

JOAN OF ARC OF WEST HAMMOND WINS HER FIGHT.

Remarkable War Waged Single Handed
by a Young Woman Against the Dive
Keepers Who Ran the Town

MISS Virginia Brooks is just now the most talked of woman in all the region about Chicago. She has come triumphantly through a two year fight against the graft and corruption of a gang of politicians and dive keepers who for years have been in control at West Hammond, Ill. In a long and bitter battle, in which she fought virtually single handed, she has swept her foes out of power and replaced them by honest and capable officials. She has closed the dives and made the little city on the Indiana line fit to live in.

Many persons have heard of Hammond, Ind., but few outside its immediate vicinity have heard of West Hammond, Ill. Miss Brooks put West Hammond on the map. She is now called the Joan of Arc of West Hammond. The title is high sounding, but it is not inaptly applied to her. She has not made world history, as did the Maid of Orleans, but her fight was great in its way. It was an epic of woman's courage.

West Hammond was founded twenty years ago by Oliver H. Brooks, Miss Brooks's father. It is a town of 6,000 inhabitants. Of these, 5,000 are Poles and the remainder are mostly foreigners of other nationalities. It adjoins Hammond, Ind., a thriving city of 20,000 people. The two towns merge into each other. There is nothing to show that a State line divides them. On one side of a street of pretty cottages are Indiana and on the other Illinois. West Hammond is a town of factories and slaughterhouses, of cottages and modest frame houses which are the homes of working people. There are few people in the place who do not labor with their hands.

Hammond, Ind., has no dives of its own. Its cleanliness in this respect is due largely to the fact that the vicious element found it good policy to place a State line between itself and Indiana law. The people of the Indiana city were powerless to combat dive keepers in Illinois. So West Hammond from the first became the "red light district" of Hammond.

In time the dive keepers grew rich and powerful. They formed a vice trust, which elected town officials, selected the chief of police, the members of the police force and justices of the peace; in short owned the town body and soul. The police did not dare to interfere with the men whom they owed their positions and their very bread and butter. In consequence the dives were operated in reckless disregard of law.

The West Hammond resorts were combination saloons, gambling houses and dives. Along the walls of the room in which the bar was located were all sorts of gambling games—faro, stud poker, draw poker, baccarat, banked craps and roulette. All the games are said to have been crooked.

Robbery was of daily occurrence. Either a man was speeded at the games or a woman picked his pockets. If a man proved difficult to handle by ordinary methods he was drugged. In a recent investigation of the dives by the Cook county authorities from Chicago what was known as a "death bottle" was found on the shelves of all the dives. It is said to have contained knockout drops.

A man who had been drugged and robbed was carried out by a rear door and thrown upon the prairie far from the resort in which he had been rendered unconscious. There was a rumor that one of the resorts had a tunnel leading underground from a rear room to the prairie and that this tunnel was used for getting rid of the victims of knockout drops. The rumor was persistent, but the Cook county officers failed to find it.

But robbery and white slavery are not the gravest of the charges Miss Brooks made against the dives. She unearthed evidence to show that a number of murders had been committed by the dive keepers and their hangers on in the last few years. Miss Brooks believes that these murders number at least twenty. Three persons died recently after visits to Foss's resort. One of these, John Messmacker, was undoubtedly murdered. Coroner Hoffman at the instigation of Miss Brooks disinterred his body and found enough poison in his viscera to kill a dozen men.

A cab driver who had driven Messmacker about during the latter's last debauch was found dead on the prairie. It is believed he was quietly removed because he knew too much about the Messmacker death. Father Harrison, an inmate of the resort, also died under mysterious circumstances. These deaths are being investigated.

The death of Miss Brooks's father, this crime ridden community was an accident. Her father died when she was a girl, leaving a comfortable estate to his widow and Miss Brooks, who was his only child. Part of the estate consisted of 115 pieces of real estate in West Hammond. Miss Brooks was born and grew up in Chicago. She and her mother lived in an apartment on the North Side. Miss Brooks was a favorite in society.

