a leader in missionary circles. During the five years of her presidency, twenty-five states were organized, the noontide prayer adopted, an official paper, now the Union Signal, started, a bow of white ribbon selected as the official badge, and representation at national conventions put upon a dues-paying basis.

In 1879, Mrs. Wittenmyer was succeeded by Frances E. Willard, the "master organizer." With Anna A. Gordon, she set out with the ambition to visit every town and city in the nation that had a population of 10,000 or more. They toured the whole country from the Atlantic to the Pacific,



*Frances E. Willard*

from Canada to the Gulf, and left in their trail newly organized state unions in the West and the South. More than any other one woman Miss Willard helped to break down the prejudices of the conservative Southern women and unite the North and South.

"Mother love works magic for humanity, but organized mother love works miracles," was a pregnant saying of Frances Willard. To make possible the working of these miracles it was planned to divide the work of the W.C.T.U. into departments, for it was the great leader's belief that while "Everything is not in the temperance reform, the temperance reform should be in everything"—her famous "Do Everything" policy. The number of these departments was at first fifty but was gradually reduced through the years to twenty-two. It is significant that several of these early lines of work have since become the basis of other organizations devoting their entire time to that one project, as, for example, woman suffrage, international peace, child welfare.

Upon the death of Frances Willard in 1898, Mrs. Lillian M. N. Stevens of Maine became the National leader. As the years passed and the boys and girls who had received temperance instruc-

tion in the schools grew to manhood and womanhood and became voters, protective legislation to outlaw the liquor traffic became a popular question, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union had its part in instructing and mobilizing voters for the election of legislators who would represent the principles for which the organization stood.

The contribution of the W.C.T.U. to these campaigns was varied. In addition to their regular meetings where they planned and prayed for the abolition of the drink traffic, the women trained the children and the young people in the Loyal Temperance Legions and the Young People's Branches; they taught them in the Sunday schools; they held essay and oratorical contests; they distributed literature; secured signatures to petitions; made personal appeals to voters, and held mass meetings.

The wisdom and farsightedness of the early leaders is in no way shown more clearly than in the make-up of the organization which consists of 10,000 or more local unions, (each with its officers) which are grouped into county or district unions, and these in turn are grouped into state unions; and the forty-eight unions, plus the

four territorial unions, are united under the National W.C.T.U. With this closely knit machinery at their command, the National officers in an emergency can, figuratively speaking, "press the button" at the National Headquarters, in Evanston, Illinois, and their word goes down the line from National to state, from state to district or county, and, from county to the 10,000 local unions, which immediately get into action to carry out the plans of the National. This makes for incomparable team work which has brought remarkable results in appeals to Congressmen and Senators and other officials and which many times has changed the current of legislation.

The regime of Mrs. Stevens will be specially remembered by her statesmanlike conduct in the Maine resubmission campaign in 1911, when the liquor interests attacked the prohibition law of Maine, enacted in 1853. Maine held this law even though ballotless women led the fight. But on the eve of the election, September 11, 1911, before the result of the election was known, Mrs. Stevens issued a ringing proclamation for National Constitutional Prohibition, which set in motion the campaign for the Eighteenth Amendment that never stopped until it was incorporated into

the Constitution by the ratification of forty-six state legislatures. Mrs. Stevens' strong faith in prohibition as the only way to deal with the drink traffic, founded on her knowledge of the benefits from the dry law in her own state, made her an ideal leader in the national prohibition campaign and her formulation, in 1913, of plans for the movement had much to do with its successful culmination in 1920.

When Mrs. Stevens was called from this world in 1914, her official mantle fell upon the shoulders of Anna Adams Gordon. There followed history-making days. The world was at war and, in 1917 when the United States became involved, the National W.C.T.U. seized that tragic opportunity to enlist for service and make articulate its patriotism in practical work. Its members cooperated with government plans for women's war service; became members of the advisory committee of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense and of the Liberty Loan Committee; provided comforts for the men in the training camps and at the front, for the sailors and the marines; established hostess houses; contributed ambulances and diet kitchens for the men in France; knit sweaters and socks; furnished wholesome entertainment and literature for

the men in camps; maintained work in the hospitals for the disabled returned soldiers; adopted French orphans; helped in the conservation of food; in fact, cooperated whole-heartedly in any plan for safeguarding and making more tolerable the lives of the men in training or at the front.

The National W.C.T.U. has always made much use of petitions to express the prohibition sentiment of the nation, having secured some 12,000,000 signatures to petitions for National Constitutional Prohibition, to present to Congress, but the most notable of all these was the "Win the War" petition presented to President Wilson in March, 1918, by Anna Adams Gordon, then National president. This historic document urged that in the interest of food conservation, the production of malt liquors in the United States cease immediately. It was signed by the official representatives of organizations of women numbering six millions. Among these signatures were those of numerous college presidents, and the deans of women in twenty-seven of the largest colleges in America.

It was a master stroke that at the strategic moment when the great objective of National Constitutional Pro-

hibition seemed about to be attained the W.C.T.U. Golden Jubilee project, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the organization by raising a million dollars and gaining a million members, should have been broached. The achievement of these objectives gave a wonderful impetus to the local membership all over the country and in 1920 when National Constitutional Prohibition was declared the law of the land, it found all departments of the organization in full swing and equipped to carry on for law observance and enforcement.

