

# Civic Dream Comes True

## What a Unique Women's Society Has Done for a Small Iowa Town

By R. P. CRAWFORD

FOR a long time the town of Lake City, Iowa, had dreamed of a memorial that would fittingly commemorate the services of its soldiers and sailors, but it remained for the women of the town to engineer the project that resulted in the erection of one of the finest community buildings, not only in the Middle West, but perhaps in any town of the size in the country. This building is unique, for it fills the needs of the small town in a remarkable way, from affording the council a place to meet, to furnishing an auditorium and hall for social events. There are a women's rest room, handsomely furnished, a room for the American Legion, shower baths and gymnasium equipment. It is a theater, town hall, women's club, gymnasium, banquet hall, young people's club—all in one. There is nothing that concerns the community as a whole that does not have its center here.

But along with the story of this building goes the story of the Lake City Civic Improvement Society. A men's organization? Not a bit of it. There are nearly 250 members of this society from the town and surrounding country, and the strange part of it is, they are all women. One must remember, too, that Lake City is a town of only about 2,500 population. This society is not a study club nor a federated women's club. It is just what its name implies, an organization which spends all its time and efforts on improving the community. It is very democratic. An effort is made to enlist every woman in the town, and the woman from the country is welcomed just as much as the woman from the town. Its dues are only 50 cents a year.

Not long ago I sat in the home of Mrs. W. H. T. Shade, wife of the editor of the Lake City News, and heard her tell some of the inner secrets of this society, which grew to its present membership from 40 or 50 women who were the charter members.

"You don't need to have me tell you that every small town has certain things that need to be done," said Mrs. Shade. "The men are good workers, once they get started, but they always have their business worries and cares. You see," explained Mrs. Shade with a smile, "sometimes a man dislikes to say anything about a needed improve-

ment to another business man, because he feels that his attitude may be considered as a critical one, and provoke a little resentment. But we women can go ahead and do things, and not be criticized, or when we are, it doesn't matter anyway."

I had been assured beforehand that the Lake City Civic Improvement Society was the peppiest organization in town, and when I began to learn some of its accomplishments, I agreed that such a characterization was true. The first thing the women discovered was that the town park had never been kept up. Of course, that was not much of a discovery, since every one knew that anyway. Perhaps it should be said more properly that the women discovered here an opportunity and an outlet for their club's efforts.

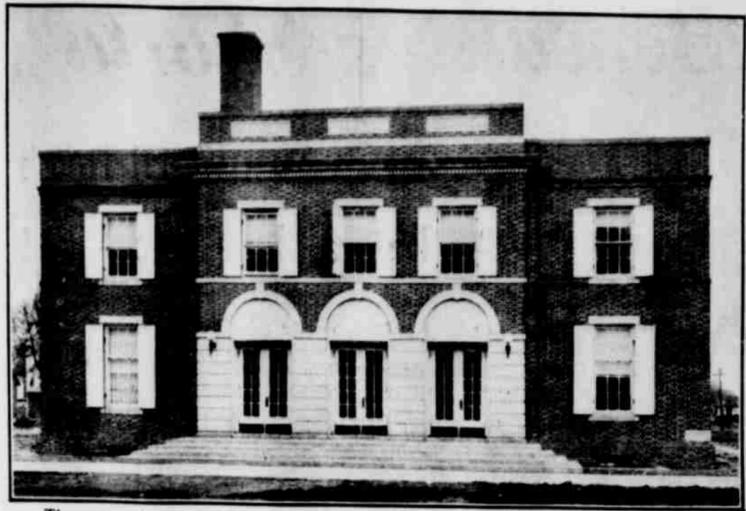
The first thing for the women to tackle was the hitching post proposition. Around the edges of the park were numerous hitching posts, almost gnawed into kindling wood, relics of the day when everybody came to town with horse and buggy. Six years ago there were still a great many who drove in with a team and a number of direful things were threatened the town if the posts were touched. But by working through the town council, the posts were finally removed and relegated to the side streets. The dire threat from a few farmers to boycott the town if this was done did not materialize, and everybody was happy. In fact, today, about a third of the improvement club's membership is composed of country women.

The next job was to clean up that park. The men of the town donated their time and the women served sandwiches and coffee all day.

A humane society was formed within the civic society and soon the latter took over the lyceum course, and saw that through. The next thing a public rest room for the women was established in the basement of the public library. Baby beds were provided and a matron was employed, so that women could leave their children there while they went shopping.

But finally came the big project. Long hours the women of the civic society had worked on Red Cross supplies during the hard days of the war, and the question had often arisen as to what should be done for the boys when they returned. It had frequently been suggested that a suitable place should be provided where the boys might talk things over; in fact, where the entire community might get together and talk things over. And that was the beginning of the community building.

