



MODERN REVIVAL OF OLD ENGLISH OPEN WEAVE
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THE OLD COLONY UNION AT BOURNE, CAPE COD

BY M. T. GARLAND

THE Old Colony Union was founded about ten years ago, with the idea of bringing the women of the town together along social, industrial, and agricultural lines. At that time there was absolutely no agriculture in our village, even the potatoes were brought in from outside. The children were fed on canned milk as none of the permanent residents maintained cows or poultry. The organization was the outgrowth of the forming of a class on Saturdays in the high school building, which offered to give to girls instruction in needlework. In our schools at that time there was no basket weaving, no manual training of any sort. This offer was therefore welcomed by all of the children. Out of a possibility of ninety-seven girls, we drew into our group ninety-one, and before we had been a month together, the boys in the village asked that they also might be given work.

I faced rather peculiar conditions in organizing this school, because although it was made free to all of the children of the town, it was more or less impossible for many children to attend, owing to the distance from their homes to our building. During week days these children are transported by railroad and buses at the expense of the town, and of course I found myself maintaining a school meant to be free to all, which was not free to all. It was found impossible in this community to give certain children their carfare without others feeling that those at a distance were being paid to attend the school. I therefore made arrangements whereby each girl who attended the school was to be paid for her work by giving her the same rate as is given to a finished sewing woman. Those whose fare had to be paid were to have it deducted from the sums of money which they earned. In order to equalize the distribution of

funds among the children, it was suggested to those girls who had no carfares to pay that they set aside a sum equal to what the others had to set aside, in this way starting to build a fund which would carry the school during any dead season and give it some working capital.

Each lot of work was handed out to the child applying for it, and each work had on it a tag. This tag carried on it the original cost of the material, the amount that we would pay for the work to be done, the amount of profit, and selling price. When the child took a lot of work, she signed for it and her name was written on the tag. We faced, of course, the necessity of creating such things as would find a ready market. We began with half dozens and dozens of dish towels, which taught the younger girls simple hemming; and we carried our work to the finest hemstitching on handspun towels, and eventually to embroidery and to marking of the same.

To meet the requirements of the boys, we started a class in carpentry. I supplied three sets of tools, buying advisedly only those that would be in immediate use. The high school set aside an unfinished cellar, where, under the direction of a teacher from the industrial school in Hyannis, the boys spent some time erecting benches and partitioning off such portion of the cellar as they meant to use for their own work. By the time the boys had finished their workroom—which did not take long, as the tools were kept constantly busy by boys coming and going in groups, we faced the fact that we had no place to dispose of our work. It was at this point that I conceived the idea of forming the Union that would eventually, I hoped, draw in all the women of the six villages in our township and realized that the process would be very slow if we did not start with some capital. I therefore offered to build a simple clubhouse for their use as soon as we had obtained 150 members. I am not sure that it was not only 100 members. As none of the women in our village were economically earning anything and were dependent upon their men folk for money, it was not until the men got to work in the spring that the women began to come in.

While we were waiting to form our membership of 100, I went to the different villages with a hamper full of work, having planned and designed myself such simple things as bureau covers, table covers, hammock cushions, and such things as the summer residents might want and buy. When I went to the different villages, and spoke to as

large a group of women as they were able to get together, pointing out to them the necessity of earning something themselves in the home during their odd moments, also the importance of growing fresh vegetables for their consumption, and the joy of maintaining a small garden and a few hens. I pointed out also how necessary it was for them to get together in social groups to work along community lines. There seemed to be nothing to draw them all together with the same spirit. Even these small villages maintained their separate churches, sometimes two in each village, and this alone was a matter of discord.

About the middle of May or June of that year, we had our necessary number of members. So I went to work on the plans of the club, having originally stated that I would not spend over \$2,500 on the ground and buildings. We wished to make this club self-sustaining. We wanted also to draw people there to see and buy our handiwork, and we desired if possible to draw our industrial school into this organization and maintain our school free to all women and children who wished to attend.

Some time in August, the clubhouse was finished and opened. It consisted of a tea-room, a salesroom, and a clubroom for members, where they might write and read and have their classes. The tea-room was to bring people into the clubhouse, and all those who entered the tea-room had to pass through our salesroom, so they were thrown in constant contact with the work we were doing. I agreed to carry the clubhouse and grounds without any rent or interest charges for three years. As a matter of fact, I have carried them for ten years and now find the club so well on its feet that it can pay me rent and gradually take over the club itself. The group of women raised a fund by subscription and by work with which they built a separate building for the industrial school, and in this school during July, August, and September, there are classes constantly going on. We brought into the village the first year a skilled Italian needle woman, and I had in my possession unusual samples of Italian needlework which I have sent all over the country on exhibition.

