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The Federated Music Clubs

“Iowa is the most musical State in the Union”, said Walter Damrosch on February 10, 1928, basing his opinion upon the response to his radio broadcasting. If this remarkable distinction is true, it is due partly to his own influence and unusual ability in teaching people how to appreciate good music.

But the stimulation of general interest in music and the foundation of musical attainment in Iowa was begun long before the name of Walter Damrosch became the symbol of radio popularity. Although it has been twenty-five years since the death of Theodore Thomas, his ideals of “music for the people and music by the people” of America have survived. One of the factors which has contributed to musical education in Iowa has been the coming, year after year, of the great Chicago Symphony Orchestra which was organized and directed by Thomas whose name it bore for many years.

In preparing a musical festival in 1893 for the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago, Theodore Thomas realized that the occasion was opportune to form a national musical organization. Mrs. Rose Fay Thomas, working with her famous husband, issued a call to musical societies and clubs, asking that delegates be sent to a "Congress of Musicians". Forty-two organizations responded. Although the formation of a permanent society was proposed, the national organization was not perfected until five years later. Nevertheless it was the vision of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and their influence at the Chicago World's Fair which inspired the women who constituted the first Board of Directors to form the National Federation of Music Clubs on January 28, 1898, in Chicago. At a meeting, which was held at the home of Mrs. William S. Warren, eleven States were represented. The organization was incorporated on February 26, 1898, and the first biennial convention met in St. Louis the following year.

The ideals fostered by Theodore Thomas became the aims of the new organization: first, "To make America the Music Center of the World"; second, "To make Music useful in the Civic Life of America"; and third, "To Promote and Develop American Musical Talent." It was hoped that the influence of the federated music clubs would extend to every nook and corner of America, and be felt even in musical centers of Europe.

One of the founders of the National Federation

of Music Clubs in Chicago in 1898 was Mrs. Russell Ripley Dorr, formerly of Burlington, Iowa. Mrs. Dorr served as the fourth national president and, aside from other activities, has been almost continuously the historian of the National Federation. In a conversation with Mrs. Dorr, in Symphony Hall, Boston, on June 11, 1929, the writer expressed her pride to Mrs. Dorr over the fact that an Iowa woman should have been one to recognize and encourage the ideals of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas so long ago. With a long warm handclasp came the reply, "I am glad Iowa can, through me, claim her part in the formation of this great cultural society. My early married life was lived in Burlington and many happy memories are mine."

The National Federation of Music Clubs continued to grow. Its aims and ideals took root and during the administration of the eighth president, Mrs. Albert J. Oschner, the "official measure to organize each State into individual State Federations", was inaugurated. From 1915 to 1919 twenty-one States were organized. A former Iowa woman was largely responsible for carrying forward this work, Emma Roderick Hinkle Fisher (Mrs. William Arms Fisher), whose long service as an official in the National Federation is noteworthy. All of the States are now organized, as well as Cuba, the Philippine Islands, and Alaska.

The Iowa Federation of Music Clubs was organized at Davenport in December, 1916, with thirteen

clubs as charter members. During the first two years of its existence the World War occupied the attention of the organization. A decade later the Iowa Federation could turn to the pages of its records and recall with pride the words of the national president, Mrs. A. J. Oschner, spoken on June 30, 1919, at Peterborough, New Hampshire. "The unprecedented demands upon hearts and hands and the work of the war years has given to the Music Clubs of America a real responsibility", she declared. "For suddenly music was given recognition as a great moral force. Song leaders were sent into every camp. Community music was urged every place. Music and more music must be given our boys in training. . . . Music must fill the waiting hearts at home and vibrate from shore to shore with love, faith and gratitude."

With what pride Miss Norma Weise of Davenport, the first president of the Iowa Federation, gave her report on the outstanding war music work! "For Music in Camps: Many volunteer programs rendered. To camps Dodge, Travis, May, N. J., and the Rock Island Arsenal have been sent 14,240 sheets of music, 1,650 Victrola records, 800 pianola rolls, 55 musical instruments (including several pianos)." When the Iowa Federation of Music Clubs held its biennial convention in Des Moines in November, 1918, officers and delegates were cordially received at the Hostess House at Camp Dodge.

After the war came a period of expansion. Mrs.

Nora Babbitt Harsh, Des Moines, was elected the second State president; Mrs. Louis B. Schmidt, Ames, third; Mrs. Charles D. Marckres, Perry, fourth; Mrs. George Judisch, Ames, fifth; Mrs. Susan Bender Eddy, Des Moines, sixth; and Mrs. Nelle M. Johnson, Muscatine, the seventh and present State president. Each of these administrators has advanced the aims of the national society along the various lines of work through faithful and conscientious efforts, aided always by a board of officers and the chairmen of departments.

In 1921 the Iowa Federation adopted the national classification of departments and organized its work in accordance with the general plan. Each department is subdivided, with a chairman for each section. The Education Department includes the divisions of Course of Study, Public School Music, Library Alcoves and Extension, Pageantry, Choral Music, Civic Music, Music in the Home, Radio, Music Settlement Schools (in mining camps, night schools, and for factory workers), Music Credits, Motion Picture Music, Memory Contests, Community Music, and Legislation. The Department of American Music sponsors memorials for noteworthy musicians, particularly Iowans. It also includes Chamber Music, International Musical Reciprocity, Bands, Orchestra, Opera, American Composers, Iowa Composers, Religious and Church Music, and Young Artists Contests. In the Extension Department are the District and County Chairmen, New Clubs, Artist

and Individual Memberships, Past Presidents Assembly, Junior and Juvenile Clubs, and Contests. The Finance Department is composed of the Budget, Ways and Means, Scholarships, MacDowell Colony, Endowments, and Life and Special Membership branches. Radio Programs, National Music Bulletin, and State Publications are the activities of the Publicity Department.