Miss Brooks is pretty. There is hardly a suggestion of anything heroic in her appearance. She is below medium height, slender, pale, and so delicate as to seem almost fragile. In her smart tailored clothes, her patent leather boots, immaculate shirt waist and white gloves she looks the woman of leisure. The only hint of the heroine of the Joan of Arc character is to be found in her steady, fearless gray eyes, the Roman curve of her nose and the determined, tightly compressed uncompromising mouth. She is 25 years old.

The politicians who ruled West Hammond were growing rich on exorbitant property assessments. They assessed the real estate of Mrs. Brooks and her daughter \$100 for every twenty-five front feet. Mrs. Brooks could not afford to pay the assessments. It was only a question of time when the men who were thus juggling with her holdings would gobble them up at forced sale.

It was to fight this unjust taxation that Miss Virginia Brooks moved to West Hammond. She won her own private fight. Then she took up the fight for the redemption of the town.

She took up her residence in West Hammond in November, 1910. The two years that have followed have been crowded with exciting incidents. There are some of the things she has done.

She started a newspaper in which she denounced the men responsible for conditions in West Hammond. She placarded the town with posters and flooded the streets with handbills which exposed the highhanded and dishonest methods of the political gang in power and its allies, the divekeepers.

She won her fight for reduced assessments when Judge John E. Owens of the County Court of Cook County cut down West Hammond's street assessments \$250,000 yearly.

She exposed a brazenly fraudulent election by which a gang of tricksters proposed to continue their power and she forced another election.

She brought about the election of a reform ticket which has given West Hammond honest officials. During this administration Miss Brooks has been the power behind the throne. The officials take no important step without consulting her. She is the real political boss of the town.

She headed a mob of women which stopped the laying of rotten street pavement and fought the police when they attacked the feminine crusaders with clubs and revolvers.

She had a personal encounter with a big policeman who knocked her down and whose face she slapped.

She was arrested and locked in a cell for five hours and was released only when a mob threatened to storm the jail and set her free.

She exposed the conditions in the dives. She began a fight upon the wealthy and influential men who own the dive buildings, her exposures causing scandal which almost disrupted a fashionable woman's club.

She exposed the methods of West Hammond's justices of the peace and had them arrested on charges of graft and malfeasance.

She started an investigation which has laid one murder at the door of the dive keepers and promises to bring to light evidence of several more.

She has closed the dives. She has aroused a public sentiment in West Hammond that bids fair to keep the town clean.

When you set foot in West Hammond you feel the atmosphere of battle. There is an indefinable something abroad that suggests a field recently swept by hostile fire; it is as if the smoke of gunpowder still hung in the air. You pass the famous dives—they are closed, the blinds are drawn. Fat men, red faced, heavy jawed, bleary eyed, with loud clothes and heavy watchchains and a general air of sinister prosperity, stand in front and glare at you as you pass. These are the men that Miss Brooks has been fighting. They are ugly looking customers, these men, and you feel that to fight them would be a man size job, requiring a real man's courage and hardihood.

In other parts of town you notice groups of men and women on the corners. The men are in overalls. The women are in calico and gingham with black shoes over their heads. With earnest, serious faces, they are discussing civic problems for the betterment of the town. The women are as deeply interested in these things as the men. These groups are a visible expression of the new spirit of West Hammond born of Miss Brooks's crusade.

In the midst of a district of cottages inhabited by Polish laborers stands neat, white cottage with a porch in front of it and a little front yard bright with flowers. This is the home of West Hammond's Joan of Arc. A knock brings Mrs. Brooks to the door. In this tall, spare woman, with snow white hair, you see just what Miss Virginia got her fighting qualities. You feel sure at a glance that Mrs. Brooks possesses fearlessness and strength of character.

It is a pretty little home inside, with pictures on the wall, a piano, a well filled library and a general air of old fashioned hominess and comfort. There is nothing to suggest that this little cottage is the citadel of the reform forces from which the West Hammond war has been directed. Geraniums bloom in the yard. Morning glories twining about the pillars of the porch shake their gorgeous bells in a gentle breeze. Peaceful, yes. But if you listen a while to Mrs. Brooks you will realize that all is not so peaceful as it seems.