Facing the park, which the women had so effectually brushed and combed, was an old hotel, an eyesore to the town. The owner had agreed to remove the hotel, provided some one would buy the lot for \$1,750. The civic improvement society took him at his word and bought the lot. The women pledged the first \$1,000 toward a community memorial building, provided the town would see it through. It was decided that the



The community memorial building at Lake City, Iowa, erected through the efforts of the Lake City Civic Improvement Society, a women's organization, as a crowning achievement to many civic improvements.

project must be paid for by public subscription. This was a big proposition, and it was necessary to obtain the co-operation of every one; and, of course, when it came to giving large sums of money, the men folks were taken into consideration. There were, of course, many large subscriptions from well-to-do business men, but there were also unique entertainments for raising money. Pigs, calves, horses, furnishing goods donated by merchants, were auctioned off, even doughnuts bringing \$1 each. Individual organizations and clubs in Lake City pledged themselves to raise money. Finally virtually the entire \$80,000 necessary for erecting the building had been raised by public subscription.

It was but a short time ago that I visited this community building and saw what had been accomplished. Facing one corner of the park is the memorial building, constructed of a light reddish brick with white cut stone trimmings. At the very top of the building are three stone slabs with the inscriptions, "Soldiers," "Sailors," "Marines." Over each of the three doors is a stone arch. One of these is inscribed "San Juan, Santiago, Manila Bay." The second arch is inscribed "Shiloh, Antietam, Gettysburg." The third arch has the inscription, "St. Mihiel, the Argonne, Chateau Thierry." The structure is not only a memorial to the soldiers and sailors who served in the World War, but to the veterans of the three great wars of our last century.

The doors open into a foyer and then into a spacious lobby. On one side is the council chamber, reserved for the meetings of the town council. A cloakroom is at the other side of the lobby. From the lobby one enters the auditorium. The seats are movable so that the floor can be used for dancing or other entertainments. There is a large stage. This theater has been one of the most delightful features of the building, for it makes it possible to have outside as well as home talent performances.

Stairways lead to the second floor from both sides of the lobby. There is a large hall on the second floor. This is the trophy room, and here all relics of the war and community keepsakes are on display. The service flag hangs along one side of the hall. This hall opens into the balcony of the auditorium. At one side is a room for the American Legion and at the other side is a men's smoking room.

Across almost the entire front of the building on the second floor is the women's rest room. Directly off the rest room is a nursery, where women may leave their babies while shopping. The rest room is always in charge of a matron. It is here that the women of the town are always free to come and talk, and this is where the different women's organizations hold their meetings.

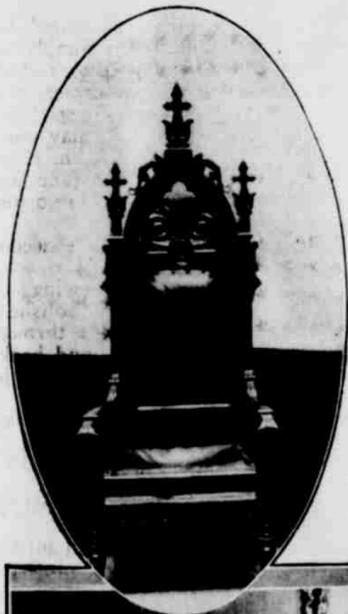
The building itself is under the management of a community congress, composed of three members, including at this writing Fred Boldes, George Pearen and Mrs. I. D. Weirick. They, in co-operation with the town council, have supervision of the building. In fact, the state of Iowa now has a special law providing for the erection and maintenance of buildings such as this. It even provides that communities may issue Liberty Memorial bonds for the erection of these memorials, which may take the form of a library, assembly hall, gymnasium, or include any of these features. Club rooms and rest rooms may be provided, and the building also may contain offices for any county or municipal purpose. A tax levy of three mills is provided for maintenance. Gifts and bequests also are authorized to be received for such buildings.

The Lake City building, perhaps the first community building of its kind to be erected in Iowa, probably will have the benefit of the three mill levy for maintenance, although it was erected by public subscription. At the present time the profits derived from the use of the building are used to extinguish a small debt. The building can be made practically self-supporting without any recourse to the levy. As much as \$800 has been taken in from a two-day entertainment.

Probably the greatest reward from this community project is the good feeling that it engenders. Anybody in the town or surrounding country feels perfectly free in making use of the building.

There is something doing at the building nearly every day in the week. The Farmers' Club has the auditorium for its dance and big dinner every Monday night. There also is a women's club from the near-by country that holds its meetings at the community club regularly. The high school finds it a great place for its class plays.

Nor does one forget that this is a memorial building. The coziness of the American Legion quarters suggests something of the good feeling that will bind the boys together, while the trophy room will become a source of unending inspiration to young people, with all important accomplishments of the community and its citizens recorded therein.



Above—In the trophy room on the second floor. In this room will be kept all of the trophies and community relics. Insert—The nursery where women leave their babies while they go shopping. Below—Quarters for the American Legion in the memorial building.