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 100th 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. Author 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, activist author

that the young newspaperwoman revered Addams, who was also the founder of the WLFPF 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 18th 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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### Zona Gale: daughter, wife, author, friend, activist

**ACROSS**

1. ZG biographer
2. ZG dad
3. With 5 down, promoted compact libraries in WI
4. ZG supported this cause
5. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
6. Fictional (?) town in ZG stories
7. Radical immigrant executed for notorious crime
8. Social reform worker who influenced ZG
9. UW president ZG defended
10. Elusive quest for ZG and others
11. Magazine that awarded $2,000 prize to ZG
12. ___________ rights
13. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
14. ___________ of character in many early ZG stories
15. ___________ Village of ZG stories
16. ___________ job was here
17. ZG mother’s maiden name
18. With 14 down, ZG fellow novelist with Wis ties
19. to glance at hastily; or to examine systematically
20. ZG novel represented author’s social awakening
21. A trail, walkway
22. Radical immigrant executed for notorious crime

**DOWN**

1. A bit, a tad
2. ZG dad’s occupation on RR
3. With 5 across, promoted compact libraries in WI
4. ZG supported this cause
5. With 4 across, promoted compact libraries in WI
6. Social reform worker who influenced ZG
7. ___________ Village of ZG stories
8. ___________ rights
9. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
10. ZG supported this political party
11. ____ Village of ZG stories
12. With 14 down, ZG fellow novelist with Wis ties
13. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
14. ZG mother’s maiden name
15. ZG supported this political party
16. ___________ rights
17. With 15 down, prominent local attorney, ZG friend
18. With 14 down, ZG fellow novelist with Wis ties
19. To glance at hastily; or to examine systematically
20. ___________ rights
21. A trail, walkway
22. ___________ Village of ZG stories

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.