

THE WOMAN'S CLUB OF MOORHEAD 1868-1946

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The Woman's Club of Moorhead 1868-1946

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ABSTRACT

Far from upholding the domestic ideal of the Victorian Era, the Moorhead Woman's Club helped establish the first public library in the city and strove for changes in education through active engagement in the public "sphere." The club women, helped women gain a foothold in local government by applying maternalistic arguments for women's involvement and leadership in reform activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Woman's Club of Moorhead was more than a social club. The club began in 1893 out of the Women Auxiliary at the Chicago World Fair. The women who founded the club wanted more mental stimulation, a change from the routine of household duties, and to champion progressive issues. The Moorhead's Woman's Club acted as a civic club, instead of a social or study club as many of the women clubs from that time were doing. For example, they conducted civic and community projects that developed cultural awareness.¹ They did this by inviting professors from the local colleges to speak in open meetings about world issues and their scholarly work.

The Moorhead Club formed in part because of an awareness in the high-ranging interest in the Fargo Woman's Club. At the time there was no club in Moorhead. Clubs in each district were emerging, as were women's interest in the organization and community. This thesis recovers the history of the club movement, the history of the library that the Moorhead Club founded, and its other activities. In addition, this thesis shows the importance of libraries to not only club women, but for how they strove for education and community wellbeing. Because of the skilled women in the Moorhead Woman's Club and similar clubs, schools, national forests, and libraries were established and were improved greatly at a time when the Industrial Revolution would have left them in the dust otherwise.

In a time when women were expected to stay at home and care for families, the Moorhead women used a maternalistic argument to step outside the norm and to impact society. As social, political, and economic problems of the Progressive Era became evident, the members

¹Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893. Records (MSS S2687) Northwest Minnesota Historical Center, Minnesota State University.

turned from self-improvement to reform. They worked at the local level, national, and even international level. Club women nationwide undertook research, instigated and ran social programs, and lobbied for legislation to address a countless number of social problems. Some women's clubs opened private libraries, which local governments took over.² Ladies' literary societies started appearing across the country. These clubs became educational spaces. Clubs also furthered national political action.³ Club women at the local level stressed the significance of books. For example one of the original sponsored projects the federations took upon themselves was the formations of traveling libraries to create communities with literature. Club members also created makeshift libraries in schools, churches, and town halls, allowing for a vast amount of materials.⁴ Libraries were important to the community for education for literacy for both adults and children. The public had no access to free books before the introduction of traveling libraries and public libraries.

In addition to self-improvement and education, female activists, mostly from middle class and prosperous backgrounds, used clubs to try to fix many of the social problems that arose during the end of the nineteenth century. With women on the front lines understanding more about the family structure, it made them better equipped to deal with public health and safety, child labor, and women's work under harsh conditions. Female social reformers between 1890 and World War 1 formed new places for themselves before they even had the right to vote. Temperance, abolition, and moral reform activities were strong in women's politics even before

² "Reforming Their World: Women in the Progressive Era." National Women's History Museum. Accessed August 09, 2017. <https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/progressiveera/introclubwomen.html>.

³ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. (University of Illinois Press, 1993) 117.

⁴ Karen Blair, *The Club Woman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), 100.

the Civil War. Organizing in church groups, women had tackled similar problems in the past. By the 1870s, women expanded their influence, forming and working in national groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The Progressive era led to many women (and men) seeking to fix problems and implement change and moral reform.⁵

When World War I and II came about, women strove to take up extra work while men were fighting. Club members joined the Red Cross, created Victory Gardens, and helped with the sales and purchase of Liberty Bonds. Not only did club members help by securing funds and food during the war, women specifically in the Moorhead Women's Club became politically active by campaigning for peace and presenting lectures on various war-time conferences.

Scholarly work in the field of women's history during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is still emerging. My work reinforces this scholarship by arguing how club women, while adhering to their traditional roles as respectable middle class women, worked their way into the public and political sphere to change their community. Looking at various works, women's historians' viewpoints and arguments show how women sought change and sought to fill the gap and will continue to be helpful for future scholarship. One of the most influential works is that of Jane Croly, the founder of the first woman's club in America. Croly wrote a book on her own account of the club she started, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*.⁶ This work is vital to the growth and knowledge of the club movement in the United States, describing how the movement started, the leading women, and the ways they acted.

⁵Miriam Cohen, "Women and the Progressive Movement." *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, 2012. Accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/politicsreform/essays/women-and-progressive-movement>

⁶Jane Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*. General Federation of Woman's Club of America (Boston, Massachusetts: H.G. Allen & Company, 1898).

More recent scholars such as Karen Blair and Kathy Peiss utilized Croly's work in their own research and expanded upon it. In *The Club Woman as Feminist*, Blair covers women's clubs of the nineteenth and twentieth century and presents a part of women's history that has often been overrun by suffragists. She demonstrates how the club movement grew among women from an awareness of the power for gaining autonomy through collective action and shows how they gained skills such as speaking in a public forum. While her work is extremely helpful, she makes a connection between the establishments of women's clubs with the suffragist movement. However, not all club women were suffragists, so this thought conflates club women and suffragists. Other avenues to explore would be their relationship to each other, as some suffragists were club women, and while some club women were suffragists, not all could be put into that category.⁷

In *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York*, Peiss explores the working class women in society and how they encountered resistance when engaging in leisure time. Focusing on women in the nineteenth century having to coordinate their leisure activities into respectable recreation, from dance halls to other social events, Peiss uses case studies and documents how women spent their free time, including when and how women organized into clubs. Peiss helped to look into how society and men viewed women going out into the public sphere and engaging in new activities. Peiss shows how women were treated leaving the household and creating their own autonomy out of the private sphere. The work also shows what obstacles club women faced and how they learned to overcome these difficulties with education and community involvement.

⁷Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980).

In *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Alice Kessler-Harris presents the history of working women and their fight for wage equality and how the women of the middle class worked together to reform their lives during the Progressive Era. This work helped to describe the roles of middle class women and how it shifted when women who were once homemakers, entered into the workforce, and how they fought against women's inferior roles in society.⁸

For the history of libraries and the Moorhead's Club impact on the first public library in Moorhead, Terry Shoptaugh's "A Look at Women from Our Past and the Moorhead Public Library", proved a vital source in providing evidence of how women in the area worked together to get a library for the community. Other sources that proved vital as research included the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) Archives and the Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) archives; including the Minnesota Federation of Women's Club collection at MNHS and the Moorhead Federated Women's Club collection from MSUM. These collections contained primary sources pertaining to women's clubs influence on libraries and the growth of libraries due to women participating in legislative roles. These works brought insight into how club women were the leading force in the spread of public libraries.⁹

The organization of the thesis focuses around the life cycle of the Woman's Club. Starting with the founding of the first Woman's Club in America then going into their activism and values. The aim is to illustrate how the Moorhead Woman's Club came together to promote

⁸Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁹Terry Shoptaugh, "A Look at Women from Our Past and the Moorhead Public Library". Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (MSS S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

education amongst middle-class women but then expands by examining their involvement in civic engagements and lastly how their studies helped them in their future political roles.

Chapter 1 will demonstrate the founding and history of the Woman's Club movement, showing how the first woman's club in America set the prerequisites for future clubs including Moorhead. In addition, the chapter will cover Moorhead citizen Sarah Comstock's significance in that she was a leading figure in the formation of the club, showing the activities of the group, focusing on them as public servants, their work for the schools, and their outreach accomplishments in the communities.

Chapter 2 will illustrate Comstock's role in establishing and utilizing Moorhead's first public library, not only for the benefit of club purposes, but for the betterment of the community. This chapter will also cover the history of public libraries in Minnesota, as a majority of them developed on behalf of women's clubs in the area. This chapter will also cover the many civic engagements in which the Moorhead Club participated in and ran.