"This fight," says the white haired mother, "has given us two women living here alone some exciting times. Many a night Virginia and I have taken turns at sleeping while the other stood watch to guard against assassination. We never dare sit at night by a window with the shutters open. Our enemies might shoot us. We do not sit at a window even with the curtains down lest our enemies shoot at our shadows on the blinds."

"We have no illusions regarding the men we have been fighting. They are desperate and unscrupulous. It has been no child's play, this fight to take from these vicious men their source of wealth. Virginia has been their worst enemy."

They hate her with a cordiality that almost wins respect. They would kill her if they could, if they dared. Nothing would happen would please them so much as her death. They have hired

bravos who would do the job for a pitance if they could pondar on shoot her secretly. Only their fear of the gallows has prevented it so far. "Our guns are always loaded. We keep two Winchester rifles and several revolvers in the house and both Virginia and I know how to shoot. If our enemies ever get us we shall do our best to take some of them with us."

"We are not afraid. Twice a week Virginia makes it her custom to walk slowly past the dives for no reason in the world except to show the divekeepers

Just here Miss Virginia comes into the little parlor. She has on a house gown and an apron. Her face is flushed from the kitchen fire. Joan of Arc has been cooking—frying ham, you suspect, from the savory smell. She looks very dainty and feminine and gentle as she sinks into a rocking chair.

"My fight in West Hammond," says Miss Brooks, "began selfishly and grew and broadened as it went on into a fight for the redemption of the town. When mother and I were living quietly in Chicago the postman one day brought us an armful of mail. Mother glanced it

through. It was notifications of assessments due on our rather large holdings of real estate in West Hammond.

"Dear me, child," said mother wearily, "the assessments will foot up \$20,000 in a few years. It is outrageous, but I see no remedy. Our property is bringing in nothing. We can't afford such taxes. We shall have to let our real estate go. We can't hold it any longer."

"I had never paid much attention to our West Hammond reality. I was busy with my social affairs. This made me sit up and take notice."

"Our property was valuable. It would

Disreputable Resorts Closed, Honest Men
in Office and Lower Taxes After Two
Years Battle Against Graft

then I made up my mind to fight. I was a woman and I never had fought any sort of fight before, but I felt that if I went about it in the right way I should find justice in the end."

"Mother," I said, "we will move to West Hammond to-morrow."

"And we did. We rented a cottage in the heart of the Polish district. Our neighbors on all sides were poor Polish working people. We determined to throw in our lot with them, to live as they live, to become one with them. They had the same grievances as ourselves and I determined to fight not only for ourselves but for them."

"The first week I was in town I called a mass meeting of citizens to see what could be done about assessments. This aroused public sentiment against the gang of politicians who were robbing the people. It bore its fruit in practical results later, but not then."

"Soon after I had come to West Hammond an election was held upon the proposition to make the town a city. The politicians wanted to turn it into a city. They hoped in this way to acquire greater power and to continue it indefinitely."

"I saw that the ballots were fraudulent. They were so printed that 'Yes' was after the proposition to change the town into a city and 'No' after the proposition to retain the town form of government. No matter which way one voted it was a vote for the change. It reminded me of tossing a penny. 'Heads I win, tails you lose.'"

"I took the ballots before Justice Green, the same Magistrate whom I afterward had arrested on a malfeasance charge, and he declared sagely that the ballots were probably not exactly legal under the statutes, but were perfectly so under the Torrens system. Of course the politicians won the election; there was no way for them to lose. But I had the result declared null and void and another election held."

"This time the town was turned into a city, but by legal votes. I was not opposed to this. In a subsequent election of city officers, the reform crowd, headed by myself, won. Our candidates took office and have been at the head of affairs ever since. We succeeded only recently, however, in getting rid of a hostile chief of police."

"In the first few weeks of my West Hammond residence I began the publication of the West Hammond Searchlight, a small newspaper. It certainly was all that its name implied. No dark corners of graft, vice or dishonesty escaped. I called a spade a spade. I named names. I let the people know just who was robbing them."

