

**Third biennial, General Federation of Women's Clubs : by invitation
of the Woman's Club of Louisville, Ky., May, 1896.**

General Federation of Women's Clubs.
Louisville, Ky. : Flexner Brothers, 1896.

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THIRD BIENNIAL

GENERAL FEDERATION



OF WOMEN'S CLUBS.

BY INVITATION OF THE WOMAN'S CLUB OF
LOUISVILLE, KY., MAY, 1896.

♦
Unity in Diversity.

FLEXNER BROTHERS, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY.
MDCCCXCVI.



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WOMEN AS ARCHITECTS.

The last century has witnessed a remarkable change in the position of women in the professional world. Previous to 1871, women did not appear in the census as practicing physicians, and the names of women appear as architects in our census for the first time twenty years later, in 1891. Though it is well known that a few women were practicing previously to that time, this is the first official recognition of them in the profession.

At the time the circular was issued by the Women's Board of the Columbian Exposition, inviting competitive drawings for the Woman's Building at Chicago, it was, I understand, seriously doubted whether a sufficient number of women might be found prepared to enter such a competition. Twenty-one sets of drawings were submitted, a number of women who were practicing architects at the time not entering the competition, either through lack of time or because they disapproved the conditions of the competition, the remuneration for services being much less than that given the designers of any of the other buildings. The significant fact was that in 1891 twenty or thirty women were both willing and competent to undertake work of such a serious character, and that the first and second prizes justly went to the graduates of the Massachusetts School of Technology in Boston. The other plans may have been as good in composition or general plan, but doubtless lacked the finish of detail and execution which can come only from thorough training under the most competent masters. It is useless to enter the profession of architecture without a thorough training grafted upon a real love for the expression of art in building. Architecture must be accepted as one of the professions where the chief reward is in the consciousness of work well done, and not in anticipation of large financial returns. It is simply an art, and one of the oldest and most honorable.

Miss Hayden, who designed the Woman's Building in Chicago, is at present, I understand, in the office of a decorator in Boston. Miss Howe, who received the second prize, has recently opened her office in Boston for the practice of architecture.

At the present time seven women are studying architecture in the School of Technology in Boston, four of whom receive their degrees this year. Three of the four wish to enter active practice in offices at once.

Miss Hand and Miss Gannon, of the New York School of Design, are practicing with distinguished success. I recently heard a member of a

large land company speak of their work with unstinted praise. Miss Elsie Murcur, of Pittsburg, designed the Woman's Building recently erected in Atlanta for the Cotton States Exposition, and the women of the South may be justly proud of the beautiful building which they contributed to the exposition. Every public recognition of woman's work makes it easier for other women to achieve success and to do better things in their chosen occupations. Perhaps no woman has won a more deserved success in architecture than Louise Bethune, of Buffalo, who has worked in this profession for a number of years, one of the few women, if not the only one, who are members of the New York Chapter of the Architectural Association. She said some time ago, in speaking on the subject of women in architecture, that she would change it to "Woman and Architecture," and that "when women entered the professional field to become physicians, they filled a long-felt want. There is no need whatever for a woman architect. No one wants her, no one yearns for her. There is no one line in architecture to which she is better adapted than a man. The woman architect is always conservative. She has exactly the same work to do that a man has. When the woman enters the profession, she will be kindly met and will be welcome, but not as a woman, only as an architect."

I must take exception to one point only, and that is: "There is no need whatever of a woman architect." There is great need that every woman should be educated in architecture. She must know, if she be a tenant, the possibilities and adaptabilities of a house, and if she be a prospective house owner, she must impress upon her future home the result of her own intelligent idea of what that place should be, having it put in practical shape by a skillful architect. Is it not a reproach to the good sense of part of the human family that a woman will devote more time and thought to the making of a new frock to be worn for one short season, than to the planning of her home?

If every woman who thought of building a new home would make it the serious occupation of her life during the time of its planning and construction, if every woman who enters the profession would determine that she would lay hold of the difficulties of design, construction and ornamentation until she was master of her art, there would be great need of her. I hear constantly of some young woman, who contemplates entering the profession as draughts-woman or designer, unwilling to assume the superintendence of

construction during the erection of her own designs. If women ever hold a respected position as architects, they must assume all of the duties and responsibilities; they must bring to it trained hands and eyes; they must enter the field determined not only to be architects, but to be the best of architects. The public is so disposed to look upon our work with kind and sympathetic eyes that we must judge our work by the standard of the highest architectural achievements, and be satisfied with nothing short of complete success.

