

National Council of Women  
and Conservation

BY  
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Reprinted from the  
Fifth Annual Report of the Commission of Conservation

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Ottawa—Commission of Conservation—1914

LP F 5012  
1914  
P 736

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# The National Council of Women and Conservation

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AN ADDRESS BY

MRS. H. P. PLUMPTRE

*Recording Secretary of the National Council of Women of Canada*

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**M**R. CHAIRMAN, Ladies and Gentlemen : I am sure you will understand that I have come here not as a speaker but as one who desires to learn. I am representing the National Council of Women, which is a federated organization of thirty-one Local Councils, in as many of our largest cities. There are, too, sixteen affiliated societies of women, many of them having very large memberships. For example, I might mention the Daughters of the Empire, the Victorian Order (which indeed is the child of the National Council, for the National Council originated the work of the Victorian Order of Nurses), the Women's Institutes and a great many others which I need not detain you by mentioning. We have, in all, a membership in our Council and affiliated societies of about one hundred and fifty thousand women, so that we feel that we have a large backing in any work we undertake, and that what we learn we are able to disseminate amongst a very large number of people.

More than that, we, as a National Council, represent but one of twenty countries from which the International Council draws its membership. All the great countries of the world are represented on the International Council of Women.

**Work of Local  
Councils**

Our work is chiefly carried on in the Local Councils in the various cities. These are granted considerable freedom of action, but there are a few general regulations. Thus, no Local Council is allowed to approach any legislature without the permission of the National Council. We desire to save legislative bodies from being troubled by small requests or by requests for things which are not necessary at the time or

place at which they are presented, and so to that extent we place restrictions on the Local Councils. But otherwise they are perfectly free to act as they think best.

We do our work mainly through eighteen standing committees, the most recently formed of which is that on Conservation. It is for that reason that you were kind enough to invite me to be present to-day to represent the National Council of Women. We feel that, as we are just starting this work, we should like to follow the best possible lines. Believing as we do, that in this work co-operation is more desirable than competition, I have been commissioned to be with you here to-day to learn on what lines you are working, and, if possible, to carry back some ideas as to how best to mould the policy of this new committee which we have organized.

**Co-operation with  
Commission** For a number of reasons we thought we might be able to co-operate with you in your work. First of all, I would say the aim that you have and the aim that we have are very much the same, namely, the general welfare of the public. Your Assistant to the Chairman, Mr. White, said recently, that practically every branch of human endeavour was included in the work of your Commission. From another point of view, ours is almost the same field. We have standing committees on almost all the things on which you have standing committees and a great many others besides. We are like a large commission of women dealing with the many interests which touch the lives of women.

**Public Health  
Work of National  
Council** We have, therefore, a large number of standing committees. For instance, we have a standing committee on public health, one of the most active and the oldest of all our committees. It is obvious that public health is a matter of national concern. It is also obvious that it concerns first of all and chiefly the women of the country, because it is on them that the stress of caring for the sick generally falls, and because it is they who find in their own homes the disabilities that are brought on them by such things as Dr. Hodgetts has just been speaking of to you. Again, you have heard Dr. Hodgetts' reference to town planning. We have been working along the very lines of which he has been speaking, through our standing committee on public health.

**Agriculture and  
Women** Then in agriculture we believe that there is a large and unworked field for women. Many branches of agriculture are now being opened up for women's work. For example, in connection with fruit picking and packing there seems to be work in which women can be very

well occupied. I have heard Katharine Davis, the first woman Commissioner of Correction that the city of New York has ever had, whose appointment was made by Mayor Mitchel recently, say that, in the state school at Bedford, the girls who were under her supervision there, built pigsties and even silos. She said that climbing a ladder is not, as has been generally supposed, a matter of sex, and that the girls were perfectly well able to build these structures. The open air and the country life benefited them greatly, particularly those girls who were weak-minded. We hope that some day the homestead regulations will be widened in Canada so as to allow women to take up homesteads on a freer basis than is possible at present.

**Immigration Problems** The question of immigration has of late, perhaps, been given more time and thought by our National Council than any other theme, because we feel that, at the present time, it is at the root of many of our social problems. For instance, the difficulties in connection with public health and housing, are very largely due to the enormous influx of persons, some of whom are not accustomed to city life, and who, when transplanted from small villages and country districts in the older countries, find themselves absolutely incapable of using the facilities of city life, even if they had them. In this matter too, we are in the position of a person who has invited guests, and, when they arrive at her house, says to them: "I am very sorry that we have no room for you, but if you will pitch your tent on the lawn until I build a guest-room I shall be delighted to have you." We invite people to come to Canada, and then fail to make provision for homes for them. These, then, are some of our reasons for desiring to co-operate with your Commission. Our aims are very much the same as yours.

