

Lawrence Women's Club Collection, 1892-1989

Repository: Lawrence History Center

Accession Number: 1989.049

Creator: Lawrence Women's Club

Quantity: 4 bankers boxes, 1 document box

Processed By: Jason L. Leyk

Access: Open for research.

Notes: Some of the materials have mold damage, while others are very fragile. They should be handled carefully.

Provenance

These records were created by various members of the Lawrence Women's Club between 1892 and 1989. They were donated to the Lawrence History Center in 1989 after the club's dissolution in 1988.

Biographical Note

The Lawrence Women's Club began with fifteen ladies meeting at the Haverhill Street home of Mrs. N. F. Sherman on May 31, 1892. The ladies met as a reading group in the "spirit of Concord" and "mutual improvement," according to the first president, Emily G. Wetherbee (1892-1897).¹ Their aim, Wetherbee continued, was to "foster the spirit of enthusiasm for mental improvement and bring together the thoughtful women for a better acquaintance and a more social feeling" beyond church and charity.² In 1893, the club joined the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs. Music and musical performances, as well as reading, were important to the young club. In 1898, the club held a musical featuring works by Haydn and Dvorak, and in 1899 it sponsored a lecture and song recital that featured slave songs and folklore.³

Within its first decade, the club became aware of its own legacy and mortality and introduced into its annual program lists of past presidents and deaths of members. The club was admitted into the nationwide General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1908. In 1912, the club began to allow non-resident memberships. According to a 1914 women's club monograph used by club members, a women's club was to have three goals: to compensate for insufficient education and acculturation; to stay mindful of current events; and for its members to achieve a sense of fulfillment.⁴ During its ninety-six year history, the club reinterpreted these goals as it took on other forms.

Club committees chose, organized, and managed monthly meeting topics and lectures with the 1914 tenets in mind, and committees flourished through the 1920s. Among the longest lasting was the

1 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Administration Records, Records of Meetings, "Wednesday Morning Club Minutes (25 May 1892-6 Jun. 1893)," 84 [unpaginated].

2 *Ibid.*, 83-84 [unpaginated].

3 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Activities Records, Scrapbook, Specific Events Program Folder (1898-1942), "Musical," 8 Feb. 1898; *Ibid.*, "Negro Slave Songs and Plantation Folk-lore Lecture and Song Recital," 10 Jan. 1899.

4 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Books and Magazines, Kate Louise Roberts, *The Club Woman's Handybook of Programs and Club Management* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1914), 8.

Reading Circle for the Blind, which began during the 1926-1927 season. Its first “chairman” was, former club president (1910-1912) and current board of directors member, Mrs. Henry Leslie Sherman. Its intent was to read to, sponsor, and financially assist blind Lawrence-area residents. During the circle's first year, its impact was relatively small. It sewed Christmas cards for the blind and helped to hire a janitor at Grace Parish Church where it met; but over the next five decades it became one of the club's best known community-focused programs.⁵ The club founded other community-orientated committees during the 1920s as well. Their topics included Americanization, education, gardening, and war veterans. New committees coexisted with “mental improvement” committees--art, history, literature, and music--so important at its inception. By the 1930s, the club's focus was a mixture of individual development and social improvement projects. The diversity of these projects culminated in 1957 with twenty-three committees, ten of which were described as focusing on “community service.”⁶

The nature of the Lawrence Women's Club shifted again during the 1960s. By the club's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1967, its one hundred and twenty-five members were more focused on social and charity projects, and less with “mental improvement” lectures, which consisted of a self-help speaker and an astrologist, among others. The club was not introducing new projects as much as it was continuing to slowly restructure itself from an intellectual club into a social improvement club.⁷ Original areas became matters for individual club members, titled “consultants,” rather than whole committees. By the end of the 1970s, the number of total club projects, led by both committees and consultants, had not decreased greatly from the 1950s, but their structure and membership had.⁸

During the 1980s, volunteerism and leadership became the club's central focuses. In 1980, club members were instructed to individually report annually volunteer hours spent at the one-dozen preselected organizations.⁹ As the decade progressed, members became concerned about the future of the club's leadership. Members claimed the club lacked the leadership it once possessed and the club president position was potentially going to go unfilled. In the spring of 1988, thirty-three of the sixty-four members of the Lawrence Women's Club voted twenty-three to ten to dissolve the club. In a 1989 letter, two-time president, Marion Barker (1945-1947 and 1986-1988), notified former members that all club assets were to be sold and the monies donated to various charities. The club donated its records to the Lawrence History Center in 1989.¹⁰

5 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Administration Records, Records of Meetings, “Records of Lawrence Women's Club 1926-7,” 1, 7, 13, 22, 28.