Chapter 3 will show the Moorhead Club Women's travels, ranging from Egypt, Panama, South America, Japan, and Russia. These travels helped them to learn more about other people's languages, culture, and civilization. Before they went on trips, they brought in guest lecturers to their meetings, learned about art before and during their travels, and wrote papers on their experiences and on what they learned. Chapter 3 will also shed light on how the club women became active in the war efforts during both the world wars and how the Moorhead group took up political action for peace.

The efforts that club women made nationally in history have affected so many aspects of life. From how childhood education developed, the spread of public libraries, the preservation of national forests and reservations, to the growth of other club women and how women today are

active in community projects and politics, whether the club started for literary purposes or study, women's clubs across America made significant impacts on how life is today.

CHAPTER 1: THE ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S CLUBS

“Many of our sex had their misgivings as to the propriety of women banding themselves together to do work outside the home. I remember reading of the organization of one club where the subject put down for the first meetings was: ‘In order to be a good housekeeper, is it necessary to devote one’s entire time to it?’”¹ Sarah Comstock, Moorhead Woman’s Club.

Attempting to access a better education and inform other women of history, culture, and current events, the Moorhead Woman’s Club created an impactful organization in what was considered a tent town (1871-1880s). Once women’s clubs started blooming, each formulated its own ideas and strengths, while as a whole focused on the spread of education and raising women’s morals. In Moorhead, Minnesota the women thrived in the area of educational programing, aiming to advance the education of its members and the community in the late 19th century. The members took advantage of the resources available to them, including local colleges, bringing in professors to speak at their meetings and creating the first public library for their town. The Moorhead Woman’s Club formed to make more out of their leisure time and to become more informed about their community.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, middle class women formed many social clubs. The women’s club movement originated at a pivotal time in history; new towns were emerging and others growing. Women of the time were expected by society to find fulfillment through motherhood, and clubwomen were unlikely to have completed professional training or higher

¹ Medal Award is Honor to Late Mrs. Comstock, Moorhead Federated Woman’s Club. (MSS S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

education.² Women's sociability focused on the family; a difference between public and private aspects of leisure did not yet exist. Women's social lives consisted of church organizations and services. Men spent time at the saloons, which caused problems for married women whose husbands spent all the earned income on alcohol. Women in the 1820s, with the help of organizations, voiced their opposition to men using up their wages in saloons instead of helping the household expenses. Women joined clubs from the desire to form connections with friends sharing the same interest, to a passion for local, national, and international interests.³ At first, the women's clubs' desire for self-improvement was met by resistance and disdain. Men like Thomas Macbride, author of "Culture and Woman's Clubs; An Address before the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, Minneapolis", argues that "There was...no place for such a thing as a woman's club; such had no aim or excuse for existence. Women, knowing nothing of parliamentary law, could not govern themselves, or accomplish anything worthwhile even if they wanted to".⁴ Ideas like this drove club women into action to have their clubs taken as seriously as men's. While women previously dominated church organizations, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, they started forming new groups and implementing rules and procedures for more autonomy in the public sphere.

Social clubs were often called "pleasure clubs" by members to differentiate them from the serious benefit societies. Pleasure clubs were societies that began with the idea to have mixed gendered activities such as dances and social gatherings. They were a place where working

² Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986), 27, 60.

³ By-Laws and Hand Book ca. 1962. (152.H.5.10(F) 12/16/17) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴ Thomas, Macbride, *Culture and Women's Clubs; An Address before the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, Minneapolis 1848-1934* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1916).

women could go to after their shifts. They were chaperoned as dance halls were not seen by others as a respectable place for young women to spend their time. For women desiring to go out in public, it looked better for them to go out in a crowd than to go alone. Moreover, social clubs and women's organizations became safer places for women and girls, rather than exploring the town alone. Women's organizations engaged in more social activities at their founding, and according to Peiss, did nothing for the study of their own wage conditions at all, but to sponsor social gatherings for themselves, and to hold dances and picnics.⁵ These organizations helped women to get out of the home and workplace, to find new leisure activities and meet people.

Jane Cunningham Croly founded the first women's club in America and was a vital figure in the woman's club movement. Croly, born in Leicestershire, England in 1829, emigrated to New York State in 1841, attended public school and later taught while also undertaking domestic work in Massachusetts. She wrote a women's column for various newspapers and married David Goodman Croly, a staff member on the *New York Herald*, later the *New York World*.⁶ Croly recognized two separate spheres in America, the public and private, and wrote against women's exclusion from the public realm.⁷ To end the problem women must take control of their own lives and work together to demand changes they wished. Croly's outspokenness and intelligence led to her successfully founding the women's clubs movement in America. Clubs

⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986), 60-61.

⁶ Karen Blair, *The Club Woman as Feminist* (New York: Homes & Meier, 1980), 15, 16.

⁷ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860". *American Quarterly Vol 18 No. 2 part 1* (summer, 1966), pp 151-174. Women were told not to let their literary or educational activities take them away from god, as religion was valued because it did not take women away from her proper sphere, her home. For more information on the ideal of separate spheres, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

served as a meeting place for discussion on women's perceptions of personal and social problems and a way for women to leave the private domestic sphere.⁸

Croly created Sorosis in New York. Sorosis was a group of women focused on education and social activities, with the idea that anything that helped women benefitted everyone. The first meeting of the club occurred at Delmonico's Restaurant, April 13, 1868. The meeting place of the club is important because obtaining a meeting at Delmonico's was a major test for a woman.⁹ For a woman to obtain a reservation or a meeting at Delmonico's was not very common, as women did not have access to reserving high class restaurants at the time; this action shows women's organizations making changes in social dynamics by branching out in the public sphere, claiming public spaces for women too.

Sorosis' activities were described by many women involved as intellectual, social, and educational. Members were comprised of artists, authors, teachers, and business women. At first Sorosis denied working on charitable projects, instead intending the club for education and awareness. However, the club participated in welfare work such as contributing to the Children's Aid Society, the Working Woman's Protective Union, and the Hampton Institute.¹⁰ Sorosis sought to enhance the condition of working women in New York City. Jane Croly urged better treatment of female workers and better working conditions and fought for women to have autonomy in the workplace.¹¹

⁸ Karen Blair, 17, 19.

⁹ Karen Blair, 20.

¹⁰ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (University of Illinois Press, 1993), 117.

¹¹ Thomas Macbride, *Culture and Women's Clubs: An Address before the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, Minneapolis 1848-1934* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1916), 13.

Since at the beginning of the club, members refused to align with specific concerns, the public questioned the club's altruism. Newspapers such as the *New York World* where Croly's husband worked gave the club members' bad press. *Harper's Weekly*, for example, mocked women for leaving the home for a few hours a month by showing cartoons of the husbands taking over domestic duties.¹² The organization of women was regarded by some as a danger to the traditional gender order and the family. The image below is a cartoon created by Charles Bush and printed in *Harper's Weekly*. Titled "Sorosis, 1869," Bush's drawing illustrates a meeting of Sorosis in a drastic way displaying the change of gender roles of men and women.¹³ In the cartoon women have a political voice and seem to debate while reading newspapers. The cartoon tries to lead people to believe that if women enter into the public sphere and have a voice, men will be stuck at home caring for the children; thereby, the traditional gender roles would switch.

¹² Karen Blair, *The Club Woman as Feminist* (New York: Homes & Meier, 1980), 24, 25.

¹³ Robert C. Kennedy, "Sorosis, 1869 Artist: Charles G. Bush," *The New York Times Co. and Harp Week*. 2010.



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Figure 1. *Harpers Weekly* “Sorosis, 1869”

Women and women’s organizations also worked on behalf of many social and reform issues. By the beginning of the twentieth century, women’s clubs in towns and cities across the nation were working to promote better schools for children, promote suffrage for women, and encourage prohibition. By 1906, there were over 5,000 women’s clubs in existence. Many clubs met in parlors, churches, and other meeting houses across the country; these clubs were mostly dedicated to self-improvement and cultural events. Members of the clubs read books, listened to lectures, and housed musical events.¹⁵

Sorosis and the idea of women’s clubs spread when members of the group moved to a new town, or when a visitor came and shared the ideas with others. Sorosis’ meetings in 1873 led to the permanent group, the Association for the Advancement of Women (AAW). They based their approach around the public housekeeping model. However, at some points they seem to push a little further. Maria Mitchell, a founder of the AAW and president in 1875, founded its

¹⁴ Charles G. Bush, “Sorosis, 1869,” *Harpers Weekly*. May 15, 1869.