**Council a Complement of Commission** On the other hand, there are certain dissimilarities between our point of view and yours. When I compared the list of your standing committees with ours, I noticed that, by a curious coincidence, all but two of the committees of the Commission deal with property and only two directly with life, while, in the National Council, it is exactly the opposite. We have only two committees which deal directly with property and all the rest are dealing more directly with life. It is on that account that, it seems to me, our Council might complement in some ways the work of your Commission, because we, as women, have the care of life in its various forms committed to us. To put the matter epigrammatically, while you are concerned mostly with houses, the Council considers homes.

The question of education is one which has been of considerable interest to the Council since its institution. We have been earnestly striving for the spread of technical education on lines that would fit children for the lives they are to live, rather than for some more or less visionary existence. Technical education must be of great value in fitting children for real life. The conservation of human life is the immediate duty of the women of this country, and it is for that reason that we have these committees touching human life in many ways. In the old days the housewife, of necessity, procured such commodities as milk, water, etc., for her own home. To-day, she relies on the city council or other outside agencies for such things. It is impossible at present for a woman to manage these affairs for her home because they are managed for her by the city council. For this reason, women feel that these civic matters are of extreme importance to them.

The National Council also believes that in its affiliated societies it might find channels for disseminating the knowledge which your Commission has acquired. I think your Chairman has said that this Commission does not exist merely to accumulate knowledge, but rather, having accumulated it, to disseminate it as widely as possible. We can reach many small groups of persons. For example, take such an organization as the Women's Institutes which spread right through Ontario, reaching many places where there is not room for a Local Council. Then, through our locally affiliated bodies of teachers we can reach a large *clientèle* to whom such knowledge as you have would be exceedingly valuable.

The reports which Mr. White was kind enough to send to me, I have found most interesting. I might explain that I tackled, first, the one on oysters, and came to the conclusion that oyster beds were one of the few beds women were not expected to make. Many of these reports I think would be of great use to our members. I did not know that there were such reports to be had, and I am sure there are many others interested in the subjects that I am interested in who do not know of them and who would be extremely glad to read and use them. The National Council could make use of these reports. May I give a personal instance. Next week I have to address a Women's Canadian Club in another city. The officials of that Club asked me what would be the subject of my address. I said that I was coming to this meeting, and that I would speak on conservation, and I would endeavour to give a message from this meeting. So, it seems to me that the speakers the Council sends out from time to time, might mention the work of this Commission

and bring the women in the smaller centres into touch with it. After all, it is in the smaller places, even more than in the cities, that there is need for the knowledge which this Commission acquires, and the National Council could be of material assistance in disseminating it there.

Conditions in  
Smaller Towns

Not long ago I was in a small village in Ontario, one of the most beautiful in the Province. I was being driven around by one of the ladies who shewed me the various places of interest there. She said to me: "We have one of the most beautiful towns in Ontario, (as indeed they have); we have a very beautiful school property right on the lake. Unfortunately, a large, cold-storage building in connection with the fruit industry has been built, and a railway switch has been run down past both entrances of our school, spoiling the property, and making it dangerous for the children to enter or leave the building." She also shewed me a very beautiful church property, but unfortunately, as she said, the surrounding property was sold without conditions, and so a large factory district is growing up in the residential district behind the church, spoiling this old and valuable property, one of the ecclesiastical heirlooms of Canada. As she spoke, we had to drive carefully, because workmen were felling some most beautiful maple trees, bordering the road. I asked why that was being done, and she said she did not know and neither did anyone else. Would it be possible for this Commission to have leaflets distributed telling people what they can do in similar cases, or advising along what line they should work to secure legislation? It seems to me that the law is like a sprinkler, which I heard described recently in a report of the fire conditions in a certain city. One man described a fire, at which there was a damage of \$16.00 by fire, and of \$16,000 by water, because the firemen did not know where to turn off the sprinkler. The law seems rather like a sprinkler. Many people do not know where to turn it on in the first place, nor afterwards where to turn it off. So that, if this Commission could inform people generally, as to what laws there are, if any, by which a village or small growing town might be prevented from thus selling its birth-right for the good of one generation only, it would be doing a great service to the women of the country. If small and cheap leaflets, bearing on such questions as town-planning, could be distributed broadcast throughout these rural and smaller urban centres, they would be exceedingly useful.

This seems to me to be another means by which the Council might be able to co-operate in the work the Commission is doing.

Our great difficulty is that we cannot do much which requires outlay. We just manage to pay our way and that is all we can do. I think all women's societies are hampered in the same way ; and for that reason we cannot do as much educational work as we would like. However, if we could help in disseminating any of your literature or have our speakers speak on subjects connected with the work of this Commission we should be very glad to do so.

I am very grateful to you, sir, for allowing me to speak to the Commission.