6 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Activities Records, Annual Programs, “Year Book of the Lawrence Women's Club 1957-1958,” 6-7 [unpaginated].

7 *Ibid.*, “Year Book of the Lawrence Women's Club 1966-1967,” 5-12.

8 *Ibid.*, “Lawrence Women's Club 1977-1978 Year Book, Calendar and By-laws,” 4-6; *Ibid.*, “Lawrence Women's Club 1978-1979 Year Book, Calendar and By-laws,” 4-6; *Ibid.*, “Lawrence Women's Club 1979-1980 Year Book, Calendar and By-laws,” 4-6.

9 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Activities Records, Annual Programs, “Lawrence Women's Club Year Book 1980-1981,” 23 [unpaginated]. The number of reportable volunteer organizations grew to eighteen by 1988. See *Ibid.*, “Lawrence Women's Club Year Book 1987-1988,” 21 for details.

10 Lawrence Women's Club Collection, Administration Records, Records of Meetings, “14 Oct. 1980-3 May 1988,” 8 Mar. 1988, 181-184; *Ibid.*, 3 May 1988, 190-192; Lawrence Women's Club Records, Scrapbooks, Letters (1917-1989) Folder, “To [member] from Marion Barker,” c. Jan. 1989.

Scope and Content Note

The collection includes a wide variety of materials including activities records that consist of annual programs and scrapbooks. These materials include the names of members and officers, listings of all the different committees, newspaper clippings regarding various club events and activities, event programs, and certificates of recognition. These materials span the entire history of the club. There are also administrative records of meeting minutes and club finances. These records date from 1892 to 1989. They include information about committee events, speakers and lecturers, votes that occurred, as well as lists of club assets, payments, and donations. The collection also contains books and magazines that focus on how to manage clubs, the history of women's clubs in the United States, and the goings-on of women's clubs. These materials date between 1914 and 1982. Finally, the collection includes records of the Tuesday Sorosis Club, which was a professional women's club. The records date from 1936 to 1968, and include a scrapbook and three yearbooks. They focus on the club's activities as well as the recognition it received for its members' charitable deeds.

Arrangement

This collection is organized into the following four series:

- Series I. Activities Records, 1892-1989
 - Subseries 1, Annual Programs, 1892-1988
 - Subseries 2, Scrapbooks, c.1898-1989
- Series II. Administration records, 25 May 1892-23 January 1989
 - Subseries 1, Records of Meetings, 25 May 1892-3 May 1988
 - Subseries 2, Records of Finance, 1899-23 January 1989
- Series III. Books and Magazine, 1914, 1962, and April 1982
- Series IV. Tuesday Sorosis Club, c. 6 May 1936-c. 8 April 1968

Series I. Activities Records, 1892-1989

Subseries 1, Annual Programs, 1892-1988

Box 1

This subseries consists of annual programs. Between 1892 and 1895, the programs only consisted of by-laws, officers, members, honorary members, and board of directors members. The programs' content changed over the course of the club's history and many additions were made. Among the most important changes were the inclusion of the annual club calendar, beginning in 1895-1896; the deaths of past members in 1897-1898; past presidents, departments, and committees sections in 1905-1906; a non-resident member list beginning in 1912-1913; details pertaining to the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Reading Circle for the Blind in 1926-1927; and the volunteer organization listings beginning in 1980-1981. The programs also listed lecturers and artist appearances between 1908-1909 and 1917-1918. The annual programs are extremely helpful in understanding the club's structure and how it changed during its history.

