

The Story of Zonta

(Talk Given by Barbara H. Wright)
at Zonta Birthday Party
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Tonight Zonta International is celebrating its 40th Birthday and Minneapolis Zonta Club is celebrating its 33rd Birthday. Zonta International has now become a mature organization well established throughout the world. It is in the process of enjoying life, going places and doing things. According to Dr. Dorothy Radusch, "A better life (for Zonta) begins at 40".

How Did Zonta International Come About?

In 1919 women suffrage had been attained. World War I was over. During the War women had stepped in to take men's places in business and industry. They had served with the Red Cross in Europe and had helped out with bond drives and other community enterprises. This new service club for women was the result of their yearning to hold on to the gains they had made in industry and to continue community service. Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club had already taken hold and had established a pattern for service clubs.

Early in 1919 nine women service clubs were organized in New York state under the leadership of such people as Mary Jenkins, newspaper woman of Syracuse, and Dr. Esther Park of Ithica who had "dodged bombs, held clinics in Nancy and studied radiology under Madame Curie."

In November 1919 officers of these nine clubs met to form articles of "Confederation of Zonta Clubs". At this time the name Zonta was selected. The charter clubs included: Rochester, Binghamton, Elmira, Syracuse, Erie, Utica, Ithica, Buffalo and Detroit. Within a period of four months this plan "stirred the imagination of some 600 women in 9 cities. The idea was, of course, membership based upon accomplishment in the business and professional world - with each field represented by one member - on individual worth and ability, regardless of social or financial rank. It was based on the desire to serve the immediate and world community and to share happy fellowship with onward looking women". (Zontian Fall 1959).

In 1924 Zonta needed a full time Executive Secretary and Harriet Richards left her position as a YWCA Secretary to become Executive Secretary of Zonta. Headquarters were soon moved to Chicago and Harriet Richards remained Executive Secretary for 26 years.

The 5th President of our organization now called Zonta International, was Marion deForest from the Buffalo club. She was a noted playwright and critic and a dynamic organizer. Under her leadership Zonta expanded very fast. Upon her death in 1935 an organization fund was established in her memory. At first contributions were voluntary, and later they were assessed against the members. The money has been used to organize new clubs.

The growth of Zonta since 1919 has been very impressive. In 1919 there were 9 clubs and 600 members. In 1930 there were 107 clubs and 3,000 members, with clubs in Hawaii, Canada and Austria, as well as the United States.

In 1940 there were 150 clubs and 4,000 members, with additional clubs in Germany, Canada, Denmark and Sweden. In 1950 there were 210 clubs with 7,800 members and we had added clubs in Iceland, Finland, Norway, Chile, Switzerland, England and France. Now in 1959 we have 405 clubs with 14,400 members, and there are clubs in the Philippines, Austria and Guatemala. A new club in Bombay has been organized and will probably be started in February 1960. From 9 clubs in three states, to 405 clubs in fifteen countries; from 600 members to 14,400 members, this is indeed a marvelous record.

Among the famous members of Zonta Club was Amelia Earhart. She belonged to the Boston club and later the New York club, and Zonta was the only non-professional club she ever joined. In 1937 no one had encircled the globe by air around the equator. She had the courage, skill, imagination and initiative to try, and in the South Seas she lost her life. In 1938 at the Zonta convention the A.E.S.F. for women students in aeronautical engineering was established. Contributions to this have been voluntary. During the years 26 women have been granted scholarships to take graduate work in aeronautical engineering. Among them was Miss Sappo from Italy who took her work at the University of Minnesota.

This year Zonta International has undertaken a new service project, the European Refugee Project, and members are assessed \$1.00 each for this year. Together with many other organizations, and under the leadership of United Nations we are going to help in clearing out the refugee camps in Europe. Our special assignment is to help finance the Father Perie Village to care for the "hard core" cases, the old, ill and disturbed, and attempts will be made to find part time employment in the village for many of these.

