

# Brief History of FAWCO

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Because many of the clubs belonging to the Federation are comparatively new members, and because so many of the individual members of these various clubs know so little about the Federation, we have tried to gather together a sketchy history of F.A.W.C.O. since its founding 22 years ago. Mrs. Mary Unwin of the London Club, former editor of the Federation Bulletin (1936-1939) has been kind enough to compile the pre-war information which we feel will help us to know our Federation better.

The Federation was founded by the President (Caroline Curtis Brown) and the Executive Committee of the American Women's Club in London in 1932, under the title « Federation of American Women's Clubs in Europe ». It was felt that much more useful work could be done by the various clubs if they were united in one Federation. To this end, invitations were sent to clubs in Europe,

asking them to send delegates. Almost every club sent one or more delegates, who were received, housed and entertained at the headquarters of the London Club. Meetings were held and the vote in favor of union was unanimous. A constitution was drafted and Mrs. Curtis Brown (London) was elected first President.

The objectives of the new Federation were:

1. To further by every possible means the cause of peace.
2. To standardize the laws in the different countries regarding the rights of foreign women married to American men.
3. To study the question of schools for American children living abroad.

As a result of the efforts of the Federation, the United States Congress enacted a law providing that foreign women married to American men would at the end of five years of married life

automatically become American citizens, instead of being compelled to reside in the United States for two years, as was the case earlier.

In 1934, at the conference held in Paris, the second President was elected — Mrs. Louise Connett (Paris). It was decided that conferences be held yearly, all delegates to be entertained by the various hostess clubs. The subject of paramount importance at the conference was always to be the preservation of peace.

The fourth annual conference was held in 1935 at the Hague. It was at this conference that the Federation Bulletin began, with Mrs. E.J. Keen and Mrs. J.E. Briggs, Jr. as editors.

The fifth annual conference at Copenhagen in 1936 was an active one, with 11 clubs sending delegations from nine European countries. Thanks to a donation of \$1,000 from Mrs. Clarence Gasque of the London Club, the scholarship program was initiated. Conference discussions centered on Education and the Equal Rights Treaty. Mrs. Mennell (London) was elected President. The name of the Federation was changed to the « Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas». Mrs. Mary Unwin became editor of the Bulletin, which post she held until July 1939 when the last pre-war Bulletin was published.

The sixth conference was held in 1937 at Zurich, at which time Mrs. Blattner (Zurich) was elected President.

Eleven clubs (with 2000 members) participated in the 1938 conference held at Hamburg.

The last pre-war conference was held in London in 1939, at which time Mrs. Volkmann (Zurich) was elected President. This conference was again concerned with questions of laws affecting citizens abroad and alien wives of Americans abroad, and round table discussions were held concerning the availability of American education in Europe. The last pre-war issue of the Bulletin appeared in July 1939, just a few months before war was declared. This issue had 26 pages, including six pages of advertisements, and sold (as did all of the 12 issues) for 1 shilling. The 1940 conference was scheduled to take place at Stockholm and the 1941 conference at Oslo. The President returned to the United States and the Vice-President, Mrs. Morgensterne (Oslo) took over. During the occupation of Norway, most Federation files were destroyed. Mrs. Morgensterne was in concentration camp and died shortly after the war.

We owe sincere thanks to Mary Unwin for making possible this article on the pre-war history of our Federation. She writes from London, «On looking back, it is sad to reflect how little effect was produced by all these genuine and splendid efforts for a better understanding between

nations. It is sad that humankind is not equipped with foresight. In spite of all our Federation congresses and goodwill meetings, when the fateful hour strikes we are all found wanting. We do not know if another and more hideous war is waiting for us just around the corner. But if the women of the world would strive harder and to more purpose to cultivate an atmosphere of tolerance to others, much might be accomplished.»

### **Since the War...**

After the war interval, Mrs. L.J. Blattner of Zurich, Secretary of the Federation, was the only officer in Europe. In 1948, Mrs. Blattner asked Mrs. Carl Briner, also of Zurich, to approach former member clubs and propose a post-war conference. Six clubs (Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm and Zurich) responded and sent delegates to Copenhagen for the 9th conference in 1949, just 10 years after the last Federation meetings.

Mrs. Koster Frosig (Copenhagen), who had been a delegate in 1936, presided over the re-organization meetings which elected Mrs. Briner as the first President of the post-war Federation. Biennial conferences were agreed upon and before the 1931 gathering in Stockholm, four additional clubs joined F.A.W.C.O. Under the dynamic leadership of Mrs. Briner, the Federation was once again on its feet!

At Stockholm there were delegations from nine member clubs with Antwerp, Athens, Brussels and London welcomed into F.A.W.C.O. Elected for a two-year term was Mrs. Tom Hoyer of Oslo, who presided so capably at the 11th conference in Brussels last spring. Five new clubs joined during her able and inspiring administration-Paris, Dhahran, the American Women's Organization of Greece, New Delhi and the Hague. The Round Robin, circulated among clubs, served to weld together the growing Federation. F.A.W.C.O. now numbers 16 member clubs of 2600 members and surpasses the pre-war grouping.

Current activities, as initiated by Mrs. Hoyer and the Brussels' discussions, are known to all of us. Federation funds, frozen during the war, are being released and the scholarship idea under study. We have tried a mutual welfare project, we are busy securing information on civilian absentee voting, and we have launched into publishing a Federation Bulletin. The current President, elected at Brussels, is Mrs. Jean-Paul Ganseman (Brussels).

F.A.W.C.O. will be 23 years old when the 12th conference meets next year in Zurich, the city from which came the vital stimulation and inspiration responsible for the post-war revival of our Federation.