¹⁵ “Introduction to Women in the Progressive Era” *National Women’s History Museum* October 9, 2016.

Science Committee and wrote a paper, *The Need for Women in Science*. In the paper she questions whether or not women have had their chance to show their skills in science, arguing that women needed to have the same opportunities as men in academia.¹⁶ The goal of AAW aimed to secure for women higher intellectual, moral, and physical conditions. In addition, AAW meetings helped the continuous spread of the women's clubs by engaging women of different backgrounds and class over the United States.¹⁷

Club women set out to provide help for people in trouble. The desire to do good was a motivation, and women were seen as helping fix and clean up society. Benevolent women focused their spiritual and intellectual improvement on helping people in poverty, advancing education to areas and those without, and bettering the community. An increasing number of women were gaining education and developing a desire to learn more, while some young women entered into female seminaries, their female relatives and married friends created benevolent societies as educational institutions for themselves.¹⁸ These societies, intended for self-improvement and self-education, felt it was their duty to improve themselves with an agenda of carrying out community responsibilities. Women's organizations across the states had similarities; while they may not have the same goals, many had written constitutions with rules about meetings, uses of money, and qualifications for potential charities.¹⁹ Benevolent women took their domestic habits and used them in the public sphere. They sewed and knitted for the poor, tried to cure bad habits such as drinking, and concentrated efforts on children.²⁰

¹⁶ JD Thomas, "The Association for the Advancement of Women in 1896," November 19, 2014. *Accessible Archives*.

¹⁷ Ann Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. 118.

¹⁸ Ann Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. 80.

¹⁹ 20 Years of Club Progress 1893-1913. Moorhead Woman's Club Histories (MSS S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

²⁰ Ann Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. 15.

In the development of the structure of clubs, many women had to take on new roles to be taken seriously in the community. In 1882, the Indianapolis Woman's Club thought of a cooperative program to offer the conversation of constitutions and ideas. At first, no change occurred; however, during the 20th anniversary of Sorosis, a committee sent letters over the country, trying to gather support from other club women to form a federation. A year later the federation held the first of the biennial conventions that "...became a major source of communication among women...to exchange ideas".²¹ Women from all over could help in the organization and program of events in this club. If a club in a small town made an impact on their community or ran a program that became popular, they could share it with the federation, which would send out information in their newsletters. This networking also helped in finding ways to gain new members and creating more clubs. In 1890, Croly formed the General Federation of Women's Clubs, bringing literary and social clubs together in a national association. After this, state federations started forming that allowed the many clubs to collaborate, cooperate, and help in the coordination of civic projects.²²

Encouraged by the national General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), local women's clubs sought to learn and discuss the problems of the urbanizing society.²³ The General Federation of Women's Clubs was a place for the various women's clubs to work together. Sixty-six clubs initially formed the federation in 1890. According to Sarah Comstock, a charter member of the Moorhead's Woman's Club, Sorosis and the New England Women's Club exerted a great influence on the woman movement of the whole country, more than any other

²¹ Anne Firor Scott, 126.

²² Karen Blair, 96.

²³ Miriam Cohen.

club ever did.²⁴ The General Federation of Women's Clubs had specific rules for their clubs, and some states required the same qualifications for membership: that a club must not be a secret society, must not require political tests for membership, and must contain nothing in its constitution that contradicts the United States Constitution.²⁵

In 1894 federation was discussed for the state of Minnesota. The President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs came to Minneapolis to meet with the presidents of the woman's clubs in Minnesota to begin the process of forming a state federation. The General Federation became so large that individual representation of the clubs became almost impossible. Meetings of the State Federations would be annual and compare methods of work and gather inspiration.²⁶ The Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs organized in 1895 with Margaret Evans as the first state president. The purpose according to Evans "...shall be to effect a permanent affiliation of the women's clubs of the state of Minnesota, for the promotion of science, literature and the arts, and for the betterment of the social, moral and education conditions of Minnesota and elsewhere".²⁷ This promotion led to not only having learned professors from the local colleges speak to the club women, but educating the women during meetings of current events, distant cultures and customs, and politics. This education and the fact that women learned to speak up in meetings about their thoughts and what they learned, helped them become better members of the

²⁴ 20 Years of Club Progress 1893-1913. Moorhead Woman's Club Histories (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

²⁵The Minnesota Club Woman 1926-1928, (152.H.6.4F) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁶ Beginnings of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs-Mrs. H.N.M. Kusick, Historian, 1904-1915. (142.F.16.1B MNHS 12/15/17) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁷ By-Laws and Hand Book ca. 1962. 1(52.H.5.10 (F) 12/16/17) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society

community. Their public speaking ability also helped during World War II when the club began their political talks on peace and the members increased their public speaking.

The Woman's Club of Fargo formed in January of 1884 as the first women's club in North Dakota and demonstrates how the influence of the Sorosis club was vital to the growth of women's organizations around the country. The Woman's club of Fargo established itself under the direction of a woman from New Jersey, who belonged to the Orange Club in the state, which followed in the direction of Sorosis. In the beginnings of the Fargo club, members often referred to their club as the daughter of the New Jersey Orange Club.²⁸ The Fargo club acted primarily as a study club but also took part in community projects. Club members were assigned topics from the program committee, which they researched themselves, and reading the papers at the meetings. In the beginning, the club studied English and American history and literature; after about 1900, the women studied topics of the day, such as women's suffrage, temperance, and world politics.²⁹ Several women from Moorhead participated in the Fargo club, becoming interested in the work conducted and desiring a club in their own town.³⁰

Before the Women's Club came about in Moorhead, a group of local women joined together called the Ladies Benevolent Society, in which women worked together on issues important to them and the community.³¹ Moorhead in the late nineteenth century developed into a disheveled town. Saloons took over and many men spent the majority of their time and income

²⁸ Moorhead Woman's Club. Histories- loose copies, 1893-1913, 1943-1948. (MSS S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

²⁹ Women's Club of Fargo Records, (MS 47) Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

³⁰ Moorhead Woman's Club. Histories- loose copies, 1893-1913, 1943-1948. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³¹ For more information on benevolent societies, see Lori A. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. (Yale University Press, 1990).

on alcohol, leaving their families in shambles. Other men left to work on the railroads, and many disappeared, also leaving their families without any income support. The Benevolent Society worked to find ways to provide aid to the temporarily distressed and destitute.³² They provided shoes and clothing to allow children of poor families to attend public schools in 1872. In addition, the women worked with the public schools to distribute provisions to twenty needy families during the holidays.³³

The Ladies Benevolent Society was more focused on charities for children and the poor than on self-education and betterment of society. A member of the society is quoted, during a spotlight column in the *Moorhead Daily News*: “To those who think this society is mainly for the purpose of providing dainties for the sick we can say that dainties, when given, are taken from the private supplies of the members, never purchased with the money belonging to the society, fuel is occasionally given in sickness but butter and sugar are stricken from our list.”³⁴ This comment examines the inside of the society and their priorities for those in need. While many women were satisfied remaining in the restrictions of the benevolent societies, eventually some women expanded their efforts to engage in more community and educational endeavors working with the larger society.

The Moorhead Club grew in part from the Fargo Club but also due to a vital family in the community. Sarah Comstock, the wife of Solomon Comstock a pioneer of Moorhead was a key member in creating the Moorhead Woman’s Club. Comstock had been involved in collecting materials for display at the Congress of Women Pavilion, a part of the 1893 World’s Fair. The

³² Looking back: Spotlight on past Benevolent Society. *Moorhead Daily News*, January 14, 1897. Microfilm.

