

W.C.T.U. OF COLORADO

HISTORY OF COLORADO CITY WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION Written by Mrs. Lou Musser

On the 28th day of October, 1887, a meeting was held in the first court house in El Paso County, which was located where the Bancroft school building now stands, and was being used for a school building.

This meeting was called to talk over the advisability of organizing a W.C.T.U. in Colorado City. A motion carried to organize, and the following officers were elected: President, Mrs. P. A. Gibbs; Recording Secretary, Mrs. Rose; Corresponding Secretary, Mary Brown; Treasurer, Mrs. A. A. Finley; Supt. of Flower Mission work, Miss Edna Templeton, and Supt. of Young Peoples' work, Miss Edna Ingraham.

The new organization had no money except the dues and as half of that goes to the State Union as dues, they had very little, so decided to give a supper. From this they realized \$50.00.

The work being new to all the members, they counselled with older workers in Colorado Springs as to what work they take up. Colorado City was booming, for the Midland railroad was just then building through here, and there was no place in town but the open saloon for men to spend their evenings. A motion carried that they rent a building and open a free reading room.

The building secured was on the north side of Colorado Avenue where Pries plumbing shop now is, and the rent was \$35.00 per month. The President, Mrs. Gibbs, had charge of the reading room and had living rooms in the rear, the Union giving her the rooms for her services. The members all gave books, magazines, papers and furniture. The Union furnished the coal. A gospel Temperance meeting was held in the reading rooms on Sunday afternoons and many attended.

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In March, 1888, Mr. Holt, a temperance lecturer came to the city and lectured for two weeks in the Methodist church. On April 3rd he held an afternoon meeting for the workers. At this meeting Mrs. Gibbs resigned as President of the Union and other officers followed her and resigned also, and a new set of officers were elected as follows: President, Mrs. A. A. Finley; Recording Secretary, Mrs. Lillie Jackson; Treasurer, Mrs. Genoa Stone.

The energies of the Union were chiefly given to raising money to pay rent and other expenses connected with the reading room. The membership had increased until they now had 40 members.

It was at a meeting in September, 1888, the first mention of a building is recorded. The Midland shops were located here, the railroad was employing more men. Saloons, gambling dens, houses of ill fame, dance halls, Vanity theaters - in fact every sin that goes with a booming western town - was flourishing here. I had never seen anything like it.

At the next meeting of the Union a committee was appointed consisting of Mrs. Chambers and others to feel the public pulse regarding raising money for a building such as we have here. The plan was a free reading room in front and a Gospel Temperance Mission in the rear on the first floor and this lodge room above for an income for the work. Why not put the money they were paying out for rent into a building and have a place of their own, a place where men could go for a quiet hour, free from temptation. All of these places of sin never closed their doors, year in and year out, and the glitter and warmth and welcome the men received in these death-traps set for their feet was too much for many of them.

When this committee reported favorably, the Union formed an Incorporation, not for pecuniary purposes, and is exempt from taxation.

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It is recorded that in February, 1889 a committee was appointed to secure a lot on which to build. Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Wentz were the committee. Also a committee to solicit money to pay for the lot and begin the building. Mrs. Chambers was to take Colorado Springs and Miss Rose Jackson, Denver. On April 30, 1889 it was decided to start the Building. The vote was enthusiastic and unanimous with the trustees and members of the Union. So they launched out not knowing what was before them, but believing firmly in the righteousness of their cause.

In the course of time the walls were erected, the roof on and the treasury empty. People told them it was a laudable undertaking, just what was needed and would be a credit to the town. But all these kind comments did not finish the building. Something must be done. Hard times came on, money was scarce and interest high. They must either borrow or let the enterprise fall through. So on August 15, 1890 they secured a loan of \$2500.00 at 10% and finished the building.

But in order to rent this hall it must be furnished. Carpet, chairs and organ were bought. These were paid for by Mrs. Finley giving her personal note at the bank. It was a sore disappointment to have to rent the first floor to get money to meet the interest instead of using it for what it was intended.

As often is the case the weak hearted ones left the ranks when the struggle came. By this time the debt and interest, \$250.00 per year began to seem like a mountain and the faint hearted began to propose that we sell the building. But the more determined ones, which were the majority, said, "No, we will stay by it until it is paid for."

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About this time we began to get cards from Unions in other states that had undertaken the same thing we had, asking us for \$1.00. So we tried their plan and had 500 cards printed and sent out to other Unions. But we only received about \$30.00 above the expense. Several ladies and older experienced workers in Colorado Springs heard of our struggle over here and came over and joined our Union. Two maiden ladies, sisters that were here from Texas, by the name of Hetherington were of great help in many ways. And Mrs. Hamlin, a good business woman was working with us and said, "Let us make a canvas and raise part of this debt." So in May 1894 the Union appointed Mrs. Hamlin and Mrs. Musser to solicit subscriptions and when they secured \$500.00 we got a new loan for \$2000.00 at 8%, and in 1896 we had a good income from this hall.

