

The Woman's Club

Bryan, Texas

Author unknown

1988

(Summary)

Organized in October, 1895, The Woman's Club was first known as the "Mutual Improvement Circle." From the beginning to the present its motto has been: "We must move with the times." The objectives of the twenty founding members were to improve their minds, to serve the community, and to promote the cause of women's rights. Through the years the Club has been active in civic and literary improvement of the community, and a promotor of various philanthropic undertakings. It was active in helping to obtain a grant from the Carnegie Foundation in 1902 for the establishment of a Carnegie Public Library in Bryan, and later in promoting a bond issue to finance construction of a new library building. It helped to beautify a five-mile stretch of road from Bryan to the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas through the planting and care of live oak trees along what came to be known as College Road. Approximately thirty-nine of these trees remain today.

In 1909-1910 the Mutual Improvement Circle became The Woman's Club and has continued as such to this day (1988). It was chartered January 19, 1921, and its charter was filed in the office of the Secretary of State on January 22, 1921 for a period of fifty years. The charter was revised and extended on January 21, 1971.

The Club first met in members' homes, and after the opening of the Carnegie Public Library it met there until 1929 when it constructed its own building near downtown Bryan and used it until 1942 when growth of the Club membership necessitated a larger facility. The Club property was sold and the M. W. Sims home on Bryan Street was bought and remodeled in 1948. By 1967 this property was sold and the Club met for several years in the Bryan Utilities Building while plans were formed for acquiring a new site (1970). A new building was erected on Carter Creek Parkway in 1972; it serves as the present home of The Woman's Club (1988).

Narrative History

The Woman's Club was organized as a study group called "The Mutual Improvement Circle" in 1895. The yearbook printed in 1896 listed 20 members.¹ On the cover was printed this statement: "Study deep the buried treasure to ornament both heart and mind." The group adopted the white rose as its flower, and it is still the flower of The Woman's Club.² A study of "Greece" was the subject of the 29 meetings of the MIC in 1895. It began with a "Geographical Description of Greece." Mrs. Walter Wipprecht was the leader. The year's study ended in April with the conclusion: "Modern Greece." The Annual Lawn Party closed the year. Thus the women of Bryan began their lengthy study of the world about them, the plays of Shakespeare, "and the world wide their minds roamed" (quote).³

The meeting day was set for Wednesday, and the members met weekly from October through April. It has been said that the ladies of the MIC selected Wednesday for their day to meet, since that was the day the Rotary Club met, weekly, and since most of their husbands were in the Rotary, this relieved the necessity of preparing a noon meal, so the members had enough time to dress up, and review their talks, if indeed it was that person's day to deliver the lesson. The Woman's Club still meets on Wednesday, October through April, twice a month.⁴

In the Club year, 1948-1949, with Mrs. Emmette Wallace as president, the yearbooks and other material were collected by Mrs. A. M. Waldrop, Sr. (who served three times as president) as a project of the Library Committee, Mrs. Mit Dansby, chairman. The old minute books were also sought at the same time, and Mrs. J. T. Hanway was able to find all of the minute books from 1895. Both yearbooks and minute books are kept in the files of the Woman's Club, located at 1200 Carter Creek Parkway, Bryan, Texas.⁵

Bound in a wrapper with the yearbooks from 1898-1910, was a dainty program from a dinner served Thursday, March 21, 1901. The program is shaped like a rose which is hand painted and cut in the shape of a rose. The

¹ Bylaws of the Mutual Improvement Circle, yearbook 1898.

² Woman's Club yearbook, 1988-1989.

³ 1989 Mutual Improvement Circle yearbook.

⁴ Woman's Club yearbook, 1988-1989.

⁵ Woman's Club yearbook and minutes 1948-1949.

program was composed of clever take-offs of various women: the woman with a broom, the woman with a hatchet, and, of course, the club woman. The menu was elaborate, including soup, fish, turkey, chicken salad, Neapolitan cream and macaroons, including cheese, fruit and coffee.⁶

The question comes to mind regarding the organization of the MIC. As told to us in later years, it appears that one of the ladies in Bryan visited in New York, and was invited to attend a meeting of a woman's club. She was impressed, and upon her return to Bryan, she urged her friends to form a study group. Men had clubs, why not women? So, on October of 1895, the Mutual Improvement Circle came into being.⁷ The meetings were held in the homes of the members. The first president was Mrs. Edward Hall. The MIC remained in existence until 1909, when it became The Woman's Club, in response to the motto, adopted at the beginning and still the motto of the Club: "We must move with the times."⁸

As the movement for clubs for women became more popular, the MIC was invited to federate with the Texas Federation of Women's Club, headquartered in Austin, Texas.⁹

The Woman's Club was chartered January 21, 1921. The charter of that date (copy) is attached to this document. It was in 1972 that the Charter was revised.¹⁰ (Ed. Note: Some of the items referenced as attachments may be found at the Carnegie History Center, Bryan, Texas.)