The Young Artists Contests have been one of the principal activities since the beginning of the national society. Before the State contests were organized, Ralph Leo, of Cedar Rapids, was one of the first national contest winners. Mrs. J. J. Dorgan of Davenport, who has served as third vice-president of the National Federation, was State contest chairman for twelve years, while Professor E. H. Wilcox of Iowa City served four years as national contest chairman.

In many respects the national contests constitute the most important work of the Federation. Under the supervision of Professor Wilcox, the administrative headquarters for this activity were located at Iowa City from 1923 to 1927. In 1924 preliminary contests were held in every State of the Union, the winners of the State contests participated in district contests, and finally the best in each of the fourteen districts competed in the national contest. Some conception of the value of this work may be gained from the fact that several of the successful contestants have won professional recognition directly after

their triumphs in the competition of the National Federation of Music Clubs. Hilda Burke and Kathryn Witwer have sung in the Chicago Civic Opera, while Catherine Wade-Smith has attracted much attention as a violinist.

Iowa composers have received special attention by the Iowa State Federation of Music Clubs. This work was started in 1916 by Mr. John W. Teed of Bloomfield. Mrs. C. L. Armstrong of Waterloo and Mrs. Louis B. Schmidt of Ames have compiled a long list of names and collected copies of many compositions, dating back as far as 1881. Two articles based upon this material have been published. Dr. Carl Engel, Director of the Music Division in the Library of Congress, wrote in 1926 that "If other states would do what Iowa has done in collecting data on their writers of music, we would soon know where we stand in creative musical art."

In public school music a survey conducted by Mrs. Sue Hambley of Gilmore City, in connection with the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction, won national honor in 1922. Scholarships and prizes have aided many worthy young Iowa musicians. The Junior and Juvenile Club work, especially the contests, as carried forward by Mrs. W. F. Murdock of Clinton and Mrs. Carl Ristvedt of Story City, has laid the foundation of musical education for young people in Iowa. Other organizations have eagerly absorbed the principles established by the Iowa Federation of Music Clubs in promoting simi-

lar contests. At present Iowa has sixty active progressive Junior Clubs under the leadership of Mrs. Lewis H. Bolton of Des Moines.

The success of each State organization depends upon the strength of the individual clubs. The Ladies' Musical Club of Independence is forty-nine years old. Conspicuous in northeast Iowa is the Music Study Club of Cresco, which has established in the Cresco City Library probably the finest music alcove to be found in Iowa. The Idlers' Music Club of Salem, among innumerable activities, reported in 1921 a gift valued at \$350 to the Orphans' Home in Council Bluffs. These brief records indicate the civic work done by music clubs. Many times the finest work is done by the smaller clubs. Gilmore City, a town of seven hundred people, drew crowds of three thousand to their Sunday afternoon Community Concerts from 1919 to 1924.

In 1921, from the 4th to the 14th of June, Davenport was the scene of the largest gathering of musicians that ever met in Iowa. The nine federated music clubs of Davenport, assisted by the Chamber of Commerce, entertained the National Federation of Music Clubs in behalf of the "Tri-Cities", Davenport, Rock Island, and Moline. A record in the historian's files shows that Davenport alone spent \$31,000 for this unsurpassed Iowa music fiesta. Within the large fifty-page program were names to be conjured with in national and international music circles. Not the least of the programs to at-

tract attention was the one devoted to Iowa and Illinois composers. Fredrick Knight Logan's "Pale Moon" was given its "premier public performance, with the composer at the piano." The soloist was Genevieve Wheat-Baal of Des Moines. No doubt the star attraction was the presentation of Paolo Gallico's prize-winning dramatic oratorio, "The Apocalypse", on Tuesday evening, June 7th, followed by the awarding of the prize of \$5,000 by the National Federation of Music Clubs.

It was at this time that the Iowa Federation reached its largest membership with a total of ninety-six clubs. After the excitement of the national convention had subsided and normalcy had returned in Iowa music circles, the weaker and hastily organized clubs disbanded. Recently, however, the number of clubs has increased and the *National Bulletin* credited Iowa with a membership of ninety-four music clubs on January 1, 1930.

The door to the fairyland of music is open to every man, woman, boy, and girl who may choose to enter. The cost is no more than the price of an ice cream soda, for the membership fee in a music club is no more than that. There are no paid officers either in the State or the National Federation. The whole organization is entirely philanthropic in scope. Unfailing intelligence, direction, and ceaseless efforts of officers and members have raised hundreds of dollars to benefit Iowa musicians and music lovers. Thousands of dollars have been raised by the

national organization and large sums given personally for prizes, scholarships, and innumerable enterprises. And so the vision of Theodore Thomas, nearly forty years ago, has been realized in the "greatest constructive force for music in America".

G. PERLE SCHMIDT