

THE FIRST YEARS OF

The Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club

AS REPORTED BY THE
CLUB HISTORIAN

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Older than the City of Fort Lauderdale itself, the Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club has provided nearly ninety years of leadership in the fields of public service and civic improvement. Originally named "The Ladies' Civic Improvement Society," the club was organized to combat unsanitary conditions in the community. In succeeding years, the Woman's Club founded Fort Lauderdale's first library, and was instrumental in the establishment of the city's first volunteer fire department, 4-H club, and tourist board, as well as participating in a number of educational and beautification projects.

The following article, a chronicle of the club's activities and accomplishments during its first fourteen years of existence, was written in 1925 by Mrs. Cordelia D. Vreeland, the club historian. Born in New Rochelle, New York, in 1862, Mrs. Vreeland came to Florida in 1900 and moved to Fort Lauderdale in 1906. In addition to her term as historian, Mrs. Vreeland served as president of the Woman's Club in 1928 and 1929. She died in 1958, at the age of ninety-five, and is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

"The Ladies' Civic Improvement Society" was organized on January 11th, 1911, in the little M.E. church south.

Mrs. Frank R. Oliver, president; Mrs. H.B. Adams, vice-president; Mrs. Frank Stranahan, secretary; Mrs. P.D. Parks, corresponding secretary; Mrs. C.H. Slifer, treasurer.

The second meeting of the organization was held at the home of Mrs. J.F. Gordon at which time a committee was elected to draft by-laws and regulations.

The charter members of the club are as follows: Mrs. H.B. Adams, Mrs. S.M. Davis, Mrs. G.I. Edgerton, Mrs. J.K. Gordon, Mrs. W.H. Heiney, Mrs. W.H. Marshall, Mrs. P.D. Parks, Mrs. C.G. Rhodes, Mrs. D.D. Rawlins, Mrs. C.H. Slifer, Mrs. Frank Stranahan, Mrs. W.B. Snyder, Mrs. D.G. TenBrook, Mrs. Chas. Van Antwerp, Mrs. J.B. Vreeland, Mrs. H.G. Wheeler, Mrs. Frank R. Oliver.

Two months after the organization the little town of Fort Lauderdale became a city and elected a mayor, Honorable W.H. Marshall, the society entertained the mayor and newly elected city officers on the beautiful lawn at the home of their president and her husband; this function was the society's first big affair and they had no reason to be ashamed of their reception to the city fathers.

During the months between January 11th and October 6th the society raised about \$80 and had a membership of twenty-nine.

This handful of ambitious women worked and worked hard, harder than the women of today will ever work, because of the hardships and difficulties they were compelled to face and to overcome in order to "blaze the trail" for those who would come in later; and always the object and aim of these pioneer women was a club home and a library for their city.

The first Friday in October was, and is today, the beginning of the club year, so on October 16th, 1911, the same year in which the society was organized, Mrs. D.G. TenBrook was elected the second president of the society.

Mrs. Oliver served faithfully and conscientiously as president during the nine months of her administration and the society deeply regretted that she felt that she could not serve another year.

Mrs. TenBrook served one year doing a wonderful work under difficulties and with many real hardships to endure. At this time meetings were held at the homes of members, sometimes in the schoolhouse, where now stands the courthouse, sometimes in the one church in the town, until the Real Estate Exchange and the Board of Trade offered the society the use of

their rooms on Wall Street: the society was invited to serve ice cream and cake at a ball given by the band; also to cooperate with the Board of Trade in entertaining the state senators when they were here on the occasion of the "Gulf to Atlantic" celebration in February; the society held a sociable to raise funds for the Fort Lauderdale band, at which time about \$50 was netted and presented to the band.

It was Mrs. H.G. Wheeler who suggested that the hibiscus be adopted as the club flower, also that the club colors should be red and green.

February 13th was named "Guest Night" when the club members entertained their husbands and friends, and jolly good times they had, too.

A Valentine social was given on February 14th, when a neat sum was realized for the library fund.

The matter of organizing a fire department was taken up with the Board of Trade and the society donated one hundred dollars to the newly organized fire department.

A street and back yard clean-up was inaugurated. One of the methods for raising money was for each member to earn five dollars for the society by January 1st, and to tell how she earned it; some of the stories were very amusing indeed. A supper was given which netted \$34.15.

The society became instrumental in having a "stock and poultry ordinance" passed; also sanitary conditions looked into.

A beautiful motto was suggested by Mrs. S.M. Drake as follows:

"For the cause that needs assistance,
For the wrongs that need resistance,
For the future in the distance
And the good that we may do."

Mrs. TenBrook filled the office of president with dignity and grace and was faithful and true to her trust.

