



GENERAL FEDERATION
of WOMEN'S CLUBS

WHRC NEWS

Newsletter of the GFWC Women's History and Resource Center



Fall 2017

Dear Friends of the WHRC,

I am lucky enough to call the WHRC library my office. Every morning when I walk into work I am enraptured by the beautiful white built-ins, filled with women's history, and the streaming sunlight that seems to pour in from the large picture windows next to my desk. Directly in front of my desk, a certificate is hung from the American Library Association (ALA). It is a Resolution of Appreciation that lists the more recent accomplishments which GFWC has contributed to the ALA, such as testifying on behalf of federal aid for library services and supporting the adopt-a-library program, among others. However, sitting in this beautiful, storied house, surrounded by a library of our own, it often strikes me that this certificate is only the beginning of the story.

It is no wonder that libraries and literacy education has always been at the heart of what makes up GFWC. Many of our founding clubs began as book clubs and literary circles, offering women a place to exchange academic ideas where there formerly was none. It was by no stretch of the imagination that those women soon realized their duty to extend their passion to the community, opening some of the first public libraries across the nation. In those areas which were unable to support libraries, women began traveling libraries, sending trunks of books by train to wherever the railways could reach.

Support for libraries remained a backbone of GFWC throughout the 20th century. As cars became a common household purchase in the 1930s, a myriad of local clubs invested in "Bookmobiles," creating a modern day traveling library system. During WWII, when GFWC refocused their goals on the war effort, support for libraries remained a key part of its new resolutions. Into the late 20th century, GFWC

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expanded its work with libraries to not only providing free access to books, but to running adult literacy campaigns, and assisting those in their communities with learning such essentials as reading street signs, newspapers, labels, and even voting ballots. By the 1960s the American Library Association had confirmed that the clubwomen of GFWC were responsible for the existence of 85% of all public libraries in the nation.

To know this history is essential to the lifeblood of GFWC. But to read the individual stories of triumph and persistence is truly another experience. After I put out the call for articles detailing the history of club's libraries I was absolutely inundated with stories. There are few times that I can say that an overflowing inbox has made me smile, but it is miraculous to see the pride and excitement so many carry in the foundation of their club's work.

Unfortunately, submissions have far exceeded the space I am allotted for this newsletter. But I hope you enjoy and draw inspiration from those stories which have been selected. For those who do not see their club in this newsletter, an additional publication on GFWC's support of libraries will be made available in late November.

Thank you all for your heartfelt submissions, inspiring stories, and truly incredible work towards the education of our nation. Keep reading!



Alyssa Constad
Women's History and Resource Center Manager

The Miami Woman's Club

Submitted by Lynda Randolph

The Married Ladies' Afternoon Club of Miami formed in 1900, only four years after the founding of the city. The dawn of the new century, along with a population boom, and an influx of immigrants, brought new urban challenges to Miami and to cities across the country. Embracing these new problems and seeking solutions, the Married Ladies' Afternoon Club quickly adapted a mission of focusing on literacy, and began to collect and circulate books.

The mission of the GFWC Women's History and Resource Center is to collect, preserve, interpret, and promote the history of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and women volunteers.

Subscribe to the WHRC Newsletter

The Women's History and Resource Center is excited to announce that it will now be opening up its quarterly newsletter to all clubwomen. The WHRC newsletter provides an in-depth look at the celebrated history of GFWC on the national, local, and individual levels. A publication primarily written by clubwomen, the newsletter proudly publishes articles written by you and about your history. The WHRC newsletter is also the best way to stay up-to-date on the latest events and happenings in the Women's History and Resource Center. To sign up, please visit www.gfwc.org. An enrollment box is located at the bottom on the website, underneath the *News & Notes* sign up. You can also sign up by providing your name, mailing address, email, and club name to GFWC Membership Services Manager Kate Garlick at kgarlick@gfwc.org.

By May of 1906, the Married Ladies had taken in over 100 new members, and found their club and their library collection overflowing. The clubwomen adopted a new name, The Woman's Club of Miami, and sought to adopt a new home as well. Leadership began a campaign to find a permanent location for the busy club and the thousands of volumes in the library. Their hope was that Miami's largest landowner, Henry M. Flagler, would provide a site for a library and clubhouse for the organization.

After six years of negotiation, Flagler gifted to the club a tract of land in Royal Palm Park. While the land was a superb location for the club's needs, Flagler required that the women must erect a suitable club within a year, worth at least \$10,000. More than 170 individuals contributed to the effort and a sum of \$13,000 was raised. On June 1, 1913 the first Woman's Club and Library building was completed and opened to the public.

