

Alberta Secretary's Report

P. P. Woodbridge, Secretary of the United Farmers of Alberta, presented the following report at the Convention at Edmonton

It is with sincere gratification that I am able to present to you, at this the end of my fourth year as your general secretary, a report which from every angle shows a most encouraging increase and improvement in the work of every department of our association. I regret exceedingly that, so far as I personally have been concerned, my prolonged illness last spring prevented me from doing much of the work that I had hoped to do in still further improving the efficiency of the service which we are trying to give you from the central office.

You will perhaps bear with me for a few moments if I digress a little from my report proper to emphasize still further a few of the little problems which we are confronted with at the central office, and which are dealt with in detail in the report of your finance committee. I am very pleased to say that, while I am personally far from satisfied with the work of the central office and feel that with better financial aid we can give many times the present service, we receive very few complaints in regard to the service we are giving. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the present staff is not sufficient to do adequate justice, either to themselves or to the work, and that the question of increasing the size of your central office must receive more consideration and support from the local unions from now on. While this question has been a pressing one for the past two years, it had not become so urgent until this last year, when poor health has necessitated my being absent from the office for a considerable period. We have also had to consider the fact that inter-provincial developments and the necessity for our organization to secure greater recognition in high places was a very important part of our work that could not be secured without a considerable increase in the expenditure for travelling and other expenses. In view of what has been accomplished during the past year, I personally do not feel that we made any mistake in practising the most rigid economy in the central office, as it has undoubtedly enabled us to secure a vastly greater prestige and recognition among other organizations and interests, even tho it has somewhat reduced the service that we have been able to give our local unions. The time has now come, however, when it is necessary to give the financial appropriation of the central office very serious consideration, as the increased importance of our organization and its work in other directions is adding at an enormous rate to the already heavy responsibilities of your central office. In giving you this report I propose to trace briefly the growth of the organization in membership and material since its inception.

Growth of the Organization

Unfortunately, without a very great deal of work, the earlier records of the association will not allow me to give you figures that definitely permit of exact comparison with the statistics that are available today, but we can note that at the end of the first year of our association, in 1910, the report shows 122 active unions, with total membership fees paid up of \$1,073.50. At the close of the year 1912, when I was appointed secretary, the number of unions on the books was 440, but a very considerable proportion of these were not active, and the membership fees received were only \$3,395.00. This year we have received dues from all locals, and the membership fees amount to \$7,047.91. We have, in addition, 19 life members of the association. A feature worthy of special notice is the Women's Section. The advent of women into our organization was not noticeable until after the amendment introduced to our constitution by Carleton Place Local No. 202, and passed at the Lethbridge convention in January, 1914. At the end of that year we had received \$39.60 in membership dues, or a total membership of 156. The Women's Section at this time had not separate identity. The following year, at Edmonton, the Women's Section was officially organized, and you will remember that last year we reported 19 locals paying in dues of \$162.75, or a membership of 336. This year we are able to report 50 locals in the Women's Section, with a total membership of about 900.

Aside from the increase of nearly 600 members in the Women's Section, we are able to show an increase of 2,300 members among the men, which in view of the fact that so many of our members have left to play their part in the great war, is really a most gratifying and in some ways a remarkable showing. It is worth noting that right from the start our growth in membership has been steady and normal, without any phenomenal jump in any one year. This is to my mind a very healthy sign and indicates that we are building on a solid foundation, which will ensure permanency and stability to our organization in the future.

In regard to the local growth of the organization, the development during the past five years affords a very interesting study, and is even more gratifying than the general figures might indicate. A few years ago comparatively few of our locals had anything nearly approaching what may be described as a permanent organization. Their activities were of a spasmodic nature and few of them were of any size. The district association was merely an idea and the incorporated local had not been heard of. The result was a great fluctuation in the membership of the different locals from year to year, with the disappearance at times of as many old unions as we were able to create new thru our organization work. I think I would be quite safe in saying that up to three or four years ago the average falling off each year would run as high as 20 or 25 per cent. of our total number of unions.