³³ *Moorhead Daily News*, January 14, 1897. Microfilm.

³⁴ Looking back: Spotlight on past Benevolent Society. *Moorhead Daily News*, January 14, 1897. Microfilm.

success of the Congress of Women, in which thousands gathered to discuss the progress of women's scholarship and learning, inspired her to propose that the leading women of Moorhead form a permanent literary club of their own. A group of Moorhead women also active in collecting materials for the World's Fair in Chicago met to discuss the idea of continuing this association. The idea of forming a club was well received, many with associations to the Normal School (a teaching college in Moorhead); Mary Lord and Louise McClintock Kurtz were interested in continuing the group; both taught at the Normal School in Moorhead.³⁵ Members of the Fargo Women's Club had an idea that Moorhead might be a promising plan for a comparable project. Accordingly, the women started to plan their committee. The women's club decided at the first meeting an organization should emerge. Therefore, they appointed a chairwoman, Mary K. MacKall to draft a constitution and by-laws. MacKall drew up the constitution, and on September 22, 1893, the first regular meeting of the Moorhead Woman's Club occurred.³⁶

Active members in the Moorhead Club had certain responsibilities, such as preparing their papers by program committee, attending club meetings regularly, and serving as officers. Over 200 names appeared on the membership rolls between 1893 and 1940. For many years, meetings were held twice a month, on Friday afternoons in the homes of the members. Later meetings were only held once a month. According to the constitution, it was strictly a study club, not a social club. These meetings excluded "handwork" and lunch. These qualities made the club

³⁵ Terry Shoptaugh, "A Look at Women from Our Past and the Moorhead Public Library". Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³⁶Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893 (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

different than other study clubs around the nation.³⁷ Many clubs, such as the Benevolent Societies, allowed women tea and lunch during their meetings, and social clubs allowed women to knit during discussion. By distinguishing themselves from benevolent and social societies, Moorhead women sought to appear more professional.

The Moorhead women were serious about the educational work to which they committed themselves. The women sought to educate themselves on different cultures, politics, and the arts. While doing so, they also sought to use what they learned to help the community. They considered handwork a distraction to the program in meetings. The club treasurer kept records of monetary accounts, dues, and printings done for the club. Frequently purchased, according to their records books, were Moorhead newspapers to keep up with current events of local and national trends. The club members voted on officers and created specialized committees for their group. Amongst those in their organization, the members voted on a president, vice president, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, and a treasurer. Presidential duties included attendance for all meetings and writing a review of the year's work to present at the annual meeting. The Recording Secretary duties included keeping minutes of each meeting, roll call, and creating a report for the annual meeting.³⁸ The absence from three consecutive meetings meant that the member had their membership revoked.

For specialized committees in charge of events, the club started with a program committee of three members, and during the war years, and Red Cross committee. The club constructed their meetings around a schedule. For each meeting, members researched and

³⁷Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893 (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead. Box 1. In the meeting minutes and correspondence, the club uses the term "literary" and "study" club.

³⁸ Yearbooks 1894-1985. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

discussed current events, and then selected members rotated on discussions of specific places or pieces of literature. For example, from September 1893 to May 1894, one to three members discussed a part of Egypt's history, from government and customs to myths, languages, and art.³⁹ Their study included topics such as music, national and international history, government, and education, the status of women, literature, and religion. The order of meetings, according to the yearbook of 1894, occurred as the president calling the meeting to order, roll call, the reading of the previous minutes, general business reports, election of new members, and communications. Then the discussion of current events was followed by book reviews of recent books, and the regular program, with a discussion following each paper.⁴⁰

The Moorhead Woman's Club joined the Minnesota Federated Women's Club in 1893. According to the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, "... with federation the development of isolated clubs is no longer limited to the intellectual scope of their community but brought in contact with clubs of higher importance and broader work. The clubs can share and distribute ideas and achievements and work towards a common goal."⁴¹ The Federation worked with smaller clubs, held annual meetings and sent out programs regularly. Individual membership in the General Federation brought benefits to the club such as committee reports, suggestions, advice on gaining membership, and copies of the biannual reports.⁴² The General Federation also had the power to make effective national issues, such as environmental care, and wartime tasks.

³⁹Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893, 1893 Yearbook (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁴⁰ Yearbooks 1894-1985. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁴¹Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893 (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁴² "The Courant" – Why Clubs Should Federate. Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs-Federation Records, 1894-1998. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

After joining the Federation, the Moorhead Women's Club started to engage with causes throughout the state and their community, of which were a part of the Federation's platform of national issues more so than in the past. During the establishment of the Chippewa National Forest, for example, local club members of Moorhead were involved in the planning stages to make sure this important forest was preserved for future generations. The Minnesota Federation strove to hold parks and natural resources as a priority for the clubs. Parks and forests played a central role in many Minnesota families' leisure time, so protecting them became a long-term program for the members. The club was also very involved in wartime tasks such as selling liberty loans and raising money for the Red Cross. They even took things one step farther by sending delegates to the Dumbarton Oaks Conference during World War II in Washington to meet with world leaders and the United Nations to negotiate peace. The club members attended and advocated directly for peace. Literacy was also a crucial part of their platform and the Moorhead Woman's club was right there advocating for the building of Moorhead's first public library.

Sarah Comstock, a prominent and original member of the club and a charter member for 32 years, served as the first vice-president. Comstock herself advocated for the creation of a woman's club in Moorhead. Born in 1844 as Sarah Ball in Canada, Sarah married Solomon Comstock on the 27th of May in 1874. Together they had three children, Ada, Jessie, and George. Before her marriage, she was a school teacher. Resigning as the vice-president in 1897, she remained as a regular member in the club until her death in 1941.⁴³

⁴³Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Comstock would have been awarded the Pioneer Clubwoman medal. Her name was submitted to the General Federation through the district and state channels. This custom began in 1939 to name a Pioneer Woman of the Federation as a feature of the celebration of the golden jubilee anniversary of the General Federation. Comstock, living at the time, entered into two classifications in the district contest; the living member who had given the longest continuous service, and the living member with the most outstanding record of leadership in the club. The Minnesota State Federation had awarded the Pioneer Club Women's medal to Comstock for the longest active service in the 9th District, but the medal was given to Jessie Comstock as the representative of the family. Sarah Comstock was a vital member of the club, one of the starter members, and one who traveled to the different countries, and wrote papers on her travels as well.⁴⁴ Sarah was active in formulating the state constitution and by-laws; she was very involved with the club.

Women's social clubs proliferated the nineteenth century. Even though each club had its own personalities and environmental influences, they shared goals of intellectual improvement and mental cultivation. However, in Moorhead, the club differed in how they conducted themselves. While arguing that their club strove for self-education as a study club, the way that the club manifested itself came from the urge to not only learn but to help out their own community. Their involvement in civic engagements under Sarah Comstock's leadership reflected the movement in a new light. While most of the clubs generated at the time were considered social clubs, the Moorhead club remained preeminently a study club. The organization had many community and nationwide interests. With its continued service in

⁴⁴Medal Award is Honor to Late Mrs. Comstock. (S2697) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

keeping the Public Library Reading Room open on Sunday afternoons, in addition the club had contributed to the purchase of books needed for a club study. The club strove to learn and educate themselves and to add women of the community to their club. There was never a time when there was a vacancy in their group. It was always full, and they were always on the move. A quote from one of their record books illustrates this point: “Busy housewives might come and give and receive mental stimulus and forget home care and such it remains a study club.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ 20 Years of Club Progress 1893-1913. (2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

“Under the head of ‘Civics’ there is almost no limit to the work done by Clubs and Federations, in beautifying streets, in studying and carrying out sanitary measures, in establishing parks and municipal play grounds, in preserving sacred historical spots and natural glories”.¹

The Moorhead Woman’s Club members sought to better their community and impact the educational lives of women.² Sarah Comstock claimed they were strictly a study club, but their own members’ activities and papers contradicted that. While emphasizing education, the club also engaged in reform efforts. For instance, a Mrs. W.B. Douglas of Moorhead wrote and presented a paper on “Civic and Current Events in the Club” where she showed that women were progressing with great strides in this development during the past few years. She expressed that a woman now who could not discuss intellectually the current topics of the day would be a rare exception.³ The club strove for more than just personal enrichment.