In 1925, at the National convention in Detroit, Michigan, Miss Gordon declined to stand for reelection, and Mrs. Ella A. Boole of New York was the unanimous choice as her successor. Mrs. Boole's leadership through the most difficult and crucial eight-year period of the organization's existence has been of the highest possible order, and its character may be seen by some of the slogans that have signalized this era: "Mobilize for Law Observance and Law Enforcement," "Hold Fast and Go Forward," "Prohibition Is the Best Method," "Give Prohibition Its Chance—the Liquor Traffic Had Its Day," "Eternal Vigilance Is the Price of Prohibition," "Observance and Enforcement—Not Repeat." The latest

slogan, "Advance—Not Retreat," was selected in the midst of bitter attacks on prohibition and called attention to the fact that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union believes that prohibition is the best method of dealing with the liquor traffic.

During this era there has been a marked advance in the work of the young people. The W.C.T.U. pioneered in this line of activity, it having had its beginnings in 1877, and the Young People's Branch is now organized in all but four states of the Union. The most outstanding piece of service it has performed was the securing of over a million signatures of young people, between the ages of 14 and 30, to a declaration that read: "Our Nation stands upon the threshold of a new epoch of national life. I want prohibition to succeed. I want to give prohibition its chance. That the Constitution may be protected and orderly government preserved, I declare my purpose to abstain from the use of all alcoholic liquors as a beverage, to support and defend the Eighteenth Amendment and thus contribute to the success of prohibition." On December 4, 1931, this "Youth's Roll Call" was formally presented to President Hoover at the White House from

the hands of 160 young people carrying the rolls.

With the growing need of educating the people and answering the flood of wet propaganda that deluged the country, the publishing and distribution of prohibition literature greatly increased. The National W.C.T.U. has for years maintained an up-to-date publishing house at Evanston, Illinois, and the sales of literature from it in 1932 aggregated fifty thousand dollars. The annual output runs into millions of pages. The sale of a set of special leaflets put out that year reached ten million copies. This literature is purchased chiefly by local unions and distributed by them not alone in the forty-eight states but in Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines and Porto Rico. The Union Signal, the official paper, and The Young Crusader, the children's periodical, are published at the headquarters and go into more than fifty countries.

The citizenship phase of the W.C.T.U. program began in Mrs. Boole's regime, to assume larger proportions and greater importance. After women, by the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, were given the suffrage the W.C.T.U. emphasized study classes in citizenship, and the women enthusiastically put into practice the things

they learned, spurred on by a deep heart interest in the election to public office of candidates who were friendly to prohibition and would help to enforce and retain the home protection law. These later years have been notable for the intelligent study by the women of party platforms and political candidates, and the use of their ballots to represent their principles.

### Our World's Work

During the half century that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union had been increasing its membership, widening its scope of service and extending its influence, sister organizations in more than fifty other countries were carrying on similar work. It was in 1883 that there was born in the brain of Frances E. Willard the wonderful idea of a World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union that should belt the globe and join the women of the Occident and the Orient in an "organized attack upon the poison habits of both hemispheres." The World's W.C.T.U. organized that year was the first international society formed among women. Shortly thereafter the principles of the W.C.T.U. were carried by the first World's missionary, Mrs. Mary Clement Leavitt, around the world, and she was followed in later years by

many other missionaries who traveled from country to country to organize, educate and inspire the women of these lands to join the white ribboners of the United States in "making the whole world more homelike." Today the W.C.T.U. binds together the women of more than fifty nations in one common purpose, and Mrs. Ella A. Boole, the present World's president, is the worthy successor of Mrs. Margaret Bright Lucas, sister of the great British statesman; Frances E. Willard; Lady Henry Somerset; the Countess of Carlisle and Anna Adams Gordon.

The Polyglot Petition, written by Frances Willard in 1884, is historically significant as being the first worldwide proclamation against the liquor traffic. It was addressed to all rulers and nations of the world, an appeal for world prohibition, world purity and freedom from the opium trade. It carried the signatures of more than seven and one-half millions of people in more than fifty countries,—Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Gentile, Hindu and Mohammedan. It was presented to many famous rulers, among them Queen Victoria and President Cleveland.

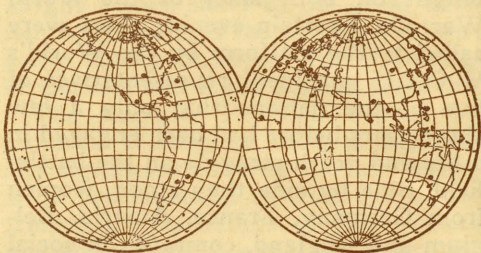
World's W.C.T.U. conventions are held every three years, and the large cities of the world have entertained

these great conclaves; Boston, Chicago, London, Toronto, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Geneva, Lausanne, Brooklyn, Philadelphia.

It was a far cry from the Crusade of the seventies to that thrilling moment at the World's convention in Edinburgh, where the lineal spiritual successors of the Crusaders were assembled in the first meeting attended by representatives of the nations that fought on both sides of the World War. On a certain evening there were called to the platform by the World's W.C.T.U. president representatives of five of the nations that only a few short years before had been engaged in a life and death struggle on the battlefield. Side by side they stood, women from Germany, France, Austria, Belgium and England, comrades in social welfare service, differences and prejudices forgotten in a burning desire to attain a common objective, the protection of their homes and their children from an age-old evil.

The significance of this and every other World's convention is that it is an agency for the promotion of friendliness and understanding among the women of all lands that is certain to make for international peace and to bring nearer the day when war shall be no more.





The World's W.C.T.U. Circles the Globe