

One of the unusual items donated to the Museum at the Portage recently is Roy Thompson's replica of Napoleon's Carriage (right) that became the symbol of "Body by Fischer" (below) seen on the door sill plates of all GM cars until the mid-1990's. Roy, a 1937 graduate of Portage High School who now lives at Heritage House, estimates he worked on the model for seven years. He used plans provided by Fisher to encourage students to study design and engineering. The company conducted a competition, and winners were awarded scholarships. Roy followed the detailed instructions, and the resulting masterpiece has hand-made wheels and spokes, a carriage door that opens, embroidered ceiling, working windows, and more



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December 2017



## Portage Historical Society Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage, WI

On the brink of war

## Zona Gale raised her voice for peace

A flurry of publications about World War I have come to the marketplace in the last year as the US observes the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its entry into the conflict on April 6, 1917. Among the books published recently is The Great War Comes to Wisconsin: Sacrifice, Patriotism and Free Speech in a Time of Crisis by Richard L. Pifer and Marjorie Hannon Pifer, and among those in the Badger state who took a stand against entry into the war was Zona Gale, the author whose name is more often associated with short stories and novels than with politics and pacifism.

Zona Gale's early works were popular, full of small-town goodness and gossip, and reflecting a provincial way of life at the end of the 19th century. Au-

thor Harold Simonson (Zona Gale, 1962) states that "Swathed in sweetness and light, Zona Gale continued by these stories to make her small contribution to the lingering romanticism of the new century." But by 1919, "her outlook had now begun to change; her style grew more severe, her themes more socially relevant." Wisconsin's maverick senator, Robert A. La Follette, presented his case for reform in *La Follette's Magazine*, and his arguments struck a chord with the Portage author.

By 1921 she was appointed to the executive advisory committee of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and was on the national board in 1929. In 1924, she spoke to the Minnesota branch of the organization and suggested to them, as reported by Lillian E. Traffee in the Minneapolis Tribune (Nov. 9, 1924) that "club women devoting their time to study of Egyptian art and William Shakespeare while problems of universal peace were facing the world" were misdirecting their energy. In 1933, about 40 members of the Wisconsin chapter met at the Civic League Clubhouse for the annual meeting. According to the Portage Register-Democrat (Sept. 18, 1933) chapter president Lutie Stearns\*, quoted author Olive Schreiner who wrote that the "principal responsibility for putting an end to war lay with women because they know the value and cost of life."

Early in her career at a Milwaukee newspaper that Zona met Jane Addams, social reformer and founder of Chicago's Hull House. Author Simonson states (cont'd on next page)

\* Lutie Stearns was a teacher, librarian, author, speaker and political activist, known for her innovative traveling library project that brought books to rural communities for the Wisconsin Free Library Commission. She is a member of the Library Hall of Fame.



Zona Gale, 2nd from right, was among the prominent 25 women — the "Hughes Alliance" — which arranged for a special train to visit 31 states to promote Charles Evans Hughes when he was the Republican nominee for president in 1916. Fellow authors Edna Ferber and Mary Roberts Rinehart were also in the Hughes Alliance. Edna Ferber. WHS 56989



(cont'd from page 1)

Zona Gale, activist author

that the young newspaperwoman revered Addams, who was also the founder of the WLFPP and an ardent supporter of Robert La Follette and a member of the Progressive Party, regarding her “as a model of womanhood, possessing a brooding awareness of the facts of life and working to mollify their sting.”

Zona’s short stories and fiction shifted during those years, with more attention to those who were overlooked or scorned. She also wrote articles such as “Outlaw War Now” (1923). She urged toy manufacturers to stop making toy soldiers and guns, and raised her voice against military training in colleges. She once declined to be a patron of the military ball at Ripon College. She refused to buy Liberty Bonds, and author Simonson notes that the Secret Service “occasionally looked in on her activities.” Her father reportedly purchased some bonds in her name and was able to show the bond to investigators.

Gale was also active in supporting other causes, such as the proposed 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to outlaw the sale and manufacture of liquor, and the later Volstead Act which further defined an intoxicating beverage as one having 0.5% alcohol. She joined the movement to save Sacco and Vanzetti from execution in 1920 for the murder of a paymaster and guard at the Massachusetts shoe factory. Like others in the intellectual community, she thought the verdict was based on racial, political and economic prejudice.

Less controversial causes gained her support: The Presbyterian Church, the Children’s Aid Society, American Library Association, Friends of Native Landscapes, Boys’ Conservation Bureau and Salvation Army benefitted from her generosity, as did the Women’s Civic League of Portage whose website honors Zona Gale with the words of Glenn Frank, former president of the University of Wisconsin, who eulogized his friend at her funeral service in 1938:

*With her, friendship was a holy thing like love or religion. But her ultimate loyalty was to truth, to justice, to sincerity... She was unmoved by considerations of place, power, or prestige. Her heart went out to the lowly, the underprivileged, and those to whom the community never gave the warmth of its attention.”*

On the calendar for 2018 “Threaded Streams” returns to the Museum at the Portage, March 22-24, sponsored by the Midwest Fiber Arts Trail. The Museum will be exhibiting costumes by Jack Kos and a collection of contemporary quilts. Watch for details about this and other exhibits and special events, coming in the February newsletter.

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The table service above is one of several Milwaukee Road items that will be on exhibit through the next season at the Museum at the Portage. Jeff Grothman — son, grandson and great-grandson of Milwaukee Road employees — loaned the items to the Museum when he gave a program on August 19 about the history of the railroad in Portage. Also in the exhibit is a menu from the dining car, a scale model of the legendary “Hiawatha,” a lantern used on the railroad, and promotional items such as a deck of cards and pencils.

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Zona Gale: daughter, wife, author, friend, activist

ACROSS

- 1. ZG biographer
- 3. With 5 down, promoted compact libraries in WI
- 6. Fictional (?) town in ZG stories
- 7. Radical immigrant executed for notorious crime
- 9. UW president ZG defended
- 10. Elusive quest for ZG and others
- 11. Magazine that awarded \$2,000 prize to ZG
- 14. ZG fellow novelist with Wis ties
- 16. ZG first newspaper job was here
- 17. ZG mother’s maiden name
- 18. With 14 down, ZG fellow novelist with Wis ties
- 20. ZG novel represented author’s social awakening
- 21. A trail, walkway

DOWN

- 1. A bit, a tad
- 2. ZG dad’s occupation on RR
- 4. ZG supported this cause
- 5. With 4 across, promoted compact libraries in WI
- 8. Social reform worker who influenced ZG
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ Village of ZG stories
- 10. ZG supported this political party
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ rights
- 13. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
- 15. With 13 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
- 16. Surname of character in many early ZG stories
- 19. to glance at hastily; or to examine systematically
- 20. Surname of ZG character
- 22. Radical immigrant executed for notorious crime