Nationally, Women’s Social Clubs tended to be social spaces where women could not escape the complete domestic life but could exercise more influence in public. While most of the activities for clubs were considered domestic to maintain their gender roles, the Moorhead Woman’s Club with their charter member Sarah Comstock was not afraid of pushing the boundary of public housekeeping. This “housekeeping” included members lobbying for

¹ Sarah Platt Decker, *The Meaning of the Woman’s Club Movement*. The Annuals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Woman’s Work and Organizations. Vol 28. (Sept 1906), 3.

² An Interesting Session Oct 6, 1896. Beginnings of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women’s Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

³ Moorhead Federated Women’s Club 1893. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

legislative changes and seeking out funding for community projects. As social, political, and economic problems of the Progressive Era became clear, the members turned from self-improvement to reform efforts. They, like other Progressives, looked first at the local level and then expanded their efforts to the state and national level.⁴ Women undertook research, initiated, and ran civically minded programs, and lobbied for legislation to discuss many social problems that were plaguing American society.⁵

National women's associations strove to create programs for the benefit of women and children. With the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, the first major item introduced was a bill to establish joint federal-state programs of prenatal care and medical attention for babies in an attempt to decrease the high maternal and infant mortality rate.⁶ The bill was called the Shepard-Towner Act, and was the first federal welfare program supporting public health nursing for mothers and infants. The idea for this act came out of the Women's City Club of New York City in 1917 when they opened a maternity center in Hell's Kitchen neighborhood where they provided prenatal nursing care and educational programs for new mothers. It expanded to ten locations in Manhattan, and their effort served as a model for the bill that became the Sheppard-Towner Act.⁷ Similarly, Ninth District in Moorhead through the clubs supported the "Mothercraft" work started by the new child hygiene department of the Minnesota State Board of Health, a project under the Sheppard-Towner law. This activity set the tone so that the district would

⁴ For more information on grass roots Progressive movements look at, Michael McGirr, *A Fierce Discontent; The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America 1870-1920*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

⁵ Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁶ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pg. 172.

⁷ Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*. (New York: The Free Press, 1994). 69, 74.

support any movement that led toward the betterment of humanity.⁸ On the legislative committee, chairwoman Florence Bramhall outlined the work on the memorial to Congress asking that Indian lands in the national park reservation be withheld from public sale.⁹

Club women were interested in Minnesota's natural resources and strove to make changes for safeguarding reservations and natural lands. Mrs. E.M. La Penticre, president of the Minnesota Federation, addressed an open letter to J.W. Cooper of St. Paul, stating that the club women were interested in a solution to the Chippewa Reservation Problem. The letter also announced that the club women of the state deserved to be heard. From 1905 most of the 750,000 acres of White Earth Reservation in northwest Minnesota belonged to members of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Over the next few years most of the land was lost to non-Indian peoples. Timber companies sought to log the reservations forests, farmers demanded a share of the Red River Valley soil, and land speculators saw the properties market value and banks sought to expand their businesses. The law and Congress favored non-Indian peoples, and non-Indian groups came to think that destroying tribal authority and encouraging private ownership of reservation lands would be beneficial for Indian peoples. The club women wanted to help to establish permanent lands for native peoples and to save the environment. The Federation of Minnesota, composed of more than 7,000 clubwomen in the state, worked over three years until 1904 to secure the best method of opening government lands.¹⁰ From 1916-1920 the Federation

⁸Course Catalog for Moorhead Courses (MSS 185) Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives, Moorhead, Minnesota.

⁹Woman's Busy- State Federation Hears Reports, Addresses and Discussions. The State Fair Headquarters, 1902. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁰ Clubwomen Ask for a Hearing-Want to Define Position of Forest Park Question, 1902. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

noticed careless use, destruction, and depletion of the natural resources. Lumber companies chewed off a large amount of timber, and power companies changed the course of the water ways with little regard for life wild as well as human. MFWC demanded that the care of the state forests fall under the care of the State Forester, not the state surveyor.¹¹

The club women thought that forests and parks were important for the state, home to different animal species and wildlife and maintaining the ecosystem. In addition, the parks and forests are a place for families to visit in their leisure time. The Federation strongly committed to the promotion of forestry and proposed a national park plan. This plan received respectful consideration from all over the country. Some of that work concentrated on trying to preserve the pines. The MFWC considered the establishment of the proposed forest park of vital importance to the state of Minnesota and asked for the members of Congress to grant the state of Minnesota the land known as the Chippewa Indian Reservation as a national forest park.¹² Harming the forests meant harming one of the few places where families could go to enjoy nature in its pristine state. An alarming devastation of forests led to the women rallying together to help with forest conservation. The destruction of forest fires of 1910, a very dry year in Minnesota, threw the state into an uproar over the pending Forest Budget Cut Bill in the National Senate. The cut, which was recommended in Washington, was for \$1 million. However, so much pressure had been brought to bear that the proposed cut of \$1 million reduced to \$500,000.¹³

¹¹MFWC Federation Records, 1894-1998. (152.H.5.10(F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹²Woman Favor Park- State Federation Unanimously Indorses. Beginnings of the MN Federation of Woman's Clubs. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹³ MFWC Federation Records, 1894-1998. (152.H.5.10(F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

According to the Annual Convention of the 9th District Federation of the Women's Clubs, women sought to endorse both protecting natural resources in the area and the aiding in the education of children. This endorsement meant enacting a conservation plan for the Natural Resources protecting against the construction of dams in any of the International Boundary waters.¹⁴ The International Joint Commission considered an application to construct dams which would raise the levels of the lakes along the Northern Minnesota boundary from 5 to 82 feet in order to develop power for the lumber and paper pulp mills. The construction of the dams would submerge tracts of the Superior National Forest; therefore, the women's clubs protested against allowing such privileges to the lumber companies and power interests as they would destroy the heritage of the land and its people.¹⁵

Education was also a cause that was important to club women. Education in rural areas lacked proper buildings and standards for teaching children. Club members considered it important to endorse vocational education of boys and home training for girls before leaving the 8th grade and sent a copy of this resolution to each member of the state department of education.¹⁶ Women thought that education was important for their children, especially in rural areas where towns were growing, but change in educational standards had yet to adapt to the times. Many clubs in the nation were on education committees once pressured by the federation

¹⁴ Ninth District Federation of the MN State Federation of Women's Clubs, Box 2 Folder 3, 50th Anniversary History of the Ninth District. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives. Moorhead, Minnesota.

¹⁵ Protesting Dam Construction. (152.H.6.4F) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁶ Ninth District Federation of the MN State Federation of Women's Clubs, Box 2 Folder 3, 50th Anniversary History of the Ninth District. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives. Moorhead, Minnesota.

to enhance school conditions for children, demanding better heat, light, and ventilation.¹⁷ Children could not learn efficiently if they were distracted by the cold and sitting in bad learning conditions. Moreover, the women in the clubs sought that each county fostered child welfare work and requested a county school nurse for each county.¹⁸ At the 19th Annual Convention, the Federation of Women's Clubs in Fergus Falls gave a list of programs for consideration. Out of this list came a community-wide interest in women and children in industry. Speaker Florence Burton with the Department of Industry in Minneapolis gave a talk on club women in reconstruction service. She also discussed the reports of the State Departments of Arts, Civic, Civil Service, conservation, industrial and Social Conditions, including public health.¹⁹ The women they were most active in their home communities and strove to make an impact. This activity was municipal housekeeping, not women staying in the domestic sphere.²⁰

In addition, club women sought to get high school students involved in their community. They viewed natural resources as an important part of their day-to-day activities, to beautify parks, preserve the land, and keep it safe from industries. They did this by conducting the Conservation Essay contest, "Our Land," which was sponsored with the State Conservation department and the federated clubs. Several hundred essays were written by junior and senior high school students. Prizes were given out locally in the districts: a trip through the Minnesota

¹⁷ Karen, Blair, 101. For more information on the sanitarian movement look at, John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1992).

