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Female Cent Society to Women's Association, 1804-1954

The year was 1804. The Federal Constitution was just 17 years old, and Thomas Jefferson was President of a nation which included only 16 states, but which had millions of western acres which were not only unsettled but also unknown. In fact, the explorers Lewis and Clark were just starting their epoch-making trip which would inform Americans about the "Great Stony Mountains" and other wonders of the continent. The United States was no closely-knit nation of factories, airplanes, and television. Americans were mostly farmers, clad in linsey-woolsey garments made at home by the women, cooking over fireplaces, reading by the light of candles, traveling by horse-back, buggy, or stage-coach.

The place was Hanover, New Hampshire. Although Dartmouth College could boast of the advanced age of 35 years, it could claim only 129 students with five professors, including the president, plus two tutors, on the faculty. The town itself numbered only 1907 free whites and 5 slaves, while the state of New Hampshire could enumerate no more than 185,855 people, and could well be called a frontier community; industrialization was far in the future, with such towns as Manchester and Nashua not even dreams. As a poor farming state, many communities found difficulty in maintaining churches, which was a sad condition for God-fearing New England. The New Hampshire Missionary Society did its best, but its funds were desperately inadequate. It was only three years old and was by no means wealthy. While this problem was being discussed at a meeting held at Concord, the wife of the

minister of Concord, Mrs. Elizabeth Kneeland McFarland, the 23 year old bride of the Reverend Dr. Asa McFarland, made a suggestion. Her project was the New Hampshire Cent Institution, a fund raising device copied on Massachusetts models, whereby each lady member contributed a cent a week, with the funds then turned over to the Home Missionary Society to be used primarily to help the poorer churches of the state. The idea was hailed with delight, and Mrs. McFarland immediately took measures for the formation of affiliated societies. The first one was of course in the parish of her husband at Concord, but two others followed immediately--one at Hanover and the other at Raymond. The records fail to show whether contributions were made that year, but in 1806 the treasurer reported from Hanover \$7.25 plus books valued at \$10.12--for even in that day Hanover seemed to have a surplus of books. The amount may not seem large, but prices were low, and the total contributions of the state were only about \$124. In 1814 Hanover sent \$31; in 1815, \$33.36; in 1818, \$18; in 1819, \$12; in 1820, \$29.44; in 1821 there is a joint entry--from the Plains of Dartmouth College \$20.82, and from Hanover \$12.40; and again in 1822 the Plains sent \$17.84, and Hanover \$12.42. In the years where I found no records it is possible that the money was sent by other means and not recorded. Unfortunately there remain no records of the Hanover Female Cent Society. At least I have not been able to find any. However, we do know that the only officer was a collector, and that there were no meetings and no minutes--truly a refreshing simplicity in organization. For 86 years the state society had only one officer, a treasurer. Mrs. McFarland held

that office from 1804 until her death in 1838 with an interregnum of 7 years due to illness. For Hanover I found the names of the collectors, Mrs. Elizabeth Woodward, Mrs. Anna Shurtleff, and Mrs. Charlotte Towne.

This very simplicity of organization may have proved frustrating for the active-minded women of the state, and especially of Hanover, for in October 1871 the more pretentious Women's Missionary Society was formed. This was the Hanover Auxiliary of the Women's Board of Missions, which was interested in both home and foreign missions.

The Women's Missionary Society was sponsored by a few ladies who met at the residence of the wife of the minister, Mrs. L. P. Leeds, on Saturday afternoon, September 30, 1871. Mrs. Gulick, a missionary from the Micronesian Isles, was present on this occasion. She related some of her experiences among the natives, and impressed all who heard her with the necessity of woman's work for heathen women.

On the following Sunday, an invitation was given from the pulpit to all the ladies of the congregation, to meet at Mrs. Sanborn's on Monday, October 2nd, to form a missionary society. Twenty-two ladies responded to this call. "The meeting was opened with prayer by Mrs. Gulick, who offered fervent petitions at the Throne of Grace, that this undertaking might be blessed of Heaven, and crowned with abundant success." The Society was regularly organized with the election of officers--Mrs. L. P. Leeds became president, Miss S. L. Smith treasurer, and Mrs. E. D. Sanborn secretary.

The dues of the Society were \$1 a year. Regular meetings were held, and minutes were kept. In the minutes of the November meeting I find that \$35 had been sent to the treasurer--this sum having been contributed by the ladies previous to their organization.

In January the meeting fell on New Year's Day so was omitted. However, during that week the secretary received some letters from Boston, so a meeting was called for the purpose of listening to them, after the regular prayer meeting on Monday of the "Week of Prayer." About 30 ladies were present.

A list of 69 members was recorded for 1872, and included many names that are still familiar to members of today's organization. The Mesdames Bartlett, N. A. Frost, Chase, Fletcher, Hitchcock, Sanborn, and Lord, just to mention a few. An interesting note in the minutes was the time when the two Dewey sisters, the Misses M. J. and E. M., served jointly as secretary.

