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Women's President's Address

Following is Mrs. Walter Parly's First Annual Report as President of the United Farm Women

I have the honor to submit to you my first annual report as President of the United Farm Women. The past year has been marked by a steady growth; the number of locals has more than doubled, and the membership of the older locals has largely increased. There is not the slightest doubt that our numbers would have increased still more, were it not for the efforts our farm women are making in patriotic work; many feel that they must devote their small amount of leisure to the great purpose as long as the war lasts. In many cases also the women have been called on to do extra work on the farm, on account of the shortage of labor; this situation is likely to be intensified during the coming year, if the farms are still allowed to remain the happy hunting ground of the recruiting officer. The people in the cities who are concerned over the high cost of living should recognize the fact that the constant drain of necessary labor from the farms is likely to accentuate this problem by lessening production.

Recognition of Work

Our growth has not been in membership alone, but also in recognition. At the commencement of the year, although nominally a part of the U.F.A. organization, we seemed to have very little connection with it. This situation, during 1916, has been completely changed, your Executive having been invited on several occasions to attend the Board meetings of the men's organization, and your President having been given a place on the Resolution Committee which met early in December. In the revised draft of the U.F.A. Constitution you will find that in Section 6, which defines the Central Board, the Executive of the Women's Section is given a permanent place on the Board of the Association; also that the President of the Women's Section is given a place on the Executive of the Association, thus keeping us in constant touch with the organization as a whole. I think we may also claim to have received recognition from the outside as a potential force for good in the life of the rural districts. Letters in my files show interest and sympathy from many sources, and from British Columbia we have been asked for information as to starting a similar organization.

With the passing of the Equal Franchise Bill the necessity of mobilizing the strength and voting power of the farm women became very apparent; also the fact that the logical place for the farm women to work for the betterment of rural conditions was in the same organization as the farm men. Many have not, up to the present, realized this fact, but I feel convinced that they will do so more and more as time goes on. Having received the provincial franchise, we must now help forward the suffrage movement to the best of our ability, until the women of the Dominion, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, are able to exercise the full privilege of their citizenship, not only in the provincial but in federal affairs.

Work During Summer

In February, being to my great regret unable to attend the convention of the W.G.C. in Saskatoon as fraternal delegate, your Vice-President took my place, and had a most interesting and enjoyable experience. She came back filled with admiration for our sister organization, and the great work they were doing. In March I was invited to attend the convention of the Women's Institutes in Edmonton as fraternal delegate, and while there, thru the kindness of the superintendent, was given a seat in the speaker's gallery for the second reading of the Equal Franchise Bill, an historic episode I wish you could have shared with me. In June your President and Secretary were invited to attend the first meeting of the Provincial Laws Committee, formed by the local Councils of Women in Alberta. At this meeting it was pointed out that the farm women of the province should be represented on this committee, and I had the honor to be made first vice-chairman. Your secretary was also given a place on the committee. Amongst the bills which this committee is preparing to present to the legislature is one asking for equal par-

ental rights, and another on equal property rights for married women. During the summer I visited several clubs and organized some new ones, and had hoped to do considerable more of this work, if illness had not interfered with my plans. During December I visited some other points, and was asked to speak at the U.F.A. District Convention at Ponoka, which I hope has led to the formation of at least two other locals.

In August I was invited to speak at the Conference for the Rural Leadership at the University of Alberta. I hope that if this conference is repeated this year, as I understand it is to be, that many of you will make an effort to attend, for it proved most helpful to our work, and was in every way an inspiration. I think I may fairly say that at every point visited thruout the year the greatest encouragement has been received and a keen interest shown in our organization. That it has proved the help and stimulus to farm women which we hoped it might have been shown by our correspondence with women in every part of the province. The most important question taken up by your Executive was that of medical aid for the rural districts. Early in the year I asked the co-operation of the U.F.A. Executive on this subject, and thru Mr. Wood was put in touch with the President of the Rural Municipalities Association.

Rural Medical Aid

This organization has for some time been investigating this problem and have secured considerable data as to conditions in the country districts. At my request a meeting of the three Executives was arranged for at Edmonton in August, and the resolution which has been submitted to the convention was drawn up. In October a committee consisting of the presidents of the three organizations presented this resolution to the premier; it was received with a full acknowledgment of the necessity for some action being taken, but no definite promise. The next session may see something further done about it. I should like to see this meeting formulate some definite policy for our future work. We may not be able to accomplish all we set out to do, but we can at least educate public opinion on what ought to be done, and public opinion is a very powerful weapon, before which even politicians have been known to give way.

The questions that seem most vital to this country are medical aid and the improvement of the rural school. For this latter we want the women's vote in the election of trustees, and women on the school board. Above all, we must work for a higher standard of business and political morality, which last will never be achieved until we destroy, root and branch, the whole system of patronage, which spreads its malignant tentacles thru every fibre of our national life. In all these questions our enfranchisement will count for much, and I feel sure that every thinking woman will use her vote, not for party or personal interests, but for the betterment of her country.

Appreciate Secretary's Work

The thanks of this meeting are due to the various officers of the Central Board, whose courtesy and help have been the greatest encouragement, and especially to the Secretary, Mr. Woodbridge, who has been untiring in his efforts to aid your executive in every possible way. I should also like this meeting to place on record its appreciation of the work of our Secretary-Treasurer, who I much regret is unable to be present. Our organization owes more than it perhaps realizes to her devoted and unselfish labor on its behalf. I know that you will all join with me in hoping that it will not be very long before we are fortunate enough to see her back on the Board of the association.

The coming year will, I hope, see a great development in our work. May I ask the delegates, when they return to their various locals, to impress upon their members that as an organization we stand or fall according to the interests and efforts put forth by each individual member. Your executive are here to do your bidding, but they are busy farm

Continued on Page 35

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The Department does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender.

By order,
R. C. DESROCHERS,
Secretary.

Department of Public Works,
Ottawa, January 17, 1917.

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