¹⁸ Ninth District Federation of the MN State Federation of Women's Clubs, Box 2 Folder 3, 50th Anniversary History of the Ninth District. HCSCC Archives. Moorhead, MN, January 17th, 2017.

¹⁹ Course Catalog for Moorhead Courses. Moorhead Women's Club. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives. Moorhead, Minnesota.

²⁰ Mary Ritter Beard claimed the term municipal housekeeping to describe the argument of women participation in social reform. For more information see, Mary R Beard, *Woman's Work in Municipalities*. (New York: London, 1915).

State Park area which the State Conservation Department presented to ten boys and ten girls who were winners in their districts.²¹

Women in the area were also concerned about drinking and the corruption it caused. In 19th century Moorhead, alcohol sales were the city's main industry.²² Women in the Fargo-Moorhead area were active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). "Women were natural recruits to the temperance cause. Beginning with their earliest efforts at benevolence, they had perceived three major causes of poverty: age, illness, and intemperance."²³ During meetings the women discussed and fought for a prohibition law. The first prohibition law in the Dakota Territory passed in 1885 and prohibited saloons within three miles of the State University in Vermillion. In 1887 a county local option law followed; then a statewide prohibition started in 1890 in North Dakota. The WCTU strove to end the saloon era and clean up the state with prohibition.²⁴ However, that did not stop people from seeking the drink completely. In 1893 members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union that were traveling for their cause were brutally beaten by liquor advocates in Rolag, North Dakota.²⁵

Many Fargo residents seeking liquor went across the river to Moorhead. In 1900 Moorhead had forty-seven saloons for the population of 3,732 people. While selling alcohol was illegal within North Dakota, the people of North Dakota could legally purchase alcohol in Minnesota. Moorhead quickly became one of the largest alcohol distribution centers for North

²¹ Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. (152.H.6.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

²² Markus Krueger, "Moorhead Prohibition". Lecture History on Tap, Moorhead, MN, 2018.

²³ Anne Firor Scott. *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. 44.

²⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, *The Story of Fifty Years*. North Dakota Woman's Temperance Union. Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo, ND.

²⁵ Ernest H. Charrington. *Anti-Saloon League Yearbook, 1910*. Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo, ND.

Dakotans. According to Moorhead Police records, nearly 75 percent of arrests in the early 1900s were alcohol related. Arrests increased during the harvest season as thousands of farm hands went to the city to spend their paychecks; while in town, they sometimes also fought and were mugged by local gangs. Moorhead was becoming a rough and wild town.²⁶

Laura Scherfenberg, a teacher at the Moorhead State Campus for over 25 years, educated people in Moorhead about the dangers of alcohol. An active member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Scherfenberg acknowledges the WCTU for her interest in public affairs and dedication to educating people. The WCTU was established in 1874 to "redeem society from the curse of intemperance,"²⁷ by persuading individuals to avoid alcohol and by working on prohibition legislation. Scherfenberg said that the group had difficulty being taken seriously: "People tend to think that we're a group of old ladies who meet to have coffee together and don't do much else."²⁸ This impression is inaccurate of the WCTU. The WCTU was the first group in America to warn others about smoking and its health hazards. They also took charge of campaigning against drug addiction decades before the government took serious notice of the problem.²⁹ The group traveled to various towns sharing the health issues and hazards.

The club women in Minnesota supported the General Federation's campaign to remove indecent and offensive literature from the newsstands. This practice was established as

²⁶ Kate Savageau, "Moorhead's Saloon Era, 1890–1915." MNopedia, Minnesota Historical Society. <http://www.mnopedia.org/event/moorhead-s-saloon-era-1890-1915> (accessed April 11, 2018).

²⁷ Elizabeth Anderson, *The Story of Fifty Years*. North Dakota Woman's Temperance Union. Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

²⁸ Terry Shoptaugh, "A Brief History of the Moorhead Women's Christian Temperance Union." Women's Christian Temperance Union F-M, 1912. (S4860) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

²⁹ Terry Shoptaugh, "A Brief History of the Moorhead Women's Christian Temperance Union." Women's Christian Temperance Union F-M, 1912. (S4860) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Suppression of Trade in, Circulation of Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use and similar pieces of legislation.³⁰ In addition, they worried about the fact that soft drinks served to children disguised look exactly like liquor and cocktails served to their parents and adult friends. Establishments served soft drinks in liquor or cocktail glasses with cherries. The club women thought that it was a moral issue and that they needed to protect children from instances where it could lead to increased delinquency. Saloons, especially in Moorhead, took over the district. Many people believed that drinking at the time led to violence, such as regular shootings in Moorhead, and for some, death.³¹ The women saw how liquor affected people and fought to prevent their children from starting to drink by attempting to avoid associating soft drinks with alcohol. They sought to pass in all Minnesota establishments the requirement that soft drinks be served in a water glass or paper cup without garnishments.³²

A WCTU chapter formed in Moorhead in 1880. Moorhead was known as the “wickedest city” on the frontier due to all the saloons that covered the city. In March of 1915 about 45 women gathered at the Moorhead Methodist Church to take action on the drinking problem. That May, voters could vote on a county option referendum to prohibit liquor sales in the county. In April 1915, the Moorhead WCTU conducted a meeting of about 150 citizens who favored the prohibition option. The women of the WCTU hoped that by closing down the saloons, they might at least make Moorhead a town to be proud of, a “better, wealthier, and more prosperous

³⁰ Started by the Comstock Law of 1873 which made it a crime to sell or distribute materials that contained obscenity or abortion that could obstruct public morals.

³¹Greg, Harness, “Solomon Gilman Comstock Portrait of a Pioneer.” Master’s Thesis, Minnesota State University, 1975. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead Minnesota.

³² MNFWC Federation Records, 1894-1998. (152.H.5.10(F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

city than it was when it had its full quota of saloons running full blast.”³³ May 17, 1915, Clay County became a dry county. A vote of 2,618 to 1,546 in favor of prohibition passed and the 31 saloons in Moorhead closed. After prohibition ended in 1937, Scherfenberg kept the group together and enacted new ways of furthering the WCTU’s campaign. She focused on reaching out to the younger generation by creating a yearly contest with school children to make posters warning about the effects of alcohol. She obtained films and literature from the Minnesota Department of Transportation and arranged for these to be in classrooms at teaching workshops.³⁴

Another civic goal of the Women’s Club of Moorhead was to bring the Women’s Club of the districts into communication for acquaintance and mutual helpfulness and the promotion of higher social and moral conditions, as well as to better inform the women of the community of Moorhead. An example of their civic work involved selling Christmas Seals. Christmas Seals started in the United States to combat tuberculosis;³⁵ stamps could sell for a penny each and the proceeds would go to the care of tuberculosis patients. American Red Cross Leader Emily Bissell designed the first Red Cross Christmas Seal. The Red Cross took part in the Christmas Seals program for the next few years rising more than \$15 million to combat tuberculosis. The club sponsored the Christmas Seals every year from 1908 to 1915 when another agency took it

³³ Terry Shoptaugh, “A Brief History of the Moorhead Women’s Christian Temperance Union.” Women’s Christian Temperance Union F-M, 1912. (S4860) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³⁴ Terry Shoptaugh, “A Brief History of the Moorhead Women’s Christian Temperance Union”. Women’s Christian Temperance Union F-M, 1912. (S4860) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³⁵ For more information see, Michael E. Teller, *The Tuberculosis Movement: A Public Health Campaign in the Progressive Era*. (Greenwood Press, 1988).

over. In 1919, The National Tuberculosis Association took over the program, and its successor, the American Lung Association, continues to sell Christmas Seals annually.

