

BRIEF HISTORY OF EMPIRE STATE FEDERATION

of WOMEN'S CLUBS - Incorporated

1908 - 1952

The year 1908 is a memorable one for the women of this state, because during that year The Empire State Federation of Women's Clubs was founded by Mrs. Alice Wiley Seay of Brooklyn.

Thirty years later, February 27, 1938, memorial services were held in her honor in Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn, Adelphi Street near Myrtle Avenue, with Miss Alice Thompson acting as chairman of the memorial committee. Four living presidents participated in the services. They were Mrs. Maria C. Lawton, Mrs. Addie W. Hunton, Mrs. Cicely S. Gunner and Mrs. Bessie Harden Payne.

Purposes for organizing the Federation, it has been recorded were the need for uplift work among girls and young women; and to care for Harriet Tubman and her home at Auburn, New York. Mrs. Seay is credited with the founding of the first Dorcas in 1908.

Mrs. Frances Reynolds Keyser was the first president. She was an honor graduate of Hunter College, New York and was noted for her gentle virtues and broad vision. Mrs. Keyser was an earnest worker and served through the first years of the organization. She worked in the White Rose Industrial Association, founded by Victoria Earle Matthews, who was present when the National Association of Colored Women was organized in 1896, in Washington, D. C.

Mrs. Mary B. Talbert of Buffalo, New York served as the second president of the state. She was an honor graduate of Oberlin College in 1885. She was a charter member of the State Federation. She had faith, courage, and great enthusiasm for any task she desired to perform and was a devout Christian. She served faithfully and was a charter member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Buffalo, N. Y. A born leader of women, she made friends

with the "high, low, great and small."

It was during her presidency that the first monument was erected by the Federation of Women's Clubs over the grave of Harriet Tubman after her death March 10, 1913. Mrs. Talbert kept in close contact with Aunt Harriet in her last years, during which time the state helped take care of her.

In appreciation of her outstanding leadership in the state and in the National Association of Colored Women, Mrs. Talbert has always been honored and revered by the women of the State. Just recently, Thursday, July 6, 1950, when the State was in convention at Buffalo, the women of Buffalo presented and unveiled an oil painting of her to be presented and hung in National headquarters.

Mrs. Maria C. Lawton, the third president, lived in Brooklyn, New York. She was a graduate of Howard University. She served the Federation for ten years from 1916 to 1926.

Three clubs functioning in 1952 are named after her. The one in Brooklyn called The Maria C. Lawton Club of Brooklyn was organized in January, 1945 by Mrs. Adah H. Talbert. (The Maria C. Lawton Civic and Welfare Club of Albany was organized in April, 1919 for the purpose of promoting civic activities by its membership. A M. C. Lawton Club was organized in Kingston

It was during these years that the State banner was made. At one time there were 89 clubs on the state roster. Mrs. Minnie W. French was one of the state organizers during that period. The conventions were largely attended and many prominent speakers addressed the conventions. Mrs. M. French represented the women of the State at a labor conference of women held in Washington, D. C. in 1924. She was a daily reporter for the Standard Union of Brooklyn, a daily newspaper, for twenty years.

The first contributions to the Urban League and to the Empire Friendly Shelter were made during this time. During the twenties a child in Africa