

# The Commoner.

ISSUED WEEKLY

Entered at the Postoffice at Lincoln, Nebraska, as second-class matter.

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Publisher  
Editorial Rooms and Business  
Office, 324-330 South 12th Street

One Year ..... \$1.00  
Six Months ..... .50  
In Clubs of Five or  
more, per year.. .75

Three Months ..... .25  
Single Copy ..... .05  
Sample Copies Free.  
Foreign Post, 52c Extra.

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Address all communications to

THE COMMONER, Lincoln, Neb.

## STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, ETC.,

of The Commoner, published weekly at Lincoln, Nebraska, required by the Act of August 24, 1912:

Name of—	Postoffice Address
Editor—William Jennings Bryan.....	Lincoln, Nebraska
Associate Editor—Richard L. Metcalfe..	Lincoln, Nebraska
Publisher—Charles W. Bryan.....	Lincoln, Nebraska
Owner—William Jennings Bryan.....	Lincoln, Nebraska

Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None.

CHAS. W. BRYAN, Publisher.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of March, 1913.

(Seal) J. R. FARRIS, Notary Public.

My commission expires July 19, 1918.

## KIND WORDS FROM NEW YORK

James A. McKenna, 55 John street, New York, N. Y.—It is with great pleasure I enclose you a check for a renewal of my subscription which I started with the first issue of The Commoner. To me it has always been a source of personal satisfaction to read your paper because your views on the issues of the time are in so many instances in full accord with those held by myself; and, besides, I have had the gratification of seeing the same policies advocated and then accepted and proclaimed by so many prominent men as their own original remedies for the public ills of the day. These same men, in many instances, had previously condemned such measures. Since 1896 I have experienced and witnessed wonderful changes among many of my own personal friends and acquaintances. My support of your candidacy in that year seemed for a time to have cost me most of my personal associates. Very many of them appeared to have gone mad in their denunciation not only of yourself and your platform, but of every one who supported you and the principles of the democratic party as expressed in the 1896 platform. Now I find a great many of those same men, splendid citizens, and dear personal friends of mine, enthusiastic advocates of yourself, personally, and hearty supporters of your politics. In this city there are a great number of men who would gladly support with their means and personal attention a party organization which would honestly support and clearly state the principles set forth in the national platform of the democratic party. It is not the belief of those who have year in and year out stood for the principles of our party that the proper means of advancing those principles is through organization now in control of this state. My purpose in writing you this is to give you the assurance that you have nowhere in all this country more sincere well-wishers and warm personal friends than in this city.

# Using the School Houses

University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., March 13.—Editor Commoner: I am sending you herewith a copy of a bulletin published by this department, which contains the Wisconsin law declaring the citizens right to the free use of school houses as citizens common council chambers.

I am also sending you herewith a copy of some recommended legislation which was prepared at the request of legislators in a number of states, including New Jersey, where President Wilson, as you undoubtedly know, lent the force of his influence to this movement and specifically recommended legislation of this kind.

I am also enclosing a brief explanation of the proposed legislation. Very heartily yours,  
EDWARD J. WARD.

## THE LAW

The Wisconsin law which relates to this use of schoolhouses or other public property for meetings of citizens organized into neighborhood associations is Chapter 514 of the Laws of 1911.

The sections especially pertinent are as follows:

Section 2. Where the citizens of any community are organized into a non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-exclusive association for the presentation and discussion of public questions, the school board or other body having charge of the schoolhouses or other public properties which are capable of being used as meeting places for such organization, when not being used for their prime purpose, shall provide, free of charge, light, heat and janitor service, where necessary, and shall make such other provisions as may be necessary for the free and convenient use of such building or grounds, by such organization for weekly, bi-weekly or monthly gatherings at such times as the citizens' organization shall request or designate.

Section 3. The school board or other board having charge of the schoolhouses or other public properties, may provide for the free and gratuitous use of the schoolhouses or other public properties under their charge for such other civic, social, and recreational activities, as in their opinion do not interfere with the prime use of the buildings or properties.

