



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Clio Club holds a breakfast at the Woman's Club on May 2, 1934.

Williamsport Women: The Clio Club, early years

Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI

By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT

Sun-Gazette Correspondent

The Clio Club of Williamsport, organized in 1897, shared a rich history with other women's groups throughout the United States. Such organizations became an important part of the cultural fabric of communities and demonstrated the increasing interest on the part of women in education, social welfare and international concerns. Together, women were able to celebrate remarkable accomplishments. We honor the Clio Club during Women's History Month.

The Clio Club and its mission

The local Clio Club stated its mission as "The pursuit of study as a means of intellectual culture and general

improvement." At its organizational meeting, held on Oct. 27 in the Red Room of the Park Hotel on West Fourth Street, each member of the Browning Club brought two friends with her to form a new club.

(Printed programs indicate that the Browning Club was a small group of men and women who gathered to study the life and literary times of Robert Browning.)

Mrs. Wilson Emory became the first president. The name "Clio" was chosen because Clio is the Greek muse of history, who often is represented in art wearing a laurel wreath and holding a manuscript or a case containing manuscripts. Dues were set at \$2, with membership limited to 125 women. New members were by invitation only with an affirmative vote by the executive committee. In the beginning, the club was an affiliate of the State Federation of Women's Clubs.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Clio Club members in 1890-1910.

A home of its own

As early as 1905, club members wanted a home of their own, and building a facility for its exclusive use became a goal of this popular group, which

met weekly on Wednesdays. Over the years, the women convened not only at the Park Home, but also at the Trinity Parish House, Covenant Central Presbyterian Church and the James V. Brown

Library. Eventually, the club was instrumental in buying and renovating the Woman's Club House, holding 10 shares of

(See THE CLIO, Page E-3)

Lifestyle

The Clio Club, early years

(From Page E-1)
capital stock in the property.

Continuing education

At first, these "student women" with a love of continuing education were assigned research areas and would read their reports to the entire membership. Later, guest speakers would make many of the presentations. Often the presenters were local people, but newspaper articles attest to the number of well-known national experts that the group brought to its membership.

The calendar of events for the first year focused on English history and literature. Clara Reading researched and spoke on Alfred the Great; Mary Corvell on The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles; and Bessie Crocker on Lady Jane Grey. Mrs. John Beck retained copies of all the papers presented until they completely filled the garret space in her house, at which time the papers were destroyed.

Clio Club activities

Yearbooks included a detailed constitution and outlined numerous committees and departments, such as art and travel, drama, civic, program, entertainment and citizenship. The departments had their own meeting schedules and programming. Sometimes the yearbook ended with an extensive list of books at the James V. Brown Library relating to the year's topics.

In 1925, the Drama Department presented a play titled "Suppressed Desires: A Freudian Comedy" ... especially for the ladies of the rotarians in attendance. With music by the Dickinson Seminary Orchestra, the play was given in the gymnasium at Williamsport Dickinson Seminary. Annually, the Drama Department offered at least one play for the general public in Association Hall, which was rented for the occasion.

An important annual event was the May breakfast that closed the program year. In 1907, this "breakfast," held at 1 p.m., included a

menu of fried chicken, potato croquettes, pickles, biscuits, ice cream, cake and nuts. Minutes show that, in 1932, 110 women attended at a cost of \$1 per ticket.

Civic commitment

Current affairs were an important concern of the club. The 1903 yearbook indicates that there was a Living Issues Department, and by 1910 the organization had "much to do with civic advancement." An article in the Jan. 13, 1910 issue of the Gazette and Bulletin states that the club is composed of women with "brains, and having brains they use them ... club women don't go to their meeting places to smoke, eat and play billiards."

In 1904, local efforts included protesting the use of schools as polling locations. In cases where the group did not get a satisfactory response from local officials, members took their concerns to the public through the newspaper.

In 1911, the club called for a public outcry against unsafe exits at the City Theater, which showed moving pictures: "Current laws care more about the morals of such places of entertainment and have received some attention at the hands of our law makers, but life and limb have been neglected." The group encouraged people to appeal to their local legislators about this public menace.

Whatever the situation, the Clio Club was known for getting things done. In 1913, with less than 24 hours notice, the women assembled more than 400 box lunches for National Guard members arriving in the city. There was enough food in each box to last all day.

In 1914, when the formation of a "Suffrage Club" in Williamsport was announced in the Gazette and Bulletin, the Clio Club was listed as being present at the organizational meeting. Members studied war efforts during World War I, and invited news analysts, news editors and heads of government agencies to speak during World War II. Clio Club women generally were

active in the community. These same individuals took leadership positions with the Home for the Friendless, the YWCA, the Williamsport Music Club and local churches. For example, among the members were Eva Grey, wife of the Dickinson Seminary president and an educational and religious leader in her own right, and Dr. Jean Saylor-Brown, one of the first female physicians in Williamsport. The bonds formed among members led to strong and supportive friendships.

50th anniversary

The Clio Club celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1947-48. By then, the group was meeting twice a month, and all meetings were held at the Woman's Club. One program that year was "The Destiny of Western Civilization: Our Responsibilities in World Affairs."

In 2015, the remaining members of the Clio Club decided to disband, giving their papers and a monetary donation to the Lycoming County Historical Society. Many of the organization's documents also are available through the Lycoming County Women's History Collection at www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc/index.html.

Janet McNeil Hurlbert is Professor Emerita of Library Services at Lycoming College. She continues her interest in the Lycoming College archives by working on a limited basis as archival project specialist and being an advisor to the Lycoming County Women's History Collection.

The regular Williamsport Women writer, Mary Sieminski, is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Her column is published the second Sunday of each month and she can be reached at lcwhcmanager@gmail.com.