# TOWNS RUN BY WOMEN

By GENEVIEVE PARKHURST

MRS. ROSE CRABTREE, THE JACKSON, WYOMING, COUNCILWOMAN WHO DEFEATED HER HUSBAND IN THE CONTEST FOR OFFICE

MRS. FAUSTINA FORRESTER HAIGHT, ANOTHER JACKSON COUNCILWOMAN, FINDS TIME TO TRAIN DON HAIGHT, JR., FOR CITIZENSHIP

LET'S elect the women.

Some one in the audience at a town meeting two years ago in Jackson, Wyoming, interposed that remark as a humorous solution of a town difficulty. One by one the town's prominent citizens had refused to run for office and could not be persuaded to offer themselves as candidates at the next election. The town took that remark seriously. It elected a town council of women.

What the women have done to the town is worth telling, because it proves that women can bring into practical politics common sense and business ability. Jackson, Wyoming, is a small town, but small-town problems are big-city problems on a small scale. The record of the women's council of Jackson is the potential record of any town in which the woman voter takes an interest.

Jackson, Wyoming, is a town of one thousand people, thirty miles from a railroad and seven thousand five hundred feet above sea-level, set in a triangular meadow where the Wind River and the snow-capped Teton Mountains tower nearly seven thousand feet above them. For eight months of the year the entire valley lies under four feet of snow, while the temperature hovers around forty degrees below zero. The melting snows from the mountains feed the Snake River, which roars and pelts at a depth of twenty-five feet the year around, twisting in and out of the valley. That part of the water which is not adopted by the river is diverted into ditches, which flow along both sides of the streets of Jackson. This geographical situation created its own problems.

THERE is nothing wrong with the men of Jackson. They are of the sturdy type which has pioneered the West into an incomparable empire. But in administering their own town they were "easy-going." They didn't need to make money out of politics, so they paid their mayor twenty dollars a year. Their personal affairs absorbed them during the day. At night they were so comfortable at home that they had to be dragged away from their firesides when the council meeting was called.

Those lackadaisical methods finally resulted in a slatternly town. Because of the perpetual flow of water from the mountains, the sides of the ditches had been worn away and in many places stagnant pools menaced the health of Jackson. There was no garbage disposal system, for the man who collected the refuse from the homes made use of vacant lots. And then there were the culverts, supposed to bridge the ditches at every crossing. But they were only a foot and a half in length, whereas ditches were two feet wide. The water ran over and around and every place but under the culverts.

There was no cemetery in Jackson. A spot among the aspens high up the hillside had been set aside as a resting-place for the dead, but there was no road to it. In Winter the pall-bearers had to carry the caskets for a mile up a rugged slope packed hard in four feet of snow. In Summer the climb was made in a hot and unrelenting sun. Lastly, the streets needed grading and there were no street lights.

Two years ago the citizens of Jackson became restless. They called a mass-meeting to nominate an entirely new city ticket. They met the same old obstacles. The men who were in office did not want to run again. Those out of it refused. Then that voice cried: "Let's elect the women."

Before the meeting adjourned, the women were nominated. And then Jackson began to change its face. May, 1920, the very day upon which they took the oath of office, a council meeting was held and a thorough inventory of the city's debits and credits was made. A list of its needs followed. A town budget was voted. There was but two hundred dollars in the treasury—a strange sum for a town whose people were all fairly well off. They went through the books to discover uncollected fines and taxes. That evening notices of collections were sent to the delinquents. They went out personally and collected every cent due the town from those who ignored the notices. Before the end of a fortnight there was two thousand dollars in the treasury.

BIDS were asked on new culverts, the contract going to the lowest bidder. While they were being built, the women started in to spend that two thousand upon town improvements. They passed health laws making it a misdemeanor to throw garbage into the streets or vacant lots of the town. They set aside a cleft in a hill outside the town where refuse was to be burned. Property owners were asked to paint and refurnish their homes and buildings. A clean-up week was instituted, and when it came around the citizens of Jackson and the ranchers and cowboys from the hills turned it into a town holiday. They carried away the refuse and burned it.