The Club aided in bringing the Carnegie Library to Bryan and assisted in buying books for it, and kept up the Library grounds. The Club started the Civic Improvement Association to assist in beautifying downtown Bryan. They were active in getting the horses and wagons off Main Street, aided in eradication of mosquitoes, and helped with the beautification of the Court House lawn.¹¹

In 1913 the Woman's Club, at the request of city management initiated a project to create a city park in the block between 26th and 27th streets, across from the railroad depot, and in front of the Bryan Hospital.

⁶ Yearbooks binder 1989-1910.

⁷ Questions and Answers, p.1

⁸ Questions and Answers, p.1

⁹ Texas Federation of Woman's Club, Austin, Texas, records.

¹⁰ Records of the Secretary of State, and 1972 minutes of Woman's Club.

¹¹ Ibid.

The railroad brought in the gravel, and The Woman's Club landscaped the park, installed the streetlights from Main Street, and placed benches so that people visiting in the hospital would have a place to relax. Finally, when the city had outgrown the Carnegie Library, the need for a new library became urgent. The city requested that The Woman's Club relinquish the park so that the new library might be built on the property.¹²

In the Club year 1917-1918, Mrs. J. T. Hanway was president. She appointed a committee to plan an approach to the College. The committee was named "College Highway." The members of The Woman's Club formed a group to plant live oak trees down the length of College Avenue, which was named in such a fashion as to indicate the approach to Texas A&M College. Each member had a tree, for which she was to care, carrying water and otherwise tending the tree.¹³ Even as late as 1985, by count 39 of the trees were still alive and beautiful, although College Avenue is no longer the only gateway to Texas A&M University.¹⁴

The first clubhouse was built under the direction of Mrs. Tyler Haswell, president, 1928-1929.¹⁵ The building was later sold in 1942, because of the growth of the Club in membership and the need for repairs. (Editor's Note: The 1937 Bryan City Directory indicates the Woman's Club was located at 206 East 27th St. in Bryan at that time.)

After leaving the clubhouse, the members met in the Bryan Country Club about a year, followed by meeting in Maggie Parker's Dining Room, and the Methodist Fellowship Hall. The Sims home on Bryan Avenue was purchased in 1943.¹⁶ This property was sold, and the Club started meeting in the Medallion Room, in the Bryan Utilities Building¹⁷. In the meanwhile, a committee to consider plans for a new building was appointed, and this resulted in the building of the present clubhouse at 1200 Carter Creek Parkway. The Club moved into the new building for the 1972-1973 Club year, with Mrs. Allister Waldrop, Jr., as president.¹⁸ (Editor's Notes: During the times referenced, the Bryan County Club was located at the

¹² Minutes of The Woman's Club, 1913, and City Council minutes.

¹³ Yearbook 1917-1918, a minutes book of same year. Count of trees by Mrs. A. M. Waldrop and Mrs. Emmette Wallace.

¹⁴ Minutes 1930 and Questions and Answers, p. 1.

¹⁵ Minutes 1929.

¹⁶ Brazos County Deed Records, and minutes Woman's Club 1943.

¹⁷ Minutes 1948-1949.

¹⁸ Micro Film Bryan Eagle, in Bryan Public Library, October 1972.

intersection of South College Ave and Villa Maria Rd., Bryan; Maggie Parker's Dining Room was located at 200 South Congress Ave., Bryan; the Methodist Church was located at East 27th St. and S. Houston Ave., Bryan; and the Sims House was located at 708 S. Bryan St., Bryan.)

The Woman's Club withdrew from the Texas Federation of Woman's Club in 1974.¹⁹

In 1930 there were 10,000 people in Bryan and 2500 at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, College Station. In 1988 there are 52,000 in Bryan, and 29,000 in Texas A&M University, and 20,000 in College Station, which makes Bryan-College Station a metropolis.²⁰

The white rose still appears on the cover of the annual yearbook of The Woman's Club and the Club gives a bronze medallion to each president as she completes her year of service. The same medallion featuring the Club rose has been presented to the 50-year members. There is also a plaque in the clubhouse, honoring the 50-year members. See 1988 yearbook in attachments.

One of the Club members, Mrs. A. Benbow, who died last year, was 100 years old and a past president. Her daughter Mrs. Luther Westbrook, has served as president. The picture showing Mrs. Emmette Wallace and Mrs. John Seeley Caldwell at the guest book table is a good picture of Mrs. Caldwell, who is 90 years old. (See picture in attachments).

¹⁹ TFWC Records, Austin Texas Headquarters, and minutes Woman's Club 1974.

²⁰ Chamber of Commerce, Bryan, Texas.