The meetings were held once a month, but the day was changed several times. Each meeting followed the same general pattern of a prayer, a hymn, and then a discussion of some phase of foreign or home missions. The meetings featured letters and talks from missionaries; excerpts from missionary magazines; a talk about some foreign country, with the speaker using a large map to identify the location. The intriguing foreign countries were China, Japan, Fiji Islands and Sandwich Islands, while those nearer home were Alaska, the Philippines, Cuba, Key West, and Utah. The Mormons of Utah were especially interesting, for Mr. Robert's seat in the House was being challenged because of his belief in

polygamy.

Because of this interest in missions many pleas were made to subscribe to missionary magazines. "Several subscriptions were offered for the Magazine 'Life and Light,' which does much good in circulating Missionary intelligence. It will remind us at least once a month of our far away Sisters, and serve as a link of sympathy to bind us more closely together. God speed it in its labor of love and may eyes moisten and hearts soften, as the eye rests upon its pages."

The meetings were held in different homes but gradually gravitated to that of Mrs. Sanborn. They were held with some degree of regularity. However, in February 1874 I find the notation: "The first Monday occurring during vacation, and all of the Officers of the Society being out of town, no meeting was held." This was also true in February, 1875. Sometimes the meetings were cancelled because of bad weather.

In June of 1878 Mrs. Sanborn made the following report:

"The Hanover Auxiliary is happy to report an increasing interest on the part of its members. The attendance at our monthly meetings is much larger than in any previous year. The Ladies show a willingness to do each her part. We have pursued the same plan as last year assigning a particular field of Missionary labor to one or two ladies, who prepare themselves to report upon it. Naturally the same field becomes a topic of thought and reading to others, sometimes to all, this interest is mutual. Many are prepared to ask questions or give bits of information as occasion may require, and the result is a social, -ive meeting. No one stays at home for fear of being called upon to supply a gap, for

all is arranged beforehand. No one is requested to offer a prayer without having been engaged to do so by the presiding officer during the preceding week. As different ones perform this duty, the Service is varied, relieved from all monotony, and is a burden to no one."

There continued to be agitation for a room of their own, which in time resulted in the Vestry. The first meeting was held there in October, 1881.

The Hanover ladies at times invited guests from the neighboring towns to their regular meetings, and at times attended meetings in nearby towns. At one general conference held in Lebanon in 1877, however, the ladies protested rather bitterly at their limitations, and "wished that in future the Conference would grant the 'Sisters' more than a short hour for their session." More satisfactory seemed to have been the annual meeting of the New Hampshire branch; some 80 ladies gathered at Hanover, and the affair apparently went off smoothly. A similar meeting was held again in 1887, at which time Mrs. Charles Hitchcock read an original hymn. This meeting was climaxed when the 136 guests were served a "bountiful collation, which was beautifully served in the Vestry." The only flaw was that the ladies had to hurry to the waiting coaches which were to take them to the train. There is a list of all the guests attending.

The minutes of these years contain many obituaries, of which the most interesting to me was that of Miss Mary Hitchcock, who exhibited quite unusual accomplishments. She was educated at Mount Holyoke under Mary Lyon, and was enthusiastic about sciences, and

particularly about ferns and sea mosses. She was fascinated by travel, and finally realized her great ambition in a trip to Hawaii, where she revelled in the plants, fruits, and flowers--to say nothing of her trip home over the newly opened Canadian Pacific. Unfortunately she did not live long to enjoy her splendid memories, for she died a few days after her return to Hanover.

Quite naturally the society tended to expand its organization and activities. A new office of vice-president was added in 1875, and in 1891 three presidents were chosen, each presiding in turn, but in 1904 the return was made to the usual officers. The first box of clothing to be sent to a foreign mission was noted in 1878, with more and more being sent to both foreign and home fields. Particularly interesting was a box of Christmas gifts sent in 1887 to 334 children in Constantinople. Another innovation was a scholarship grant in 1891. Several groups were organized to interest the younger people, as A Younger Set, in 1880; a Children's Rainbow Band, in 1891; and a Cradle Roll, in 1907.

The ladies were always interested in what other churches were doing. At the meeting in January 1881 there was read a letter about the work of the Dutch Reformed Church, and the secretary noted in her minutes: "It is a good thing to feel an interest in the work of other denominations; and an encouraging thought that the burden of evangelizing the world does not rest alone upon Congregationalists."

The idea of serving tea at meetings came in February 1880--justified on the ground that the members could then remain for evening services. The ladies who attended this first tea pronounced "it a pleasant innovation and a decided success." Several of the

deserted husbands apparently decided that the ladies' tea was better than preparing their own suppers, for in May we find that Dr. Leeds, Professor Chase, Professor Hitchcock, Professor Bartlett, and Dr. William Smith joined the ladies.

