



*Virginia Brooks*  
20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY JOAN of ARC

REDPATH

# Miss VIRGINIA BROOKS

## *20th Century Joan of Arc*

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The remarkable story of Miss Virginia Brooks, rightly styled the "20th Century Joan of Arc," in her fight against a powerful and organized enemy at West Hammond, Ill., has attracted national if not international attention.

The Woman's Home Companion of December 1912 gave most prominent place to Miss Brooks in its department about prominent people and the Pictorial Review of February, 1913, contains an article of several thousand words about Miss Brooks' crusade, written by one of the staff writers. This article as a leading feature of this magazine was announced on 40,000 window cards printed in two colors, in all the large cities of the country.

### Given Credit for the Chicago Crusade

These are but two of a number of leading publications which have given prominent mention to Miss Brooks and her work. A Chicago publication recently gave Miss Brooks credit for bringing on the great anti-segregation crusade in Chicago and the Literary Digest reprints the article. For a young woman 24 years old to clean up her own city and then prove a potent influence in a crusade against vice in a great city like Chicago, is almost without a parallel.

The announcement that Miss Brooks is to go upon the lyceum platform is naturally of wide interest.

### Addresses Great Audience

Miss Brooks was one of the speakers who addressed the mass meeting in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, at the launching of the anti-vice crusade and this is but one of the times in which she has already lectured in that city. Her message is a vital, timely and interesting one and she speaks with the authority of strenuous and successful experience.

Miss Brooks' heroic fight was primarily in West Hammond, but certain phases of the battle were carried into the entire Cook county in which the city of Chicago is situated.

Just about four years ago Virginia Brooks becoming of age inherited from her father some real estate in West Hammond, Ill., worth nominally \$30,000.

West Hammond is a little town of 5,000 in the southeast corner of Cook county on the Indiana line. Four thousand of its inhabitants are Poles, 600 are Germans, 400 Irish. With the exception of Miss Brooks and her mother there are practically no Americans living there.

### Moves to West Hammond

The town was a village run by a board of trustees, three of whom were saloon-keepers, when Virginia Brooks inherited her property. When she was assessed \$110 for improvements on a \$100 lot she retained a lawyer. When she could not find that the improvements for which she had been taxed had been made she moved to West Hammond to live.

It didn't take her long to see that she couldn't make any headway while West Hammond remained a village. So she fought to change the form of government. In May, 1912, West Hammond became a city. It had a desperate fight. There was no expedient known in practical politics which saloon-keepers didn't use to beat Virginia Brooks.



Dodgers Printed by Miss Brooks

## Learns the Polish Language

Miss Brooks learned the language of the Poles that she might better educate and lead them in fighting for their rights.

After a long fight she beat the ring. Then she started a campaign against the dives of West Hammond. She is trying to make her city suitable for the dumb foreigners who live there. And unless she is killed she will succeed.

Today in municipal affairs at West Hammond Miss Brooks is the real dictator in the village. The people believe her. They have extreme faith in her and she leads them.

## Teaches Foreigners Their Rights

For advice they seek her residence where she is always a willing listener and a willing helper. No problem is too big for her, no struggle too hard or complicated. She has taught these foreigners their rights and how to fight for them.

She held open air meetings on the street and, standing on a soap box, addressed crowds of voters. She printed dodgers, one of which is shown in an accompanying illustration, and they were eagerly read by the crowds. She carried both criminal and civil cases into the courts.



Group of Citizens Reading Miss Brooks' Dodgers

## Miss Brooks Starts a Newspaper

Miss Brooks became reporter, editor and publisher of an "uplift" weekly paper called the "West Hammond Searchlight" during her vice crusade in the little village.

She made herself famous shortly after the first issue of the "Searchlight" by sitting on a pile of paving bricks, surrounded by a crowd of West Hammond women, and thus preventing the paving of certain streets. Miss Brooks declared the contractors were not living up to specifications.

Police were called and before they succeeded in getting Miss Brooks into a cell suffered the indignity of having their faces slapped.

## A Fistic Battle with the Police

With her wrist bruised and swollen and her throat showing marks which she claimed were made by the fingers of a policeman, Miss Virginia Brooks was compelled to remain at home for several days as a result of treatment she received in a fistic battle with the village police.

"Nihilists in Russia are treated with as much consideration as I was," she said. "The policeman grabbed me by the throat, struck me in the side and threw me back and forth in the street on the way to the jail. He dragged me part of the way by the wrist.

## Five Hours in a Cell

"I was forced to stand five hours in a dirty cell. I begged the police to give me a chair, but they refused. I caught a serious cold in the damp place, and was quite exhausted."

In the role of editor the reformer after handing a few to the police department proceeded to tear open the town hall, and made enough accusations to keep a West Hammond "Lexow Committee" busy for years to come.

Another feature of Miss Brooks' crusade was the attack on the method of keeping the records.

"Mammoth irregularities continue to be uncovered," she printed in her paper. "The intermingling of beer bottles and village records, thrown into a room carelessly and with no system of index are some of the conditions found," she said.

## Her Successful Fights Against Two Elections

The first week in West Hammond she got on the trail of an election in which she claims the ballots were worded so that the Poles declared they wanted the village made a city, whichever way they voted. Through these ballots she had the election declared void. Another was called. That one, too, she had declared void, through the voting of two propositions on one ballot, one of which required a simple majority, the other a two-thirds majority.

Her object was to put off the city proposition until she could collect sufficient evidence of crookedness to indict some one.

By her efforts 557 tax payers were saved \$35 each. The mortgages are now being slowly lifted from the homes of the oppressed. In one large section before she began her efforts, it is said that 25% of all the homes were mortgaged.

## Her War On Dives

Following this phase of her campaign, Miss Brooks began war on the saloons and dives. One day on every dive in West Hammond appeared a flaming red sign, "Warning to Dives! Thirty Days to Vacate! Virginia Brooks."

The fight waxed warm. One saloon in derision put out a sign which read: "The Virginia Brooks' Saloon."

In this fight also she has won a signal victory. The licenses of seven saloon keepers were revoked under the new regime.

The old political forces are organizing to fight her again, and regain control of West Hammond, but Miss Brooks is more alert than ever and backed by her experience and the co-operation of her former friends, the battle will be carried bravely on.

## Starts a Social Settlement

As an outcome of the work she has already done and in place of some of the saloons which have gone out of business there is now a social settlement house, a day nursery and a soup house. Twelve hundred and twenty-five children have been taken care of in this nursery in the past year.

Miss Brooks is receiving many letters from all parts of the United States with reference to her work, and many invitations to speak. She has had hundreds of letters from people in small towns and villages from Maine to California telling of the curse of special assessments and asking what to do.

## Many Requests for Lecture Dates

Already Miss Brooks is receiving many requests for lecture dates.

Mrs. Maude M. Baldwin writing from Litchfield, Ill., says that she heard Miss Brooks at the Federation of Women's Clubs at Aurora, Ill., and feels that if she had heard nothing but Miss Brooks' talk she would have been repaid for her trip. She says that she believes Miss Brooks has a message and one which the people ought to hear.



Where Village Records and Beer Bottles Were Kept Side By Side



*Moffett  
Chicago*

*Miss Brooks*