A different illustration of their civic work involved sending letters and committees to the City Council Members urging them to support the Club's issues, such as advocating for peace during wartime, creating a nurse home training task force during the war, and maintaining of a woman on the police force.³⁶ War was considered masculine while peace reflected feminine characteristics. Aggression was seen amongst men with the rise of a new masculinity. However peace was considered feminine and was within the women's realm.³⁷

Club women sought to better their communities by cleaning up their towns. Sanitation was poor in early Moorhead. Considered a tent town, Moorhead was a relatively new city where much of the people who lived there lived in tents, or other temporary structures. Saloons and crime dominated the area. Club women insisted on separate public washrooms for men and women in each town, including Moorhead. It was not until automobiles became popular that service stations included washrooms.³⁸ Clubwomen also aided in the establishment and beautifying of park areas, empty lots, and areas for children, giving children a safer place to play, instead of in open streets.

³⁶ "Moorhead Federated Women's Club 1893," (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³⁷For more information on masculinity see; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. University of Chicago Press, 1996. For more information on women and violence see, Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War; Iraq, Sex, and the Media*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For gendered ways of knowing see, Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. (Yale University Press, 1991).

³⁸ MFWC Federation Records, 1894-1998. (152.H.5.10(F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

The Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs helped to enact an 8-hour work day, the Workman's Compensation Act, the first federal Child Labor Law, and the Pure Food and Drug Act. Clubwomen worked to improve the political and social status of women, to promote better schools, raise educational standards and secure greater recognition of teachers.³⁹

The women pushed for children to stay active in school by creating essay contests and making the school rooms comfortable for learning. They sought to promote education, aiding in the transformation of tent and saloon towns to towns with established universities and welcoming communities. Many women's clubs even went as far as establishing libraries for their communities and towns so the average person would have the same opportunity to learn as others. The Minnesota club women fought to introduce a bill into legislature to propose that every town in Minnesota should have a circulating library. The club women believed in the huge influence a collection of books could bring to a community. The smaller the community, the more cut off from the usual avenues of improvement that are offered in a city through such opportunities as lectures. According to Minnesota club women, "...as an educative influence the Public Library is second only to the public school."⁴⁰ In Minnesota in 1896, there were only 16 free public libraries, apart from the city libraries. The proposed bill would provide for the formation of a State Circulating Library, in which any town in Minnesota could borrow 50-100 volumes at once.⁴¹ According to Sarah Comstock, "The proposed bill it seems to me that no

³⁹ Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴⁰ "A Bill to Establish a State Library Commission & a System of Traveling Libraries" 1896. Beginnings of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Club. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴¹ "A Bill to Establish a State Library Commission and a System of Travelling Libraries" 1896. Beginnings of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Club. Mrs. H.N.M. Kusick Historian. 1905-1915. (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

district in the state would reap a greater reward in its passage than our own, where there are so many small towns to be benefitted and I hope, by bringing it before the public in our newspapers, we may be able to arouse interest enough so that our legislatures will vote on the right side and give this additional educational advantage to the people of Minnesota.”⁴² Moorhead, being such a small town at the time, the idea of opening a public library would be a great improvement for educating the overall community.

Prior to the spread of public libraries in the United States, people looked for ways to access and discuss literature. During the Enlightenment these ideas came in the form of literary salons that gained favor in France and Italy. Salons were spaces for conversations about art, politics, and literature. Women, barred from formal learning spaces, read and shared their writing and debated. Decades later, libraries offered similar opportunities for women to enter the work force and academia in new ways. Private book clubs among prominent men formed into subscription libraries. These were funded by membership fees or donations, with collections available only to paying members.⁴³

In Pre-Revolutionary War America, books were hard to come by for anyone not wealthy or a member of the clergy. The expense and rarity of books meant that members of the middle or lower classes did not have access to ready material. Benjamin Franklin helped to play a role in the development of the first lending library. In 1790, Franklin donated a collection of books to a Massachusetts town, now called Franklin. Franklin residents voted for those donated books to be freely accessible for town members, creating the nation’s first public library. Public libraries

⁴² Moorhead Daily News, Thursday, February 4, 1897. HCSCC Archives.

⁴³ Brady, Hillary, and Franky Abbott. *A History of the US Public Libraries*. Digital Public Library of America. September 2015. <http://dp.la/exhibitions/exhibits/show/history-us-public-libraries>.

spread across the nation after the Civil War. The lending libraries were board-governed and tax funded, not operating under a subscription model. In addition, these lending libraries were open to all, not charging for their services, while focusing on the needs of the public.⁴⁴

A number of women from the prominent class volunteered their time at libraries. It was not until after 1900 that women would take control over the operational work in libraries. Women would still have to wait longer until they would have full administrative power and responsibility. In 1904, librarian Mary Cutler Fairchild found that the activity of women in the American Library Association (ALA), the first and largest library professional organization, was disproportionate to their attendance. Women outnumbered men in libraries, taking on a great portion of the administrative duties but claimed little administrative power. Nor did women hold positions offering high salaries, instead performing the same level of work for less pay.⁴⁵

By 1920 there were more than 3,500 public libraries in the United States. This rapid expansion, including the building of Moorhead's public library, can also be traced back to Andrew Carnegie who funded the libraries, and to the women's club who advocated for public libraries in their town. Carnegie's funding contributed to half of the 3,500 public libraries. Funding the building of 2,509 "Carnegie" libraries worldwide, from 1883 to 1929, 1,759 of these libraries were in the United States. Carnegie believed that the best gift he could give to a community was a free library. This gift was part of his belief in philanthropy, not welfare assistance, something he espoused in his *Gospel of Wealth*.⁴⁶ Carnegie requested that all public

⁴⁴ Brady, Hillary, and Franky Abbott. *A History of the US Public Libraries*. Digital Public Library of America. September 2015. <http://dp.la/exhibitions/exhibits/show/history-us-public-libraries>.

⁴⁵ Brady, Hillary, and Franky Abbott. *A History of the US Public Libraries*. Digital Public Library of America. September 2015. <http://dp.la/exhibitions/exhibits/show/history-us-public-libraries>.

⁴⁶ Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and other Timely Essays*. (N.Y: Century, 1900).

libraries be engraved with a rising sun and a quotation reading, "Let there be light." The first public library to open in the United States opened in Braddock, near Pittsburgh. After 1898, thanks in part to women's groups, like the Woman's Clubs, nationwide organizing established community and town libraries. Carnegie expanded his efforts throughout the country. Many towns, often led by woman clubs, sent requests for funding to Carnegie. Funding was in high demand, as few public libraries had actual space of their own. Carnegie started to lay down a curriculum to determine which of the many requests for funding he would see to. Instead of endowing libraries, Carnegie demanded that each town contribute 10% of the annual funding to its library, supply its own building site, and provide free service to the public.⁴⁷

Urbanization in the late 19th century meant that cities were more likely to fund libraries. However, this situation was not true for rural areas. Smaller towns away from cities did not have access to reading materials, so several General Federated Women Clubs (GFWC) made it their goal to address that. Club members sometimes packed books into trunks that had shelves and brought them to several communities. These traveling libraries were introduced in part to be helpful to smaller communities. The bookmobile introduced in Minnesota in 1899 was a popular and successful GFWC venture. Traveling libraries or book mobiles held 25-30 books which fit in a box that was delivered to surrounding communities. The GFWC members fundraised and lobbied for public funding so that libraries could get the support they needed. Another way GFWC members supported libraries was by forming Friends of the Library groups, a non-profit

⁴⁷ Brady, Hillary, and Franky Abbott. *A History of the US Public Libraries*. Digital Public Library of America. September 2015. <http://dp.la/exhibitions/exhibits/show/history-us-public-libraries>.

created to support local libraries. In the 1960s the American Library Association confirmed that 85% of all public libraries in the country received their funding from GFWC clubs.⁴⁸