Membership in the Missionary Society did not increase as fast as some hoped, but the secretary apparently was philosophical about the situation, for she noted in her minutes of October 1872: "While the Hanover Auxiliary shows no progress during the past year in increasing numbers and contributions, it still pursues the even tenor of its way. It is somewhat characteristic of this old college town that while it never enters into any enterprise with ardent zeal, it seldom abandons any good work once undertaken." At least equally distressing was the failure of members to attend the meetings. As late as 1905 the usual attendance was between 11 and 25. Periodic discussion revolved around the making of the meetings more attractive, although apparently there was no discussion of what to do about such matters as hungry husbands, small children, icy streets, or college holidays. A typical reform effort came in October 1906 when Mrs. Ambrose Vernon suggested better programs and more participants. The immediate result was impressive; whereas only 12 had attended the October meeting, the November record showed 45. Unfortunately the improvement was not permanent, for the February meeting dropped to 29. This problem is an ever present one.

In 1908 another change was made. All the women's organizations of the church were combined into our present Women's Association of the Church of Christ at Dartmouth College. We all know

the tremendous strides that have been made, and which are well illustrated by the growth in membership from 29 in 1908 to our present enrollment.

The first meeting of the new Women's Association was held in the Vestry Thursday afternoon, May 6, 1908, at 3:00 o'clock. It was called to order by Mrs. Moore, and the following officers were elected:

President--Mrs. Tucker

Vice-president--Mrs. Bugbee

Secretary--Miss Lockerby

Treasurer--Mrs. Person

The meetings were held once a month, alternating between home and foreign missions. Several socials were held each year, with plays, charades, and guessing games as entertainment. When the Connecticut River Valley Conference was held the ladies prepared some of the meals and made arrangements for overnight lodgings. At Christmas time, the ladies provided a tree and the entertainment, which included gifts and candy for the children.

And so we have grown and changed, and we hope always for the better. We have used various means to raise money--fairs, sales, card parties, luncheons, free offerings at the meetings, carnival meals--and those who helped with them will never forget them; in 1925 the staggering total of 517 meals were served. We also have made up and sold two editions of a cook book, have sold letter paper, and have held a very successful auction. At one time the members grew a little weary of so much work, and the society decided to ask each member to give as much as she could, with the understanding that if the budget were met that no more

demands would be made upon her. This was very successful for some years, and is still being used to some extent.

As to the caliber of the meetings--they have been varied and interesting, and even though the emphasis has shifted from time to time, the real purpose of the organization has never been forgotten. One cannot mention all the interesting meetings, but here are a few I remember very distinctly. The Christmas programs have always been different and wonderful, and if you ever attended any of the luncheons the memory will always linger. The meeting with the Shakers, and with the Jewish ladies from Claremont, the meeting where the displaced persons told of their experiences, the many musicals, the plays have all added to our own knowledge and to good fellowship.

The church suppers have been well attended, the Sunday morning breakfasts have made the college boys feel they have a home in the church. The Christmas gifts to the Lincoln Academy, the help we have given to the Laconia Home, the Kurn Hatten Home, the Faith Cabin Libraries all have attested to the love and charity of the women.

When emergencies arose the women met them, as when the church burned; when a new minister came, his wife found the pantry well stocked; when the Hospital needed sewing done; and when the UN flag was needed. Then there was the kitchen to be furnished, and always help with the mortgage. These are only a few of the many activities, because in everything the women gave assistance.

On several occasions the Association has received memorial gifts, as our two silver tea services--one from Mrs. Fletcher and

Miss Mary Fletcher, and the other from Mr. and Mrs. James Hamilton, who were former members of the community. One set of candlesticks was given in memory of Mrs. Goldthwait and another in memory of Mrs. Wood. The Rand Room was furnished by the Rand family in memory of Mrs. Flora Rand, and the Masland Room was decorated in memory of Mrs. Harriet Masland.

As you see, the history of the Association divides itself into three periods, and each period had its own leaders. The first group, from 1804 to 1871, did not concern itself actively in the work of the Female Cent Society, but was felt in many other ways. In this group were such leaders as Mrs. Young, Mrs. Brown, Miss Theodosia Stockbridge, Miss Sarah Smith, Mrs. Sanborn, Mrs. Chase, Mrs. Blaisdell, Mrs. Emerson, Mrs. Hitchcock, and many others.

The second period, from 1871 to 1908, brings us on more familiar ground, for there were Mrs. Downing, Mrs. Huntington, Mrs. Storrs, Mrs. Sherman, Mrs. C. P. Chase, Mrs. Bartlett, Mrs. C. D. Adams, Mrs. Gile, and Mrs. Emily Howe Hitchcock, who gave the Howe home for the library. These are just a few.

The third period, 1908 to today, is made up of all of us. However I would like to mention a few who have left us, but who did so much for the Association--Mrs. Urdike, Wright and Mrs. Tibbetts Hopkins, whose valiant work did so much to make the Carnival meals successful; Mrs. Spence, the wife of a former pastor, who was so wonderful with the then annual fairs; Mrs. Theodora Burleigh, who played the piano so beautifully; Mrs. Putnam, who served as both president and treasurer; Miss Newel, who was secretary for many years; Mrs. Wilder, who was always busy, and will be remembered for the beautiful luncheons she managed. And there were many

others too numerous to mention, but we who knew them loved them. We can only hope that we will be remembered with similar affection when we go.