A BACKWARD GLANCE

As the Women's National Book Association approaches the fortieth anniversary of its organization and as its activities expand in many directions, it seems appropriate to take a backward glance and to tell again the story of its founding and of the vision its founders held for it.

Among the women who sat around in high stools in Sherwood's Book Store on John Street in downtown New York one October day in 1917 was Madge Jenison, then a co-owner of the Sunwise Turn Book Shop, the first of the personal bookshops. Recalling that gathering which brought the WNBA into being, Miss Jenison reminded us of the state of the world in 1917. We were at war with Germany. Women had not yet been given the vote nor were they eligible for membership in any of the book trade organizations. Best sellers of that day were H. G. Wells' "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," Robert W. Service's "Rhymes of a Red Cross Man," and Arthur Guy Empey's "Over the Top."

It was a group of booksellers who felt the need of "a social league or club among women in all branches of the book trade," for it was L. M. Pleasanton of Brentano's, Josephine Pfanzstiel, of Hubbell-Leavens, E. F. Widman, of Swartz, Lulu Jacobs, of Greenhut's, Belle Morris of Koch, and Pauline Sherwood who signed the call to the first meeting. Mrs. Sherwood, Miss Jenison recalls, was a woman of great charm and dignity, whose husband and bookselling partner had been a circus clown, and it was she who was elected first president of the WNBA.

Never a militantly feminist group, nonetheless they realized the potential influence of women long before the Ladies' Home Journal epitomized the idea in its slogan, "Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman." A trade movement in France, syndicalism, had recently shown its far reaching weight, but it was really the broad basis of the old medieval guild, which brought together an entire craft from master to apprentice in all branches of a trade, that had captured the imagination of that energetic group of women. It was that idea upon which was based the unique characteristic of the WNBA, whose membership is open to all women in all branches of the book world in all parts of the country.

THE EARLY DAYS

One of the earliest activities of the WNBA was to march in the Women Suffrage Parade in the spring of 1918. Miss Jenison pictures them, a small contingent only eight strong, wearing gay boutonnières of orange marigolds and blue cornflowers, bravely stretched out across the width of Fifth Avenue, following a solid phalanx of some 300 women writers. The streets were lined with people eager to see what sort of women these strange "suffragettes" could be!

As the years went by, the organization grew and when the war days were over its annual dinners with leading literary lights as speakers were among the social high spots of the book trade. Miss Jenison's recollections include the very first WNBA dinner, when no one had the slightest idea how many to expect, but which drew such an overflow crowd that the speaker, Edna Ferber, had an audience of standees lining the wall; another dinner at the old Aldine Club at which Miss Pfanzstiel, the treasurer, suddenly found she did not have enough money to pay the bill and an IOU had to be signed until the crisis could be resolved; still another dinner at which Belle Walker, of the American News Co., performing in a skit satirizing the book business got herself stuck in a barrel and had to be pulled out feet first. Alice Dempsey, of Gimbel's, was another member whose memory stands out among the activities of those early days.

Asked today how the founders would feel about the WNBA, Miss Jenison has said: "It is thrilling to follow all the things the WNBA is doing and to see it growing in breadth of vision and in achievement. Sometime the Association will be ready for a great piece of work of a unique kind. Be Blessed!"

THE MIDDLE YEARS

It was in the 1930's that The Bookwoman, the official publication of the WNBA, was founded through the interest and generosity of Constance Lindsay Skinner, with Alice E. Klutts serving as editor. After Miss Skinner's death, the annual award named in her honor was established to go each year to a distinguished bookwoman for her contribution to the world of books. This has been given since 1940, with Anne Carroll Moore as the first winner. The full list of recipients is a roster of outstanding women in the book field.
During the years of World War II, the WNBA members served on committees to select books for prisoners of war through the International Red Cross, sent food packages to bookwomen overseas, and as travel again became possible, entertained visiting bookwomen from abroad.

Within the course of its lifetime, three constitutions have been adopted by the WNBA, the last in November 1950. This was revised to specifically take into cognizance the plans for chapters located in various parts of the country. The WNBA has always been a national organization in terms of its membership, for corresponding members from all over the nation had been on our roster. However, there seemed to be more and more need for. women from all branches of the book trade to have an opportunity to know one another and to work together in different localities. There were projects which needed organized backing—book fairs, book trade courses, etc.; there were visitors to be honored as they came to our various cities eager to meet the bookwomen of that area; there was the basic need of women active in the field of books to know other women in their part of the country with the same interests whose paths might not ordinarily cross in the everyday world. As we all know, there are now four active chapters, New York, founded in 1917; Chicago, in 1947; Cleveland, in 1952; and Boston, in 1954, with others in the offing.

Our archives now repose in seven or eight large blue bound scrapbooks which are passed on from Recording Secretary to Recording Secretary. A glance through their pages shows year by year, the hopes, achievements and aspirations of the WNBA. During her presidency, Martha Huddleston arranged to have Miss Klutas prepare a complete record of the officers and board members over the years, which was done with admirable thoroughness based on long and close association with the activities of the WNBA. An irreplaceable record of the past years thus has been provided.

A LOOK AHEAD

Last fall our president, Mary Shipley, named a member of the New York Board of Managers, Margaret Martignoni, to draw up suggested plans for a national Board of Managers, whose responsibilities would be on a nationwide basis and whose representation would reflect the interests of the various chapters. The Association is looking ahead to the day when we will have a permanent headquarters and at least a part-time executive secretary to carry out the plans of the organization—which today place a heavy burden on the busy business women who, on a completely voluntary basis, put so much energy and intelligence into the projects of the organization.