Minneapolis Zonta Club

In reviewing the history of the Minneapolis Zonta Club I had to depend on fewer documents and more hearsay. Zonta Club was organized in 1925 by Mrs. Katherine Wallen who came up from South Bend, Indiana. She obtained lists of outstanding women and important firms in Minneapolis. Dr. Dorothea Radusch recalls that Gudrun Carlson of Chicago suggested her name and she was one of the first people called upon. Alice McLaughlin tells how Mrs. Wallen called on Mr. Pack at N.S.P. and asked who was the most outstanding woman in the organization. Of course Mr. Pack said it was Alice, and he was so impressed with this new organization that he advised Alice to join it. Other charter members who are still active include: Nella Doyle, Katherine McKone, and Sophie Anderson. Persons to join soon after were Aurilla Smith, Adele Walker, and Blanche Scallen.

Our club was organized on February 4, 1926, almost 34 years ago. The charter dinner was at the Curtis Hotel and there were 30 members. I am told that there were no initiation fees for charter members, but the annual dues were \$25.00, quite a sum for those days. The dues were reduced to \$15.00 during the depression and were raised after the War to \$20.00. It is worth noting that they have never come back to the original dues of \$25.00 a year.

Early presidents included Aurilla Rolph, secretary to the President of the Midland National Bank and Trust. Hilda Blair Ray, an attorney who now lives in Texas but has a summer home on the North Shore, was the second president.

Alice McLaughlin was the third president. Katherine McKone recalls that she and Alice were on the nominating committee for that year. They presented a slate but in a surprise move Alice was nominated from the floor and elected.

Our first meetings were held in the old Bennett Christian home which had been turned into a tea room operated, I think, by the Women's Republican Committee. It was located on 4th Avenue South near 8th Street.

From there we moved to the Business and Professional Women's Club on 2nd Avenue South where we had a private dining room. That club was a casualty of the depression, and as you know, is now the Standard Club.

From there we moved to Atkinson's Tea Room and after a period of time we moved on to the Silver Latch which is on 11th Street between Nicollet and Marquette. That was a lovely place to meet and we were sorry to have to leave it. From there we moved to the YMCA where there is less style, but good home made bread and good coffee.

Our policy from the start has been to hold three luncheon meetings and one dinner meeting each month. Many of us recall the end of the year picnics at Marguerite Guthrie's on the Minnesota River, at Hazel Solhaug's, at Nella Doyle's on the St. Croix River, at Lucille Barberry's in Tyrol Hills, and more recently, at Dr. Ann Arnold's new home on the St. Croix River.

About 1948 when our membership was comparatively small, we held dinners at various homes. I remember going to Ebba Tolg's, at Elaine Cochran's, at Fay Weld's, at Sophie Anderson's and at Dr. Annette Stenstrom's. I also recall a progressive dinner where we went from my home to the Steefel home where Dr. Lawrence Steefel of the History Department of the University brought us up to date on world trends. For a number of years this was a part of our yearly program and we were glad to have Dr. Steefel back with us last spring.

At our weekly meetings our programs have been varied. We have always enjoyed the initiation talks of new members. Many of us look back upon the meetings at which Marguerite Guthrie and Nella Doyle discussed market trends. While we have had many outside speakers, we always enjoy talks given by our own members.

Zonta has always been concerned with community service, and scholarships have been an important way of providing service. I am told that during the first year of our Zonta club a scholarship was granted to a college student in Madison, Wisconsin. During the depression Zonta helped outstanding high school girls by granting them small scholarships which would provide lunch money and street car fare. We also gave assistance to the Minneapolis Campfire group, our special interest resulted from the fact that Fay Weld was President of the Campfire Girls.

Many of you may know of the Nellie Gorgas Fund. This was established in memory of Nellie Gorgas who came here from Chicago to be the administrator of St. Barnabas Hospital. She was one of our very fine members. After her tragic death a memorial fund of \$1,500 was raised and set up as a loan fund at the University of Minnesota to assist women training in hospital administration. Recently this has been broadened to include applicants from other health and medical fields. Last year \$500 was added to this fund, making a total of \$2,017, which is administered by the Department of Loans and Scholarships at the University of Minnesota.

For several years we have been concerned with the Indian problem in Minneapolis. We are now sponsoring Bea Jones who is part Indian. This year she has transferred from Macalester College to the University of Minnesota where she is studying Nursing. We are proud of the fact that our scholarship is making it possible for this charming and able girl to finish her education.