"I exposed the grafters who were growing rich upon exorbitant taxes and assessments and paying none themselves. I told just what the dives were doing. I gave the names of girls imported from Chicago and sold into white slavery."

"These crimes have been committed with impunity and with a reckless disregard of consequences that is astonishing. The reason of this is that the divekeepers have controlled the police and have been given absolute protection."

"It is unpleasant to speak of, but the actual physical effect of these dives, which have been in the town for twenty years, can be seen in the deformities of children, inherited maladies and suffering in many homes. If ever there was an eloquent and convincing argument for woman suffrage it is these dives. If the women of West Hammond had had the right to vote these festering plague spots would have been wiped out long ago."

"I began my active campaign against the dives the first of the present year. I went into it fully realizing the difficulties with which I had to deal, the hopelessness almost of the crusade. These divekeepers were the wealthiest men in town. They were political powers accustomed to dictate the Mayor, the chief of police and members of the police force. They had been the real bosses of West Hammond for years. I knew the fight against this junta of criminal men entrenched in their immemorial privilege of graft and robbery would belong and bitter."

"I called mass meetings. I placarded the town with posters warning the divekeepers to leave town or they would be driven out by outraged citizens. I served notice upon the Aldermen that unless they closed the dives the voters would close their political careers at the next election. This last move had its effect."

"When the question of revoking the licenses of the dives came up in Council there was a deadlock. Four Aldermen voted for the dives and four against them. Mayor Wosczyński—my Mayor, the Mayor of the reformers—cast the deciding vote and the licenses were revoked."

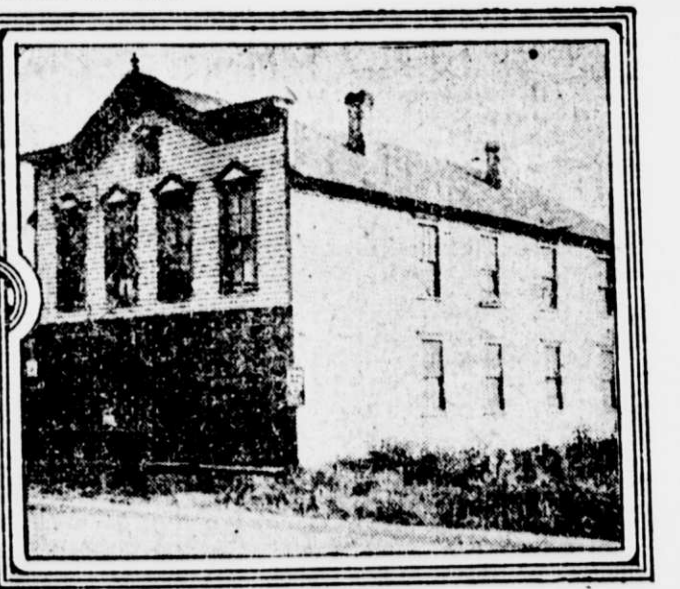
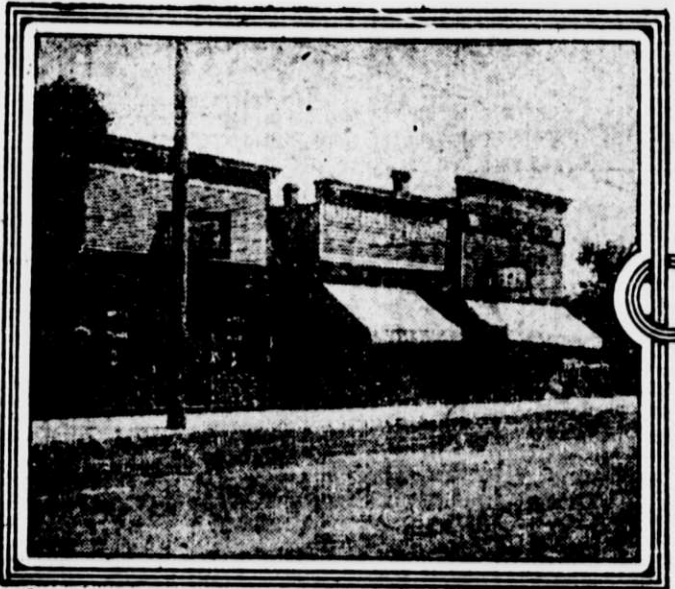
"In the meantime I have adopted other tactics—a sort of flank movement, as it were. I have declared war upon the owners of the buildings. I aroused a regular tempest not long ago at a meeting of the Hammond Woman's Club, before which I was invited to speak, when I announced that the husband of one of the club's most prominent members was the owner of one of the dive buildings. The women of the club grew quite indignant. They demanded that I name the woman I referred to and I did it frankly and unhesitatingly and offered indisputable proof taken from the county records. My exposure precipitated a feud among the women which almost disrupted the club."