We had the first year a class in designing, a class in Italian needlework, classes in basketry, weaving, and rug making. The classes for the women were in the afternoons, for the children in the morning, and twice a week there were classes in carpentry, to which both boys and girls came.

The product of the school was sold, a certain percentage going toward building up the fund for the school. The children were amply paid for their work. The boys made bird houses, scrap baskets, tea tables, benches and stools, also cedar boxes. The first year we gave them an order for all the furniture required in our tea-room, and every bit of it was handmade by this group of boys. At the end of ten years we still



IN THE WORK ROOMS OF THE OLD COLONY UNION

have this furniture, and expect to have it stand by us for a good while longer.

I think the success of my venture has been the outcome of a fund that I created, which carried in the clubhouse a consignment of handwoven linens from Italy, homespuns from Canada and Ireland, and threads and yarns bought at wholesale. I found that many of the women could do good needlework and were doing it on trashy materials, which alone made it impossible for us to sell their work. Now, everything that is done is done with the best material and when turned out is per-

fect in its way. This fund, consisting of \$2,500, is operated in the following manner:—

A woman wishes to make, let us say, a bedspread of handspun linen, which she is to embroider. She comes to the clubhouse, states how much material she wishes, and chooses her own goods, also secures the linen thread necessary to work them and finds somebody in the club who is able and willing to help her as to design and motif. She receives a slip on which are the charges for linen and thread, which she does not pay, but carries with her. At the end of the year or perhaps two years, when she has finished this complicated work, she brings it to the Union and it is put up for sale, she being allowed as much money as she feels she is entitled to. To this we add the cost of the material, and twenty per cent. profit, sometimes more. When the piece of work is sold, the woman receives her money, and the fund is repaid the amount loaned for carrying the materials.

You can well see that there would be a certain amount of depreciation in this fund, but we have so arranged that in selling our materials we sell a little above the original cost, so that the fund is constantly kept up. This fund, as you see, finances the workers, the only outlay they make being for their time. So much of the fund is now active, on account of the constant and increased sales, that we are able in the spring to pay the workers out of the fund when they bring the work into the club. This means a great deal to them.

During the winter each member makes at least one piece of embroidery which she turns in as a gift to the Union, and the Union can charge anything it wants for the sale of that particular thing. This proves that the spirit among the women is the right one and that they value the organization.

I have gone into detail regarding this, as I feel sure that it will be helpful to anyone wishing to undertake a similar organization. In order to add to our receipts we receive consignments of any handicraft that we consider up to a certain standard and charge 25 per cent. to any non-members. We have a good deal of this work consigned during the summer, and as we are not able to meet the demands for work, we import needlework from Italy.

Our dues the first year were \$.50, payable semi-annually. By a vote of the members at the end of the first year, the dues became \$1.00,

payable semi-annually. We have now an initiation fee of, I think, \$2.00, with dues of \$1.00. We have organized three or four forms of membership. One is that of the actual worker, who joins the club for the sake of the sales which she may make, another is the associate member, who is a summer resident interested in the work that we are doing and wishing to contribute something toward the maintenance of the organization. The third is a non-resident consigner, who, although she may live in some other village, may receive the benefit of the clubhouse, paying the regular dues, but paying \$1.00 more for the privilege of joining. The associate membership is \$5.00 a year. I believe in the last year a life membership has been created, which I think is \$50.00.

One of the departments which we thought much of at the beginning has been taken out of our hands by the Farm Bureau Association. This is the agricultural side of it. But in its place we have developed through association with other women's clubs a civic branch.

It is needless to say that these interests brought into the little village have created an entirely new atmosphere and spirit of co-operation. We have succeeded in getting into the schools as a part of the regular curriculum needlework and basketry, and hope within a year to have classes in cooking. We have obtained hot lunch for the children in the schools; in fact, through the getting-together spirit of these women, they have been able to bring about many reforms that they could not otherwise have accomplished. The teachers tell me that the children come to the schools with an awakened interest, and one can tell by a woman's step in the village whether she belongs to the Old Colony Union or not.