A minor activity is the packages which are provided by our members at the Christmas Party for needy Indian families in Minneapolis. Of course we contribute to the Amelia Earhart Fund and to the European Refugee Project.

Many of you will recall the economic conference called Dollars and Sense for the Housewife which Zonta club spearheaded in 1954. This was sponsored by many other womens clubs and is financed by the Northwestern National Bank. Helen Canoyer was one of the leaders in promoting this project. The meetings were held at the YWCA and attended by about 600 women.

Money raising has been a perennial concern of Zonta Club. We have always been more willing to get out our check books than roll up our sleeves. However, over the years we have tried out with a good deal of success, rummage sales, candy sales, bazaars and other such money making projects. However, we like the big promotion events better.

Alice McLaughlin may have forgotten the affair at the Women's Club at the time it opened in May 1929. Zonta took over the club for an evening and sold tickets for \$1.50. The program included music by the American Legion Chorus, a Dayton fashion show, dancing from the Genevieve Ward Dancing School, and similar numbers. Later there was dancing and cards. The program for this affair showed a very impressive list of patrons and patronesses, including the Governor and important business men. Quite a sum of money was realized from this affair.

I recall with pleasure a hat show at some swish place up near the Women's Club more recently. This, too, was quite successful. For the last several years we have had a Spring Fashion Show under the direction of Charlotte Meline, who is one of our loyal members.

Now let us turn to conferences and conventions for a moment. We are proud to have had Dr. Dorothea Radusch elected as President of Zonta International. Olivia Johnson of St. Paul, and Ellen Anderson Parks, also of St. Paul, have served in past years as President of Zonta International. I am under the impression that our club has as part of its growing up process, gone through a mild sort of adolescent revolt about Zonta International and look down our noses at the parent organization. But now we are pretty well grown up and proud to be a part of and give support to our International organization.

Our President, at least, gets to the International Convention every two years, and these are really important and entertaining affairs.

District conventions are held in more convenient places and more of us are able to go. The last one was held in St. Paul in October. Unfortunately we found it pretty far across the river and we could not blame it on to the bus strike. Those of us who were able to go enjoyed it very much. A District Convention held in Minneapolis not too long ago is still well remembered by Zonta members in this locality. They were impressed particularly with that wonderful Sunday morning brunch at the Minnikahda Club.

Perhaps the best remembered District Convention held in Minneapolis was that one in 1931 which actually did not come off. The plans were all made when suddenly the banks closed. The whole thing had to be called off for otherwise we might have had to support the convention delegates all winter.

Perhaps our biggest event was the Zonta International Convention held in St. Paul in June 1928. Zonta International was 9 years old and the Minneapolis Club, 3 years old. We had only 27 members, but we did things in a big way. With the influence of Aurilla Smith, who was then with the Minneapolis Journal, we put out a 4 page special edition of the Minneapolis Journal which was circulated at the Convention in St. Paul. A copy of this paper is in our files. All the members had pictures in the paper with couplets about each. The whole convention was invited to a concert given by the St. Olaf Choir.

Like Zonta International, our membership is made up of women of stature. Our scrapbook shows more than our share of Town Toppers. We had a number of women listed in the YWCA List of Women of Distinction and also in the AAUW list of women of outstanding ability.

Let me recall a few you may have forgotten or not have the privilege of knowing:

Nellie Gorgas	Helen Canoyer	Margaret Harding
Mac Borton	Darragh Aldrich	Rosemary McVay
Ruth Rosholt	Helen Clapesattle	

In summing up, may I point out the value of Zonta. We have fun over a glass of sherry at our dinner meetings in probing the backgrounds of various members to find out their current interests and achievements. Every member has an interesting background and a success story. It is stimulating to expand our horizons by getting to know the key women in Minneapolis and key women throughout the world. It is a satisfaction to belong to and contribute to this great group of 16,000 women who are doing things of importance around the world. It is a privilege to contribute to the service projects both in our community and in the world. It provides an opportunity for members to make friends and do things together.

It is a great club and this is a great birthday. To quote from Dorothea Radusch in the Fall Zontian, "Better life begins at 40, and thinking big is essential. Tomorrow requires vision and courage to meet the challenge and provide the leadership for women in the free world. Let's not be 'them that just sets and listens, but be them as gets up and does.'" "