"I had the names of the men who owned the dive buildings published on posters about West Hammond. With others of the reform element I called upon the owners and made them a proposition that if they would out the dives we would fill the buildings with desirable business tenants. They declined. Now we have set about ousting the dives by legal process."

"It has been a long and desperate fight," Miss Brooks concluded, "but victory is now assured. West Hammond has been cleaned up, physically, politically and morally. It has been the most thorough house cleaning any town ever had, and no town ever needed it more urgently. If my fight has done nothing else it has awakened the conscience of the community and aroused a public sentiment and a public spirit which will keep the town clean for all time to come."



Miss Virginia Brooks
Three West Hammond Joins
Foss's Resort
Where the Messmacker Murder Occurred



she does not fear them. And as she walks by, those fat bloated old spiders of iniquity follow her with eyes of venomous hatred."

Cottage Home of
Miss Virginia Brooks
West Hammond

become largely more valuable in time. I did not propose to lose it. I knew there was something wrong in a system of taxation that would rob us of it. Right

EXPLORATION OF THE ENGLISH ACCENT

By a NEW ZEALANDER.

I, too, have suffered. But not as an American. We New Zealanders have at intervals to put up with English criticisms voiced in drawing rooms or in newspaper columns concerning our awful accent, so offensive to the sensitiveness of the superior English ear.

I had heard so much about it, indeed, that when I arranged to spend some months in England, on my way to the Columbia University, I determined to explore the English voice. From the very outset I was warned against America. The idea of a colonial travelling half way round the world to pass by the safe, settled and hoary traditions of British civilization for the unknown pitfalls of the remaining British breath! And the final exclamation hurled at me was invariably: "But you'll get the awful American voice."

That was meant to be unanswerable. But it wasn't. It remained to me to somewhat ruffle the self-satisfied opinions of those very estimable people concerning their great asset.

For I left England wondering what on earth the English voice was, and whereabouts in England people spoke English. I saw in the north, at bank holiday time, tens of thousands of English men and women who speak nothing but dialects; I heard cockney in almost every street in London; I heard in the West End well bred affectation—tones produced, as it were, around a substantial marble walling in the region of the tonsils; I heard languid drawls, simpers, high pitched silver bell tones; I heard terminal awws and clipped g's and feeble h's; but rarely did I hear what I should call just a fine, clear interesting voice speaking good plain English.

Do the university nurtured speak it? Well, two of the people most admired for my safety in America were New Zealand girls of brilliant achievement. But

their voices were so suggestive of a mouthful of marble that I had to strain my concentrative powers to follow them at all; and their affection was so painful that I could only look at them in sorry wonder, with inward gasps at their absurdity.

Then in my experience as a teacher in New Zealand public schools some years ago I frequently met imported English university educated inspectors who were quite unintelligible. Also in our colonial parliaments I have often heard it stated, and have proved for myself, that the British university men usually had affections that made them the hardest of all speakers to follow. The late Premier in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, an Oxford man, has a voice that is the despair of reporters. He clips his final syllables, and his utterance is so thick that he almost needs an interpreter.

Further, not so long ago the cultured university man and actor, H. B. Irving, visited New Zealand, where he was severely taken to task, humorously enough, by an American, the editor of the *Triad*, for his extraordinary meowing, his exaggerated drawl and his inexcusable mispronunciation. "My mother" (my mother) being a fair sample of his linguistic gymnastics. If I remember rightly Mr. Irving also hails from Oxford, the most lauded culture area in the world.