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Secretary-Treasurer United Farmers of Alberta

The falling off this year is less than 50, or about 8 per cent. of the whole. The annual report forms received last year denote that about two-thirds of our unions are engaged to a greater or lesser extent in handling the more general supplies of their members. My returns in regard to district associations and incorporated locals are not complete, largely owing to the fact that under the old constitution these developments are given no official standing in the association. We have record, however, of 18 district associations, and a matter of 24 incorporated locals or districts, which will doubtless be considerably increased within the next few months, as nearly 100 sets of bylaws have been sent out to different locals who have signified their intention to take this step at an early date. Among the district associations that of Ponoka, tho not yet incorporated, takes the lead in numbers, with a matter of 15 affiliated locals and a membership of about 400. The principal work that this district has done up to the present has been in livestock shipping, and as many as 1,400 head of hogs have been shipped thru their association in one day. The value of their business in livestock shipping alone last year was nearly \$100,000.00. The Crossfield District Association is perhaps the best all round example of what can be done that we have in the province. There are eight or nine locals affiliated here, and the district secured incorporation about 18 months ago. Their business is fairly evenly divided between livestock shipping and the purchasing of supplies, and averages about \$16,000.00 per month. The association has an office and warehouse in town and employs a permanent manager. They also hold agencies for various fire and hail insurance companies, and in fact have been quick to avail themselves of anything which has offered an opportunity to serve the farmers in the district. There are very live district associations at Jenner, Daysland, Wetaskiwin and several other points which serve a number of locals. While at Leduc, Penhold, Innisfail, Nanton, Cowley and other points

the district association has practically become one large local.

Organization of District Associations

Time alone will tell which of the two plans will be the best for the work which we have to do. At the present time local conditions are the principal factor in deciding which plan shall be followed. To hold the various affiliated locals together, each retaining their separate identity, requires good leadership in each local, and where this is available probably it is the best plan to follow for the general advancement of the community as a whole. At many points, however, this leadership is at present lacking, and must be developed before such a plan can be successful, and in these cases we find that the leadership has practically become centralized in the one big local union. Comparatively few of the locals have taken up the selling of farm produce, aside from livestock, tho considerable was done at certain points this year in the shipping of potatoes. The number of inquiries in this regard coming into the central office is, however, increasing very rapidly, and I look to see considerable development in this direction in the near future. The greatest problem which we have had to face, and which to a certain extent we still have to face in the commercial tendencies of our locals, is that of continuing to hold our membership at these different points where the development assumes big proportions. In earlier days the incorporation of a local or district for trading purposes invariably meant the loss of practically all if not the whole of our membership in that district. With the advent of our Elevator Company this situation became even more intensified, and the problem assumed serious proportions. Latterly we seem to have been overcoming this difficulty, and today I note with appreciation rather than alarm the desire on the part of our locals to expand in commercial work, as those who have developed in this way during the last year or so have invariably increased their membership considerably. I am inclined to attribute this to two reasons, partly the assistance given by the central office in an advisory capacity, and partly to a realization among our people generally that the development along commercial lines in the local is only a small step in the general direction of the great work which lies before us as an organization.

General Organization Work

Your general secretary is perhaps in a better position than anyone else to realize the tremendous diversity of material among our members which is available to the organization for the work which it has to carry out. I imagine that every variety of human nature and every human characteristic is represented some way or other in our association. The problem we have to solve is to find a common object which will bring all these various elements together in a united effort to improve the conditions under which they and the great mass of the people in general have to live. To my mind the development of the commercial tendency which appeals to by far the greatest majority is not only necessary because it adds to our strength in numbers, but because we cannot enter into this work without coming into direct contact with many of the causes of our present economic oppression, not to mention the fact that the work in itself is an education which is essential if we are to acquit ourselves creditably in the higher objects at which we aim. It seems to me that we have solved our problem when we can bring it home to every individual member of our association, and those who are not members also, that we are engaged in a work and have a duty to perform as a class which cannot be undertaken by any other class. I say this in no spirit of false pride or criticism of other classes. Every development of our whole commercial fabric tends to increase the responsibility of the farmer and to force upon him the decision as to what the future of the great mass of the people, including himself, shall be. The farmer alone is beyond the reach of those who would deny us the right to express our own ideas. We will have found our common object which will appeal to all minds, irrespective of race or creed, when we make each individual understand that he is taking part in an effort to advance the cause of all the people and to compel a recognition of the rights of the common people. Martyrdom, in the same way that was suffered by those who fought for the recognition of the people in days gone by, is no longer necessary. The same spirit of unselfishness and steadfast adherence to principle is, however, essential. Whether I have succeeded or not, time alone will prove, but in the five years, during which I have given the whole of my time to the work of this organization, there have been

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