Mrs. H.G. Wheeler then shouldered the burden and responsibility on October 4th, 1912, and successfully guided the society through its third year.

Mrs. Wheeler and her predecessor Mrs. TenBrook were the society's first delegates to a convention when they were sent to attend the convention of the State Federation of Women's Clubs at West Palm Beach, at which time the society became a member of the state federation.

The school improvement association was organized by the school committee. Two separate funds were created — the expense fund and the building fund; in the latter they had at this time \$159.15; in the expense fund \$20.86.

A bazaar was held and a minstrel show, in which the members were the actors, was given in March when

\$122.00 was added to the building fund.

On May 16, 1913, the president, Mrs. Wheeler, and her good "club husband" donated a beautiful lot to the society on which to build a club house and library. This was received with much enthusiasm and gratitude, as it was just what the society had been working so hard and long for. The society immediately became incorporated with the following members as directors:

Katherine A. Wheeler, Ivy J. Stranahan, Alice R. Drake, Eva L. Newland and Eva A. Oliver.

At the close of the year the society had in the expense fund \$2.51 and in the building fund \$308.40, and all the bills paid. Loaned \$250 at eight percent interest.

Mrs. Frank Stranahan was elected to the presidency on October 3rd, 1913,

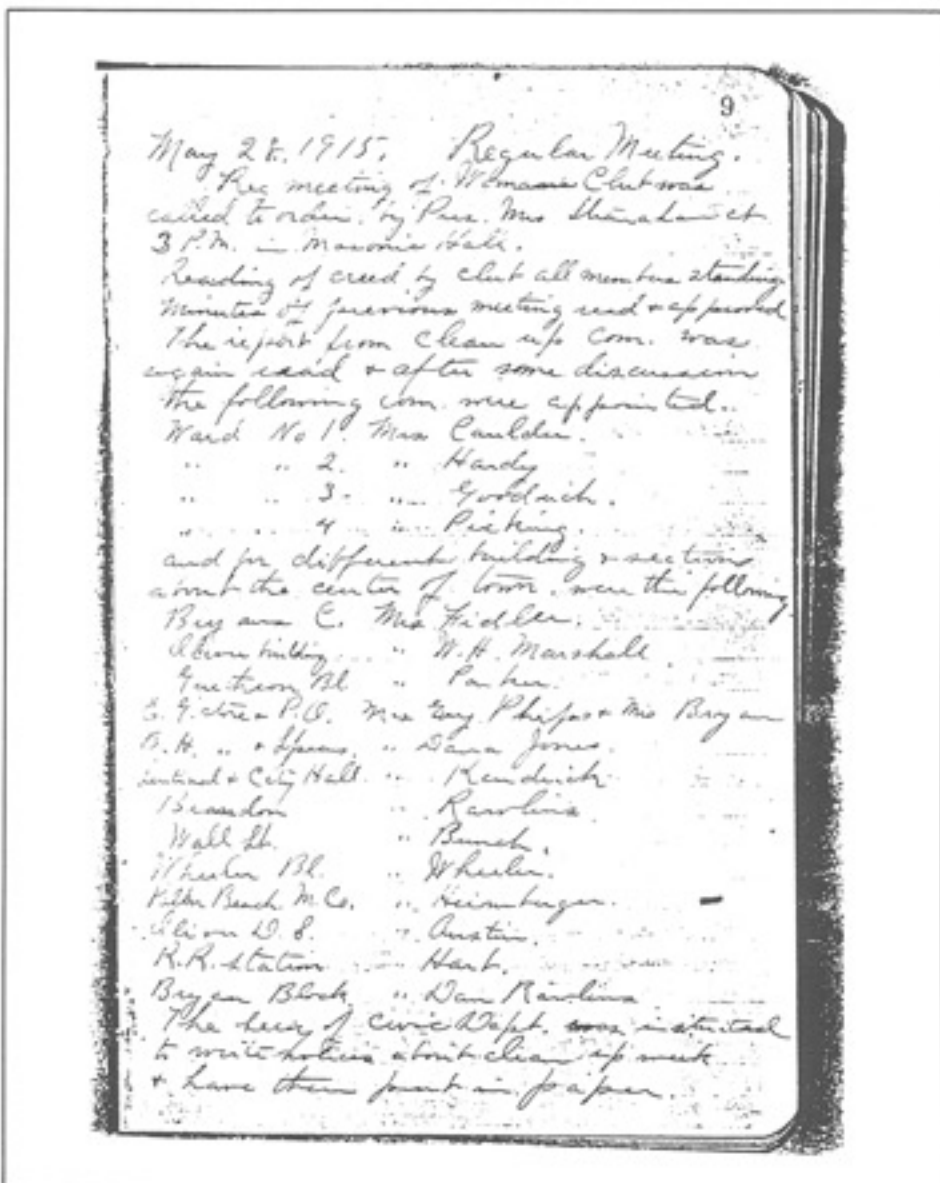
and it was during her administration that the Ladies' Civic Improvement Association became the Woman's Club.