In addition to the city's library, the club began to reach out to new endeavors. It supported tuberculosis relief and Travelers' Aid, it provided meeting space for the American Red Cross, the YMCA, and YWCA. During World War I, the club hosted enlisted servicemen and purchased Liberty Bonds. Now Florida's largest woman's club with nearly 1,000 members, the organization supported many municipal institutions. In 1916, the club took a prominent role in the founding of the State Federation Royal Palm Park. West of Homestead, this 4,000-acres of hammock and glades would be the origin of Everglades National Park.

By 1923, the Woman's Club Library, which was private, was the third largest in the state and continued to expand. In less than a decade since the club's opening of their facility, the City of Miami had experienced explosive growth. In 1942, the club's Flagler Memorial Library and four branch libraries officially became part of the Miami Library System (now the Miami-Dade Public Library System). The date marked the club's more than four decades of establishing and operating the region's libraries, providing an invaluable service to the citizens of Miami.

Become a Friend of the WHRC

Donate to the WHRC in support of our activities and you will become a Friend of the WHRC. By joining the Friends of the WHRC, you will help:

- Preserve and maintain GFWC collections
- Increase research library acquisitions
- Provide student field study opportunities
- Honor and support WHRC volunteers

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GFWC Coco Plum Woman's Club Library

Submitted by Anita Jenkins

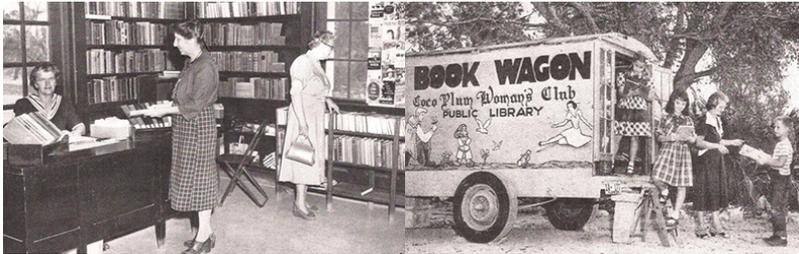
At the turn of the century, eight women founded the Thimble Club of Larken. Now known as the GFWC Coco Plum Woman's Club, the club's membership increased rapidly and necessitated the construction of a clubhouse in 1913. The simple, wooden clubhouse, which was constructed by the clubwomen's husbands, contained a book shelf which housed only a single book: "Pollyanna", written by Eleanor Porter. This donated book became the catalyst of the expanding library, which served the local community for 56 years.

Throughout the years, the library's shelves were filled by donations from members, community businesses, fund raising events, and book shows. In the club's 1925 scrapbook, there is record of a "book shower" in which the ladies came dressed in costumes depicting their favorite book and brought books to donate to the library.

Soon, the expanding library was not just shelves of books, but a comfortable reading room for members of the community to learn and study in. The women were proud that they were able to provide a free library for the community during a time in which public libraries still did not exist in the area. The club was fortunate enough to have a professional librarian for several years, paid for by the county. Additional staffing was provided by GFWC Coco Plum Library Committee. Children were the principal users of the library, along with the University of Miami students and professors.

In the summer of 1948 the library expanded its services to include a traveling library. The aptly named Book Wagon would depart at 9:30 every Wednesday morning and visit three different locations. At each stop, the wagon was often greeted by children who had walked or bicycled from long distances just for the chance to read a book.

With the opening of public libraries in the area in 1969, it was decided to discontinue the GFWC Coco Plum Library, a project which had served the community for 56 years. The doors were closed on April 30, 1969. Today, the GFWC Coco Plum Woman's Club does not have a club library. However, our members continue to foster the love of books by reading to student at a local elementary school. Members donate books which are displayed at our meetings for purchase, with the funds raised benefiting the Education Community Service Program.



GFWC Alabama Collinsville Study Club and the Collinsville Public Library: The Perfect Partners

Submitted by Christine Steele

The Study Club of Collinsville, Alabama was federated in April of 1929, marking the end of a decade of great growth and prosperity.

Throughout the early twentieth century, it was common to find small literary clubs in rural America. In small towns, literary clubs were seen as a source of social and cultural influence that helped to stress the importance of education. However, at the onset of the Great Depression, and eventual commencement of World War II, literary clubs began to expand their focus to address their civic duties.

The Collinsville Study Club (CSC) undertook its first major community project in June 9, 1933, led by Corrine Hall. The club hosted a "Book Tea," which sought books to create a library in a building owned by the Hall family. Funded partially by the Works Progress Administration

(WPA), clubwomen brought books, solicited additional books from non-members, and raised funds to purchase a set of Compton's Encyclopedias. When WPA funds were no longer available, Mrs. Hall, with the support of the CSC, continued to solicit funds for the library. After ten years of sponsorship, it became the town's public library.