A large proportion of all the buildings erected are intended for human habitations, and here it appears eminently fitting that women trained in the practice of architecture should execute their work with some advantage over men, as in all the details of designing, women bring taste, tact and judgment.

If home is woman's sphere, it must be admitted that she should build the home which she is to tend with such care. Women now hold a splendid position in painting and sculpture, and in the near future they will, doubtless, take an honorable position as architects. Women are now practicing in almost every state in the Union. It is well known that few men attain honorable recognition in the profession of architecture until early middle life. Ten or fifteen years of hard work bring with them the reward of labor well directed, and being recognized as such.

Miss Helen Treret, of New Orleans, is, I understand, a practicing architect. As the daughter of a well-known architect, she has some decided advantages. The great difficulty encountered by architectural students is the inability to obtain a position in the office of a skillful architect, and this she has had overcome for her.

M. de Monclos, of Paris, who won the third prize in the recent competition for the New Art Gallery to be erected in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, makes no secret of the fact, I believe, that he was materially aided in the details of his plan by his wife, who takes a great interest in his work. She was before her marriage Miss Katherine C. Bartol, of Philadelphia.

Of the schools of architecture and general art schools, few, if any, exclude women. The art galleries and libraries are all open to them, the facilities for the study of architecture being best in New York and Boston. In New York they have the benefit of the splendid collection of architectural casts in the Metropolitan Museum, and in Boston of the unsurpassed scientific and thorough training of the Massachusetts School of Technology.

A recently compiled table, giving the number of college women practicing the professions, gives the amazingly small number of ninety-one artists, including different branches, one only of these being possessed of a college diploma. The fact is greatly to the discredit of the professions and not to the discredit of the college. The same, I am sure, can not be said a generation hence, when the women who are at present in our colleges have taken their places in their chosen occupations.

There is a large field for women as designers of furniture, stained glass and interior decorations, and as draughtswomen.

The question of remuneration might fittingly be discussed here. Financial success will depend on a question of skill and not of sex; but any who dream of long bank balances or luxurious returns for a limited expenditure of labor, I would advise to shun the architectural path. The returns are sufficient to sustain life and to afford some comforts, but are not sufficiently luxurious to dull the keen artistic sense of that artistic life which grows best in the attics of Paris and Rome, and thrives here on unsuccessful competition and in the shadow of unpaid bills. For the benefit of clients, I would like to say that all architects base their charges on a regular percentage of the cost of the building, and that "if the servant is worth hiring, he is worthy of his hire."

Little will ever be accomplished in the way of improving our architecture until there is a general interest in architecture, until every man and woman knows as much about designing as they know about music, until they are as familiar with ancient architecture as they are with ancient military history, until an exhibition of architectural drawings creates as much interest as a poster show, until an architectural medley is judged by the same standards as a musical medley, until higher education includes as much knowledge of the architecture of the Greeks and Romans as it now requires familiarity with their languages.

I have had so much delight in my work in spite of its failures and disappointments, have met from my brother architects such a frank and generous recognition of my attempts to do acceptable work, such kindness from clients that the way has been anything but a thorny one.

In conclusion I must add one word on the vexed question of the professional life of married women. Ideally, one feels that marriage and the care of children should not displace a professional life. That a woman is entitled to the development of her talents and abilities after as before marriage no one dare deny. For my own part, I believe that nothing can

take the place in life of a real and intelligent interest in some occupation or profession, the active practice of which must at times give place to the demands and responsibilities of child life, if the mother wishes to assume the responsibility. Every child that is invited into this world deserves and has the right to demand at the hands of her or his mother her first and best care and thought. The rearing of houses is, as it appears to me, a less noble occupation than the developing of a human life. One may still maintain all of the intellectual interest and enough of the practice of a profession to lift life out of the commonplace rut of inactivity. The professions are no longer confined to law, art, medicine and the pulpit. Every earnest woman has a profession or a ministry. So much work must be done to convert the crude material of mind and matter into beauty of form and spirit, that we are all co-laborers and not competitors.

To the women of the Federation and of the individual clubs, I wish God-speed in the work of upbuilding a new acropolis, a temple whose white and gleaming walls shall adorn every city, from whose outer porch shall be heard only the voice of wisdom and of truth.

MINERVA PARKER NICHOLS.