Mrs. Stranahan filled the office of president three years. During her second year she and her husband donated to the club the present site of the club house on the corner of North Andrews Avenue and Park Avenue [Southeast First Street after 1927].

At the close of this year the annual report showed a membership of 91 and a balance on hand of \$32.37 in the expense fund and in the building fund \$209.20.

In 1914 the educational department bought a Victrola, records and some reference books for the use of the public schools.

October 4, 1915, there was a membership of 112, with \$648.37 in the



Minutes of an early meeting of the Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club, May 28, 1915.

building fund. During the year they studied parliamentary law once a month, gave a New Year reception, held a guest day reception for our teachers in the public schools and entertained the executive board of the Florida Federation. Had a suburban day which served to bring our neighboring towns closer to us, as well as our suburban neighbors. On this day, the club had as its guest Mrs. T.V. Moore, sectional vice president, to tell the women why they should belong to a club and why that club should be a federated club.

Tag day was a financial success, clearing \$105.00 for the building fund. Mrs. Belle Goodrich filled the office of president during the year 1916-17. Mrs. Goodrich was also elected chairman of the building committee, for the club then began to make preparations for building the club home and library that they had labored and sacrificed so much for. They were happy to realize their dreams at last and were as enthusiastic and happy as it was possible to be.

It was during this year that the club published an edition of the *Fort Lauderdale Herald* while the editor was away on a trip, in order that the subscribers might not miss their weekly paper. The *Herald* came out on time and looked unusually attractive, and had many special articles written by the women of Fort Lauderdale upon many subjects and altogether it was a very creditable edition.

The club was asked to appoint a committee to confer with a committee appointed by the Board of Trade to investigate and remedy conditions of

much needed improvements in our cemetery.

Held a Bohemian luncheon; also conducted an art exhibit at which were shown a number of paintings of scenes adjacent to Fort Lauderdale, by Aston Knight, for the benefit of the library department.

Assisted band in celebrating the Fourth of July; purchased piano. Served on National Defense patriotic program as well as other war work.

Mrs. Goodrich, as president and chairman of the building committee, built our club house, and when it was opened to the public on May 18th, 1917, it was she who so ably addressed the large audience in attendance. Mrs. Goodrich spoke of the struggle of the club, for the beautiful home had been realized through the generosity of the citizens of the community. She spoke of the business side of our corporation, of the obligations which we had assumed and of the work that was ahead of us to accomplish. Her every word impressed the large audience and moulded closer the good fellowship between the townspeople and their Woman's Club.

It was with happy hearts and smiling faces that the club took possession of their splendid new club home at a regular meeting on Friday, May 18th, 1917. About sixty members were present, all happy and enthusiastic in their appreciation and gratitude and with renewed courage to go on with the work of the club — "the uplift of social and civic conditions" as well as rendering assistance whenever needed.

Mrs. Daniel E. Clune was the eighth president of the Fort Lauderdale Wom-

an's Club. As this was the year in which the United States entered the World War, very little club work was done; the club however did a great deal of war work.

After a few months Mrs. Clune left town and the vice-president, Mrs. Edward Heimberger, filled out the year and was elected president in October 1918, and was a very successful one under very trying circumstances; the club continued doing war work when and wherever called upon, besides doing considerable club work as well.

The officers for the year 1919-1920:
Mrs. George E. Henry, president;
Mrs. Frank Stranahan, vice-president;
Mrs. L.A. Holland, rec. secretary; Mrs. C.W. Montgomery, corresponding secretary; Miss Elizabeth Kraft, financial secretary; Mrs. George Hall, treasurer.

The accomplishments were not many during that year, although the club was recovering from the effects of the war and taking up the duties of club life once more.

A study of foods and their values was inaugurated and conducted monthly by Mrs. Peay, Broward County's demonstration agent, which was helpful and instructive.

Voted an appropriation of \$10 to the Roosevelt Memorial Fund. Planted trees on Armistice Day in memory of our fallen heroes.

Inaugurated "hospitality teas" in which the various churches of the city took turns in serving; assisted in having Royal Palm trees set along Las Olas Boulevard; responded to call for assistance of Near East Relief work.

Brought the civic department of the



The Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club building in Stranahan Park, shortly after completion, 1917.

