

Marian deForest - The Woman

Marian de Forest was the visionary whose energy, enthusiasm, and leadership initiated the founding of Zonta International in Buffalo, New York in 1919. She was also recognized internationally as an international playwright and was inducted into the prestigious writers club - The Lyceum of London. Marian deForest is listed in the *Notable Women in American Theater* and *Who's Who in America* and in 1998, she was inducted into the Western New York Women's Hall of Fame.

Born in Buffalo February 29, 1864, Marian's schooling began with private tutoring because of an eye injury. With extraordinary determination and persistence, she overcame this handicap and graduated from the Buffalo Seminary. After graduation, she began a career as a reporter, one of the first women in this profession in Western New York. She was a drama critic and editor of the women's department at *The Buffalo Express* for 20 years. In this capacity she met some of the most celebrated figures of the theatrical and musical world. The delightful combination of her keen mind and sharp wit made many of them her personal friends.

Playwright

Concurrent with her professional life as a journalist and her involvement with Zonta, Marian's great love for writing brought her recognition as an accomplished playwright. In 1912 her first successful play *Little Women* opened in the Playhouse in New York City. (It continues playing in 1998). She traveled with the company to New York City, London and Paris, not only as author, but as publisher and director. Among her other plays were *Erstwhile Susan*, *Little Women: Letters From the House of Alcott*, *Mr. Man* and a number of unpublished works. She also

collaborated with the novelist, Zona Gale in the production of *Friendship Village* for radio. This program ran for four months in a series called "Neighbors" over WEA, a national broadcasting system.

A Woman of Her Time

Marian's collaboration with Zona Gale exemplified how much she was a woman of the early twentieth century. She appreciated the far-reaching possibilities of technology. She envisioned her plays as radio programs (*Friendship Village*), even movies (*Little Women*). She often used the radio to communicate with Zontians. When publicity for *Mr. Man* was slow, she encouraged Zonta members to hire a plane and distribute promotional leaflets over Western New York.

Her gift of communication was remarkable; she was a woman who used the power of the pen, as well as the persuasion of the podium. The proceedings of the first national conventions of Zonta are classic examples of a woman leader who presided with a crisp, focused manner and used parliamentary procedure as an expert.

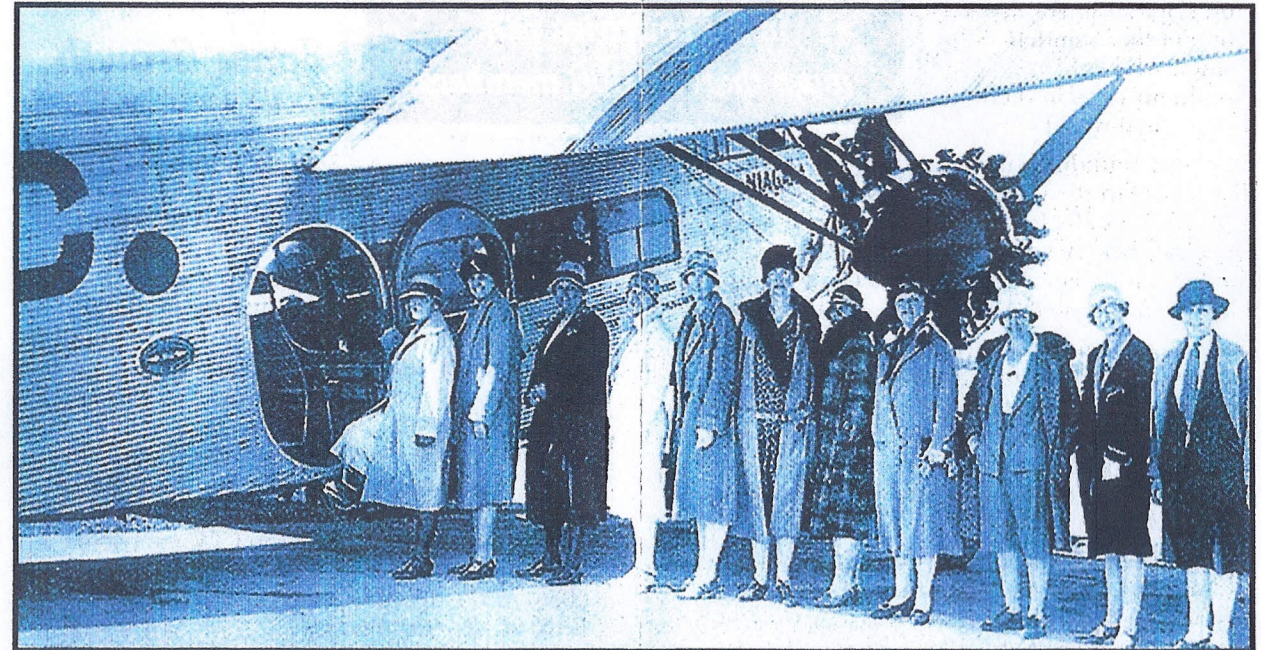
Civic Leader - Music Lover

Marian was also the personification of civic dedication and volunteerism, and was recognized as such in the news media. She was executive secretary of the Board of Women Managers for the Pan American Exposition (1901), served on many Boards including the SPCA and Buffalo Public Library. She established the Buffalo Musical Foundation in 1924. Through the latter, and working closely with the School Department of Buffalo, she arranged and promoted symphony concerts for children. Through her efforts, the children of Buffalo who ordinarily would not have experienced the great orchestras of Boston, Cleveland, Detroit and other cities, had an opportunity to do so. She once described one of

"Far reaching is our plan to assemble in Zonta International the women executives of the world, an army of experts who through friendship, understanding, cooperation and good will will become an irresistible force of peace."



Delegates to the Convention to draft the constitution of the Confederation of Zonta Clubs. The nine charter clubs were Buffalo, Rochester, Binghamton, Elmira, Syracuse, Erie, Utica, Ithaca and Detroit. With the inclusion of Toronto, the Confederation became Zonta International.



Marian deForest and her colleagues boarding the plane in 1928 to distribute promotional material for her play, *Mr. Man*. She often used cutting-edge technology to promote her plays and to spread the word about Zonta.