Then the council faced the problem of a cemetery. They built a fence around the old site and set up stones to mark the graves of the dead. A new road was a more difficult proposition, for roads cost money. Mayor Grace Miller, however, persuaded the members of the Women's Pure Food Club to devote the club's Liberty bonds toward the cost of the road. To-day a wide gravel road, accessible by motor-car or wagon, leads to the cemetery. The streets have been graded; board replaces the pioneer trails through the lush grass that used to pass for sidewalks.

These are not large achievements compared with those of a great city, but they are important to Jackson. The women on this council were ordinary, every-day, small-town women—the wives of merchants and ranchers. Several of these women were school-teachers before they married; all of them had children and houses to run. They had meals to cook and dishes to wash—and yet they found time to reorganize the affairs of a badly demoralized town.

They had no miracle to help them. "We simply tried to work together," said Mayor Miller. "We put into practise the same thrifty principles we exercise in our own homes. We wanted a clean, well-kept, progressive town in which to raise our families. What is good government but a breathing-place for good citizenship?"

Women have repeated this political success in other American towns.

It is three years ago since the first woman council was returned to office in Umatilla, Oregon. In those three years they have worked wonders. Umatilla, a railroad town and the center of prosperous farming and timber country, was in 1919 almost bankrupt. Three thousand dollars of warrants had been issued, whereas the charter permitted an issuance of two thousand five hundred dollars. The fire system was one thousand five hundred dollars in arrears. Delinquent interest on twenty thousand dollars in water bonds was due. One by one the street lights were being turned off because the city light bill had not been paid. School attendance was far below what it should have been.

One Winter's night there was a stormy political meeting at which no citizen could suggest a solution, until some one suggested that the women do the work. They nominated women whose records as mothers, wives and home-makers were unimpeachable.

They were elected in March, 1919. They've been re-elected by large majorities at two subsequent elections.

Their accomplishments are worth listening to. With twenty-eight thousand dollars' indebtedness staring them in the face, they have reduced the town indebtedness to zero and can boast of two thousand dollars in the treasury. They have raised the moral tone of the town until there is no longer need for a jail in Umatilla. They have graded the streets and improved conditions in the schools. The community is now an example of decent town rule.

FIRST, they went over the town's books. They found many outstanding taxes and fines. Some property owners were paying taxes on assessed valuations ten and fifteen years old. The women collected the back taxes and fines and raised the taxes for the coming year. The town marshal, whose duties were shrinking, was dismissed, thereby saving his salary.

As soon as they had collected the money due for taxes, fines and water service, they divided it among the town's debtors in proportion to the size and age of the bills. The light company turned on the street lights again. Those holding water bonds accepted, with the payment of the interest due, a new issue of bonds. Within less than a year all of the old warrants were met and the fire system was out of debt. A truant-officer brought school attendance from less than sixty per cent. to ninety per cent. Streets were graded and sidewalks laid.

To woman's wit alone is due the closing of the jail. Police Judge and Recorder Bertha Cherry on the first Monday morning of her tenure in office was perplexed by the number of men appearing before her. Her consternation was short-lived. All of the prisoners were up on one charge. "In future," she decreed, "all citizens of Umatilla charged with intoxication and disorderliness will be taken care of at the hotel, where they will be locked in a room, there to remain until they pay their own board bill. All prisoners who are not citizens, having abused our hospitality, will be speeded as unwelcome guests upon the first train, freight or otherwise, irrespective of its destination." Bootlegging is no more in Umatilla.

And now these women feel they have done their civic duty and they are asking to be allowed to retire.

Mayor Stella Paulu, speaking for her associates, said: "We do not believe in government exclusively by women, any more than exclusively by men. Families, to be harmonious and successful, must be run cooperatively, the men taking their share of the responsibility.

"Many insist," Mrs. Paulu continued, "that woman's place is in the home. I agree with them—but the word 'home' is a comprehensive one whose boundaries extend far beyond the place where one dwells and includes the city, state and nation in which one lives. It is in such sense that I contend that home-making applies to the city as much as it does to the home."