Subseries 2, Scrapbooks, c.1898-1989

Box 2

This subseries contains five scrapbooks. The scrapbooks dates are: 30 September 1952-5 June 1957,

5 October 1957-9 May 1962, 9 October-2 May 1969, 22 May 1969-3 January 1974, and 14 October 1980-c. 1982. The scrapbooks consist of mostly newspaper clippings from the Lawrence *Eagle-Tribune*, *Sun*, and *Tribune* and the Boston *Globe*, *Herald*, and *Traveler*, but other clippings are unsourced. The clippings relate to the club's social activities, such as lectures, exhibits, luncheons, formals, social improvement programs. The earliest scrapbook contains copies of the programs for Reading Circle for the Blind, and has minor mold and water damage on its spine and back cover. The scrapbook dated 9 October 1962-2 May 1969 has loose pages and clippings. The scrapbook dated 22 May 1969-3 January 1974 contains certificates of achievement and letters of recognition for the club's community outreach and volunteerism. All scrapbooks also contain annual programs. This subseries also contains loose newspaper clippings from 1899-1989, specific event programs from 1898-1942, loose certificates from 1908 and 1987, and letters from 1917-1988.

Series II. Administration records, 25 May 1892-23 January 1989

Subseries 1, Records of Meetings, 25 May 1892-3 May 1988

Box 3 and Box 4

This subseries contains the records of meeting from 25 May 1892-May 1908 and May 1910-3 May 1988. Some of the books are indexed. The books contain information on the following: which charities, hospitals, and social organizations were funded; the votes that occurred; the various meeting locations (banks, churches, schools, etc.); members in attendance; speakers and lecturers; committee events; and some treasurer and president reports. It also contains record of: new members; member deaths and resignations; and hostess lists from 1954 to 1988. Especially noteworthy is first president, Emily G. Wetherbee's club address at the end of its first year, which reflected upon the year's events and the inspirations for the club. Some of the books are now looseleaf or in disrepair and will require careful handling.

Subseries 2, Records of Finances, 1899-23 January 1989

Box 4

This subseries contains financial records, but the dates are not inclusive. It includes: corporation and stock documents from 1899-1903; two ledgers, which list the club's assets, bank and interest information, donations, receipts, and payments; and the annual treasurer's statement and auditor's notation. The final notation was 23 January 1989. The subseries also contains two books of unused checks, a rubber stamp, and 6 processed stamps, all dating between around 1970 and 1988.

Series III. Books and Magazine, 1914, 1962, and April 1982

Box 4

This series contains two books and one magazine. The earlier book is Kate Louise Roberts' *The Club Woman's Handybook of Programs and Club Management* (1914). The book would have been used by committee leaders or club officers to organize event and lecture topics. The topics are diverse and the book is indexed. The later book is *Progress and Achievement: A History of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs 1893-1962*, which was published by the Federation in 1962. It discusses the pre-Federation women's clubs in Massachusetts, The Federation's administrative history, the history of Federation departments and divisions, and the memorial scholarships created in the names of the Federation's founders. It also has an extensive appendix that lists the past presidents and committee "chairmen," the development of the committees, the Federation's song, a collect (prayer) for members, and an amendment to the Federation's charter. The magazine is an issue of *Clubwoman*

(volume 60, number 8) from April 1982. It is the magazine of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which was the "world's largest volunteer women's service organization," according to the publication (page 3).

Series IV. Tuesday Sorosis Club, c. 6 May 1936-c. 8 April 1968

Box 5, 1 document box

The Sorosis organization was the first professional women's club in the United States. The Lawrence chapter was organized in 1899, and Mrs. Amanda. M. Brackett served as its first president. It became part of the state federation in 1904 and the federal federation in 1914. The Sorosis Club might have merged with the Lawrence Women's Club, and its memberships sometimes overlapped. This series contains one scrapbook for the Tuesday Sorosis Club and three of its yearbooks. The scrapbook contains newspaper clipping of the club's activities and certificates of recognition from charity organizations. The four first pages are undated, so clippings on these pages may predate 1936; there are also other clippings that are undated and unsourced, but at least some of them originated in the Lawrence *Eagle-Tribune*. Some clippings have come loose and others are missing from the scrapbook pages. There is some mold and water damage on the cover and at the top of pages. The yearbooks (1943-1944, 1945-1946, 1949-1950) contain a collect (prayer), a list of past presidents, current officers and board members, committee titles and members, an annual club program, a member directory, the federation officers, and, finally, the club's song.