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Marlon Dittman, Polly Goodwin and Margaret Kinzer were the "Meet the Author" Committee scheduling out-of-town and Chicago authors to appear in the new Meet the Author Room at the Fair. A number of WNBAers appeared as authors, including Mary Andrews, Bernadine Bailey, Ruth Bendel, Peggy Burrows, Georgiana Ceder, Julilly Kohler, Isabelle Lawrence, Marie Mudra, Lucile Pannell, Anna Ratnesberger, Betty Russell, Alberita Semrad, and Dorothea Snow.

Lucile Pannell also served on the Hostess Committee, with Emily Hillsabeck and Victoria Johnson. Pat Jones came up from Indianapolis to don a colorful hostess apron, as well as to represent Bobbi-Merril. Charlemaea Rollins, Ruby Murphy, Joyce Schwenke served as Hostesses on various days. So did many of the aforementioned authors and committee members, who "doubled in brass" for the occasion.

In the best show-must-go-on tradition of the theater, Martha Bennett King, in a wheelchair because of a fractured hip, directed the Fair Theater Programs from opening day November 13 to a grand finale on Sunday November 21. Her right-hand "man" was Alberita Semrad. Most of the WNBAers already mentioned helped them on the program committee or reception committee. Others went on stage, in or out of costume, to speak or dramatize excerpts from their books.

Hit of the show was the Book Quiz with Isabelle Lawrence as M.C., and Victoria Johnson as Miss Pickerell. (Her cow supplied by the Bordon Company, with sound effects by the Museum, was there too.)

Polly Goodwin edited a fine Children's Book Section of the Tribune Magazine of Books on Sunday November 14, to celebrate Children's Book Week. It was distributed to each person attending the Fair. (Her article on the "Little Engine that Could" on October 27 might well have been appended—it was a classic in itself.)

The co-sponsors of the Chicago Fair are the Children's Book Council, Chicago Tribune and Museum of Science and Industry, where the gala exhibit is held. They all did themselves proud in the cause of children and books.

MARIE MUDRA was presented with a gold key, the highest award of the Illinois Association of Teachers of Journalism "for meritorious service to scholastic journalism." The prize, awarded at the Illinois State High School Press Association convention at the University of Illinois at Urbana, is given to one teacher each year, who, in the opinion of the judges, has contributed most to journalism in the State of Illinois.

The North Central Teachers Association of Indiana was privileged to hear DILLA MACBEAN twice at their statewide convention in South Bend last month, Mrs. MacBean is president-elect of the American Association of School Librarians.

One of the authors appearing at the Armstrong School Book Fair, October 27, was MARY EVANS ANDREWS. At the convention of the National Federation of Press Women, Mrs. Andrews received first prize for her "Messenger By Night." Her new book, "Lanterns Aloft," has just been accepted for publication by Longmans Green and Company. She was one of the writers invited to the authors' luncheon of the National Council of Teachers of English in November.

The brunch given in October to honor AGATHA SHEA was a huge success. On that occasion the Children's Reading Round Table was represented at the speakers' table by VICTORIA JOHNSON.

ISABELLE LAWRENCE talked to the North Shore Women's Club at the Edgewater Beach; she was also on the program of the Midwest P.T.A. Library meeting. Her spring book, "A Spy in Williamsburg," published by Rand McNally, is a Junior Literary Guild selection.

As we approach the coming year, our sights are set high. Our brochure on the purposes of the WNBA is ready to send out to prospective members. Our four chapters are all busy and progressive. Our plans for public relations for books on a national scale are under way. Our participation in general book trade activities is expanding. The preamble to our Constitution opens with these words: "BELIEVING THAT BOOKS HAVE POWER, the purpose of the Association shall be to provide a working organization to coordinate all the related interests of women who are connected with the circulation of ideas through books." That is our goal as we look ahead.

A Spring project of the New York Board of Managers is the compilation of a Procedural Manual covering the duties of the officers and committee chairmen. This will be prepared in mimeographed form and made available to the Chapters and to all new committee chairmen. Avis Zeuker, of the Brooklyn Public Library and recently appointed member of the New York Board of Managers, is to edit and produce this manual, with the assistance of a committee composed of Lillian Gurney, Anne Richter and Helen Jo Jasper Turner.

LUCILE PANNELL spoke at the Illinois Women's Press Association on November 19.

CHARLOTTE ZEPF participated in a panel discussion before the Chicago Book Clinic in November on  book selection as Chicago Public Library Practices It.

ALBERTA SEMRAD had a verse "What's In a Name" in the new children's magazine Treasure Trails. Her story about Kathryn Winslow's experiences in Alaska appeared in the Christian Science Monitor.

A Christmas party held at the College Club on December 14 included a white elephant sale, trimming the Christmas tree, singing carols, and helping children to books. Party-goers brought things to sell, Christmas tree decorations, and children's books. Part of the money from the sale and the children's books were given to the Howalt Day School on Calumet Avenue. MRS. CHARLEMÆA ROLLINS named this school when she was asked about children who would appreciate having books. She was right!

News from CLEVELAND

In November the Cleveland Chapter put on the second Cleveland Book Fair at the Museum of Natural History. "It really went magnificently. Marvelous cooperation among co-sponsoring groups; excellent speakers, capacity-plus attendance, perfect weather all week, distinguished visitors (editors of junior books from four publishing houses, our Mayor's wife, librarians from out-of-state libraries, etc.). Best of all, of