## RESULTS OF THIS NEIGHBORHOOD CIVIC CLUB DEVELOPMENT

A keen observer of public affairs in Wisconsin writes of this development, not only from theory but from observation, in these words: "For generations the schoolhouses have been monuments of neglected opportunity. The policy of closing them to the people outside of regular school hours has retarded the development of that higher type of citizenship which makes for better government. It matters not where it is located, whether in a congested city district, or in a hamlet, or on a prairie among scattered farm houses, a public school building is a potential center of civic activities a potential neighborhood civic club house. If there should be realized anything like a fair measure of that which the thousands upon thousands of public school buildings of the nation offer in raising the plane of citizenship and in increasing the people's capacity for self-government democracy would be vitalized to a degree that would make it militant and all conquering. It is no exaggeration to say that in making the schoolhouse the forum of the people, lies the chief hope of perpetuating the republic and of perfecting its institutions."

Public servants welcome the opportunity for the free discussion of public matters by citizens. At one of the first of the neighborhood civic club meetings in a school building in the city of Rochester an alderman followed his address upon the duties of an alderman with these words: "If every member of the common council and every other public servant had frequently such opportunities as this, to discuss public matters with those whom he seeks to represent, it would mean that we would have a cleaner government, and a better representation of the people's interests."

When he was governor of New York state, Justice Charles E. Hughes now of the supreme bench, said of this civic club development: "I am more interested in what you are doing and what it stands for than anything else in the world. You are buttressing the foundations of democracy."

Professor George M. Forbes, president of the Board of Education of Rochester, and president also of the New York State Teachers' Association, writes: "You who have not witnessed it can not understand how party spirit, class spirit, and even race spirit fade out in the intense civic and community atmosphere of these neighborhood civic clubs. It is pure democracy getting an opportunity to inform itself, working itself free from prejudice, and narrowness by absolutely free and unrestricted discussion of any question, and eager to apply its new-found spirit of brotherhood to the development and extension of community enterprises. Political liberty alone, even when it finds expression in universal suffrage, can not solve the problem of democracy. The only salvation of democracy is in the development of the community spirit. This spirit is latent in every man. It only needs its appropriate stimulus to arouse it, the appropriate soil and atmosphere in which it may grow. Our democracy has yet to develop institutions which are generally communal in the sense that they appeal to and develop the objective, the communal interests—that is, reveal the joy and satisfaction which come from co-operative effort for the common good; in short, institutions which break down the spirit and the result of exclusiveness and bring forth the recognition of man as man. Now the neighborhood civic club seems to be exactly the appropriate stimulus and soil to develop this civic spirit."

The senior senator from Wisconsin says: "Chosen individuals may strive faithfully, in meeting and solving the complex problems which arise from the industrial and economic conditions of our time, but lasting results will be achieved through the growth and development of civic interest on the part of the citizens in general throughout the state. There is a hitherto largely undeveloped resource, the growth of intelligent public interest in the opportunity which the schoolhouses and other public buildings offer for the gathering of citizens to consider and discuss together questions of common welfare. Should this movement become general, it would unquestionably result in the establishment of a foundation of intelligent democracy which would make civic progress not only rapid, but conservative and sure."

The present governor of Wisconsin has shown appreciation of the benefit to the public officials of this democratic gathering in the school buildings by consenting to be one of those who would be available for the programs of the neighborhood civic clubs.

Recently the mayor of the largest city of Wisconsin said: "As a public servant I welcome the opportunity that this sort of gathering gives for a free and open discussion of the topics of common interest upon a non-partisan platform. Such discussions will help the servants of the people to learn what you desire, and it will furnish a chance for the public servant to talk over those matters in which they seek to represent the people. I hope that your example may be followed in every section of the city, until misunderstanding and prejudice shall have been removed by the development of civic friendliness and intelligent public spirit."

The result of this use of public school buildings as neighborhood civic club houses, during three years in the city of Rochester, N. Y., have been summarized as follows:

"First: The desire to become informed upon public matters and to confer with one's neighbors in the interest of better understanding is not limited to any one section of the community. Neighborhood civic clubs have developed in every part of the city.

"Second: Men, and women, too, whatever their difference of race, class, creed, or income, are human and citizens, and enjoy getting together on a common human ground of citizenship. There is not a considerable group in any city, party, church, profession or trade that does not have some representation in almost every neighborhood civic club.

"Third: There is no danger of abuse of public property by the citizens gathering in the school buildings. On the contrary, in many cases, through these meetings, there has been aroused an interest in improving and beautifying the buildings.

"Fourth: Entire freedom of discussion is not only safe but is conducive to self-restraint, sincerity, and friendliness.

"Fifth: Citizens meeting in the school building may be counted on to show a spirit of fair-