The Collinsville Study Club has remained an ardent partner and sponsor of the library since its founding. In the 1960s, CSC began to contribute money for operational costs of the library, as well as money for the librarian's salaries. A member of the club was also voted to serve on the library's board. CSC has also continued to donate books, as well as sponsor programs at the library. In more recent years, CSC and the library have partnered on many projects. Most notable is an annual Quilt Walk which raises money for the restoration of a local historic building.

After 88 years, CSC's club name has changed, they are now GFWC Alabama Collinsville Study Club, but their focus on the Collinsville Public Library has been steadfast. As the longest sustained donor to the public library, CSC is allowed to permanently store and display their historic records there, including ledgers, scrapbooks, and yearbooks, dating back to 1929. It's the perfect place.

Establishment of the Morrow Branch of the Clayton County Library in Morrow, Georgia

Submitted by Lois Wolfe and Denise Martin

Georgia's Morrow Junior Woman's Club (MJWC) was organized on May 1, 1962 and federated the following month. Recently, the Morrow Civic Woman's Club (MCWC's name and status from Junior to General was changed in 1991) celebrated their 55 year anniversary. The club recognized their founding charter member, Jane Young, who recalled the club's greatest achievements. Mrs. Young spoke of MCWC's role in establishing the Morrow Public Library. The establishment of the Morrow Public Library is often cited as a milestone accomplishment for the club, yet current members came to the realization that few of them knew the details surrounding it.

Clubwomen commenced a search to learn more. After a fruitless online search, the women turned to oral history. They interviewed Pat Robinson, who was the Education Chairman during the effort to establish a library. Through their interview, they discovered that Beverly Remington, who was then club president, became the official spokeswoman after the decision was made to advance the local library cause. This small detail led the women to a treasure trove of information.

MCWC had previously deeded club documents to the Clayton State University Archives. There, the women found the information they needed to help put the puzzle pieces together. One entry from the Education Department's 1974 report stated the club's plan to establish a library branch in Morrow, and detailed their meetings with the Clayton County Board of Commissioners and the Library Board administrator. Archived newspaper articles helped the ladies to track the club's progress in gaining support and eventually opening the Morrow Public Library in 1975.

The women's research inspired them to document the entire process of establishing the Morrow library. Eventually, they plan on publishing a complete record about the role of the Morrow Civil Women's Club in founding the Morrow Branch of the Clayton County Library System.

The Woman's Club of Farmingdale, New York

Submitted by Maria Ortolani

When Abigail E. Leonard came to Farmingdale on her retirement at the age of 60, she moved quickly into community life and founded the Women's Club of Farmingdale (WCF) on March 7, 1913.

The story of the establishment of the first library in Farmingdale begins with Miss Leonard and the members of the Women's Club of Farmingdale. Women's Club minutes indicate that as early as 1923, club members had succeeded in assembling 130 donated books for public reading. The building used to house the library was the Kolkebeck House, a two-story wooden building owned by the Board of Education of the Farmingdale Schools. After the ladies borrowed a

desk and some chairs, and asked local citizens to donate an assortment of books in good condition, they were prepared to open the Farmingdale Free Library on January 30, 1923.

Miss Leonard served as the one-person committee for the selection of books until it became necessary that the library receive recognition status as a public library. Under Miss Leonard's leadership, the Woman's Club called a meeting of representatives of various organizations to discuss the matter of forming a library association. The association was formed at that meeting where nine trustees were elected. On September 20, 1923, the first charter was granted by the University of the State of New York.

The Kolkebeck House was well-known as the Farmingdale Free Library from 1923 until 1929 when it was demolished to make room for the construction of an addition to the Farmingdale Main Street School. The library was then moved into the Main Street School building and combined with the school library.

As the community grew, there was no longer room in the school to house both libraries. So on May 16, 1951, a group of local citizens formed an organization called "The Friends of the Library." They promoted the idea of separating the public library from the school library, which allowed it to have its own separate budget. On May 6, 1952, the taxpayers of the Farmingdale School District voted to establish a school district library which replaced the association library.

Presently, the Farmingdale Public Library is situated in a new, spacious building, erected in 1994. On April 18, 2013, the Women's Club of Farmingdale honored Abigail E. Leonard as a co-founder of the Farmingdale Public Library by holding an unveiling of a beautiful framed photo of Miss Leonard which now hangs in the library entrance for all to appreciate.



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