So, now, what are we poor benighted outsiders to do about it? How are we to know what English is, and well modulated, rich in quality, and low pitched in tone. I don't doubt that there are a great many people in England with just such voices. And I'm equally certain that there are just as many in America.

As a matter of fact, the very first person to greet me in Columbia University was an American woman with a voice much more fascinating, clear and musical than any I heard in England. And since then I've met other Americans who can speak in

a way that adds to the pleasure of living. Certainly there is an American accent. But I, for one, fail to see that it's any more offensive than the brand on the other side of the big pond. And anyway, who's to decide whether one country's accent is any better than another's?

As for pronunciation, it is simply a matter of century, university caprice and usage. It is a thing quite apart from tone quality. What matter if the American does say *clerk* instead of *clark*, *mayto* instead of *tomato*? He may pronounce his *e* sound in a far more pleasing way than the Englishman does his *o* sound, his sharp *a* far more delightfully than the other's broad *a*. What can be more objectionable than the manner in which so many supposedly well educated English people turn every terminal *er* into *ah*?

Of all the affectations I've ever known I think that attached to the English voice is absolutely the most ridiculous and the least excusable. To me it's a sign of mental degeneracy. My two New Zealand advisers had it badly. If they were fair samples of our smart modern intellectual English women's college can turn out, then I'm more than ever thankful that I set out for America. If you want to see their duplicitous and study *Fanny* in Bernard Shaw's last published play.

And then I'm not afraid of the American language either. If it's to be a choice between two evils I think I prefer your brand of slang. It seems to me to better justify its existence than does the English variety. Consider, for instance, the elegant phrase "You knock me out." Of course I don't accuse the Oxford man of this sort of thing. But he says "Oh, what!" and "Don't ever know" where they don't seem useful, and otherwise has a language all his own.

Last year I read an article by a disgusted lister in the London *New Age* giving a purist of expressions current at the historic seat of learning, and if memory serves me well most of them were just nauseating gibberish. American slang, on the other hand, whatever else it may or may not be, is certainly a virile growth, expressive and humorous. And for my part I find most of it altogether delightful.

But then of course I'm one of the heathen. But I keep wondering cheerfully. And I'm not worrying about what's going to happen to me in America.

I told what men had been drugged and robbed in the dives. I set forth the evidence to bolster strong suspicions of numerous murders. I denounced the justices of the peace as grafters unfit to hold office in a decent community."

"I exposed the men who owned the buildings in which the dives were operated. Yes, indeed, my little paper was a sure enough searchlight and while it lasted it was the most exciting thing in the way of a newspaper West Hammond ever knew."

I think there never was anything exactly like it anywhere. Every issue shook the town to its foundations like a cyclone. It made a lot of enemies, but it made more friends."

"When work upon the street paving contract was resumed I determined to stop it. The contractor was laying the pavement with poor materials, throwing in broken bottles and rubbish for a foundation and using brittle and no account bricks. I tried to get an injunction to stop the work, but failed. The contract was valid and the contractor insisted on going ahead."

"Finally in desperation I collected a band of women as determined as myself and we decided to take matters into our own hands. With seventeen women in my army I descended upon the scene where the pavement was being laid. We swooped upon the astonished laborers and tore up the bricks as fast as they put them in place. Then we formed a line across the street and stopped further work by force."

"The chief of police arrived and ordered us away. We jeered at him. Then he ordered out the entire police force to disperse us. The policemen charged upon us drawn up in line of battle with clubs and drawn revolvers. They beat the women over the shoulders with their clubs."

"Policeman John Okraj, a big, burly fellow, struck me and knocked me down. I jumped up and in my fury, hardly knowing what I was doing, I struck him in the face. 'I'll fix you,' I screamed. 'Yes,' he answered, 'and I'll fix you.'"

"He caught me by the wrists and dragged me off through an alley to jail. He did not dare take me through a street for fear a mob would attack him and release me. At the jail I was thrown into a dark, foul cell. My enemies came, and