A Mrs. Woods, a fine Christian woman living in Manitou, gave us a \$1000.00 library, if the city would maintain it. The city council agreed to do this and the Union let the city have the first floor of this building for \$12.00 per month.

In the Autumn of 1897, a Miss Moore, a missionary from the south was here for rest and joined us and gave us new courage. In 1898 the Union decided to try to raise another \$500.00 by subscription. Mrs. A. A. Finley and Mrs. Musser were appointed the committee and when they secured \$500.00 we again got a new loan for \$1500.00 at 7%.

Our Union has always had good standing. When the big fire was in Cripple Creek, Colorado Springs raised a larger sum of money for relief there than was needed and the committee gave this Union \$100.00 to use over here for charity. This we did and relieved many needy families as long as it lasted.

In 1901 a dry goods merchant came to this town to locate and after looking around, decided he would like to have our store room and went to a real estate man and told him to offer us \$50.00 a month for it.

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The library was still in our room. The trustees were called together and after asking the Lord to direct us, we all felt this was our opportunity to help ourselves. We had struggled so long under this debt. So a committee was appointed to ask the trustees of the library if they would move and they kindly consented to do so. We never felt that they treated the Union very fairly. Never but one year did they give the Union a representative on the library board.

In June, 1903, when the treasurer reported we had money enough on hand to pay the last mortgage, the meeting was turned into a thanksgiving and praise service for all the way the Lord had led us. All of these 16 years we were not able to carry on department work as we wanted to. Our greatest trouble has been to get leaders. But we had a Loyal Temperance Legion most of the time. We had a paid city missionary for a long time. We brought and helped to bring many noted temperance lecturers to town and they helped to create sentiment against the liquor traffic.

On September 18, 1903 we entertained the District Convention. We served dinner in the rear rooms. And at the afternoon session we had a jubilee and burned the mortgage. Mrs. Finley and Mrs. Musser held the tray on which the mortgage was burned and dear Mother Eaton, the oldest member in the Union, lighted the match that burned it to ashes. Judge L. W. Cunningham and Prof. J. P. Hackson gave addresses and we sang the temperance doxology and our debt was no more!

Mrs. Finley wore out a horse and buggy going on business for this WCTU. \$200.00 was the largest gift any one person gave at one time to this Union. It was given by W. S. Stratton; General Palmer gave \$100.00; Mr. Martin Drake Sr., gave \$100.00; Mrs. J. J. Hagerman \$100.00; Mrs. Finley was always giving. We feel sure she gave more than any other one person.

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Twice our building has been put on the tax list. The first time Mrs. Finley and Mrs. Musser was the committee to go before the county commissioners to ask them to take it off, but not until we went the second time did they consent to grant our request. The next time Judge Cunningham had it taken off for us. A lot of the work by the members has been paid for, but some of us worked through it all and never thought of taking pay. We have had a lot of favors shown us in the work and we have had a lot of hard places. We saw the saloon keepers flourish like a green bay leaf, clearing many thousands of dollars a year and we saw them leave town with hardly enough money to get out. We were told the saloon men said that bunch of women never could pay off their mortgage and that they would have a saloon in the building some day. I need not tell you they missed their guess that time.

Three years ago our membership was down to 7 when the present President, Mrs. Anderson was elected. She and other members made a canvas for new members and we won the State Banner for the largest per cent gain of any Union in the state. We now have 105 members and 20 or more Honorary members. We are carrying 12 departments of work.

The three Unions of this city have put the Essay Contests through the public schools the last two years. In 1921, through Mrs. Sublette getting permission from the school board and the Superintendent of schools of this city, the three Unions put a Bible in every grade school room in this District. During the years of our struggle paying for this building, many worthy corporations and individuals who had money and influence, succumbed to the pressure of hard times, while we without financial backing and few friends to our cause and only our willing hands and implicit faith in the righteousness of our cause, weathered the storm, loyal to our state and its one institution - the Cottage Home.

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A few of us worked and prayed and saw the full fruition of our cherished hope, this building free from debt. We only have two of our charter members with us yet, Mrs. A. A. Finley and Mrs. Edna Smith. Mrs. Finley served as President more years than any other one has, Mrs. Griffin more years as Treasurer. Mrs. Musser has been the renting and collector of rents ever since she joined the Union. Dr. Talmadge said it did not take a genius to find fault, but it did take nobility of character to face difficulties and still go forward. The thought of our unfitness for such a task has been a source of trouble, and yet, who can doubt the guidance of our Heavenly Father when we consider the difficulties and results of this enterprise.

The income of this building above the up-keep is always to be used for temperance work. It would not be fair to Mr. J. P. Jackson not to tell of the many favors and legal help he and many others have shown us. This Union put hundreds of dollars in the wet and dry fights that have been fought in this "Old Town." Judge Cunningham has said it was this WCTU that put the town dry. We feel we at least had a large part in it. Every member in this Union has done what she could to bring the results we have achieved. But in this short space they could not all be mentioned separately.

"Commit thy ways unto the Lord, and He shall direct thy path."