Cities and towns in Minnesota took advantage of traveling libraries in the early 1900s, and in Sarah Comstock's annual president's report in 1901 she suggested a club library, later proposed as a town library. Many club women had private libraries of their own. The club members, holding education in high regard, especially Sarah Comstock, whose home library overflowed with books of well-known authors, thought that it was imperative for the town to have their own library. In 1903, the club received a letter from George E. Perley, a prominent Moorhead lawyer, calling attention to gifts of library buildings being made by Andrew Carnegie.⁴⁹

To conduct the planning for the library in Moorhead, a library commission formed in 1904. The committee members, led by Sarah Comstock, Mrs. Frank Weld, Mrs. Burnham, and Letita Morrisey Burnham each held a three year term on the commission. The first board meeting met at the Comstock House August 10, 1904.⁵⁰ From that meeting, the commission selected a site, on the corner of 1st Avenue and 6th street south. In two days, donations came from over 75 people through a fund drive to pay for the land. In a week, they had obtained enough to secure the land they wanted. For the annual tax support for a library, the club petitioned the City Council. The City Council provided maintenance and the 10% annual support required by

⁴⁸ GFWC Libraries, *A History of GFWC Clubs Establishing and Supporting Public Libraries*. General Federation of Woman's Clubs. 2017. www.GFWC.org

⁴⁹ "50th Anniversary History of the Ninth District of MN" Ninth District Federation of the MN State Federation of Women's Club Records, 1900-1950. (MSS 186) Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead, Minnesota.

⁵⁰ "The Public Library of Moorhead and the Woman's Club" Nellie A. Price, 1945. Moorhead Public Library Records. (S4974) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Carnegie before giving funds for the building. On January 29, 1904, the members of the City Council agreed to establish a library fund of at least \$1,500 a year from property taxes.⁵¹ In December 1904 the commission elected M.E. Beebe of Fargo as the architect. By January 5, 1905 his plan reported that more land was needed at the south of the building, about ten feet. The City Council agreed to pay \$200 for the extra land. The plan also showed that the \$10,000 donation from Carnegie was not enough to construct the building that was desired. This shortfall eventually led Carnegie to grant an additional \$2,000, the remaining \$13,500 estimated cost to be paid by the city. July 31, 1905 the board met to form the contract with W.H. Merritt for \$10,622 including furnishing and setting all the cut stone, but not including plastering and painting. The library was furnished and ready for use for the public July 12, 1906, the formal opening on October 15, 1906.⁵²

The library was a one-story Classical revival style building with a pediment entry and a central dome. Carnegie's objective was philanthropic, hoping that "free public libraries would allow persons of limited income and educational opportunity to improve themselves intellectually as he himself had done."⁵³ Services offered by the Moorhead Public Library early in its history eventually formed the Clay County Library, which became the Lake Agassiz Regional Library in 1961. The Clay County Library was formally introduced in 1949 after many years of extension service provided by the Moorhead Public Library. The Carnegie Library, also known as the Moorhead Public Library, was demolished in 1963 due to urban renewal, and the

⁵¹ Media Articles, Moorhead Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁵² "The Public Library of Moorhead and the Woman's Club." Nellie A. Price, 1945. Moorhead Public Library Records. (S4974) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁵³ Terry Shoptaugh, *Images of America Moorhead* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004).

site it was at is now a parking lot. In 1961, Moorhead built a new public library on a different site, across the street from the former library.⁵⁴

When establishing the new library, a Library Commission was needed. Sarah Comstock and Letita Burnham served on the first Library Commission with Comstock elected the first president. Nellie Olson, a woman's club member, left a teaching position at the Moorhead High School to become the first librarian.⁵⁵ One of her first duties as the librarian was to supervise the spending of \$500 allocated for books by the board. Nellie Price, the club's historian, pointed out that reading materials in Moorhead were hard to get in 1900, and members needed and used many books. Books and reading materials were vital for club members' research and to better themselves. Only having a limited collection of books for the women and community to use restricted the flow of information in the town. Only those attending the universities had the chance to educate themselves. The woman's club before relied on private collections or various traveling collections until the library was built. The woman's club used the library building for lectures, art exhibits, and federation meetings. The library made itself vital in the club's study of other cultures and civilizations.

The public library in Moorhead brought in a wealth of information made available to the whole community, which meant that everyday people could use books, not just a select few. The Comstock family even donated books from their private collection at the house to the Moorhead Public Library. On Sunday afternoons, the members of the club kept the public library reading room open for the public. The Woman's Club of Moorhead formed the Friends of the Moorhead

⁵⁴ Kate Savageau, *Urban Renewal in Moorhead, 1960's*. (The Hourglass, Spring 2016).

⁵⁵ Terry Shoptaugh, "A Look at Women from our Past and the Moorhead Public Library" Media Articles Records. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Library; this organization held the responsibility of an open house at the library each year and held the Library Week celebration.⁵⁶

The Moorhead club was not the only club to establish a library in its town. Various women clubs in Fargo actively pushed for a public library in 1897 but could not get their voices heard. In 1899 the Fargo Woman's Club started a movement for a public library in Fargo. In 1900 the first library board meeting was held. The organizational meeting was held in Thomas Baker's office (the president of the board of trustees) in the Fargo Masonic Temple where the first library materials were housed. The minutes of the first meeting state that the secretary was instructed to write to several libraries for their bylaws and constitutions to serve as an aid in forming the Fargo Library's bylaws. Their goal was to provide books for circulation and other materials for use in the library, including a reading room, and a children's room. Shortly after the organization of the library, steps were taken to obtain a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. Mrs. Bolley became a member of the board in 1906 and served until 1913. Since then a member of the club was on the board at all times until the club ended.⁵⁷

Hon. B. F. Spaulding, the husband of a Fargo Woman's Club member and a member of Congress, wrote to the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and secured a donation of \$20,000.

In 1902, the Fargo Public Library was built and formally opened in 1903. The Woman's Club of Fargo had a member on the board since the library formed.⁵⁸ Other clubs such as the Fortnightly Club and the Round Table of Fargo Club helped by donating books and giving the library books

⁵⁶ Media Articles, Fargo Forum. Moorhead Federated Woman's Clubs Records. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁵⁷ Newspaper Clippings, 1932-1978. Woman's Club of Fargo Records, (MS 47) Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

⁵⁸ Woman's Club of Fargo Records, (MS 47) Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

from their own private collections. Before the Fargo Public Library was built, books were stored in the office of the mayor, and then later moved to the basement of the Masonic Temple.⁵⁹

Women's clubs' efforts in establishing libraries and building a safe and secure place for books were instrumental in Fargo-Moorhead city growth. With the establishment of universities, and the growing number of people in the towns, libraries played an important role in allowing the people living there the chance to read new material and to help spread education.

The Moorhead's Women's Club acted more like a civic club instead of a social or study club as many of the women's clubs at that time were doing. While the Moorhead Women's Club in their minutes stated that they were strictly a study club, compared to literary and other study clubs, the Moorhead Club stands out. It allowed members to have an escape from the domestic sphere for a while and engage in other activities. While most of the activities for most clubs was considered domestic, to not go too far from their gender roles, the Moorhead's Women's Club, with their charter member, Sarah Comstock, was not afraid of straying outside of traditional female roles. The Moorhead club remained preeminently a study club. However, the organization had many community and nationwide interests. With its continued service in keeping the Public Library Reading Room open on Sunday afternoons, in addition the club contributed to the purchase of books needed for a club study. The club members strove to learn and educate themselves and to add women of the community to their club. They participated in conserving natural parks and beautifying the city. Club women sought to help to improve the lives of women and children with education and civic engagement. There was never a time when there was a vacancy in their group. It was always full, and they were always on the move. A

⁵⁹ Meeting Minutes. Round Table of Fargo Records, (MS 2030) Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

quote from one of their record books were; “Busy housewives might come and give and receive mental stimulus and forget home care and such it remains a study club.”⁶⁰ The Progressive Era helped women declare their right to partake in the public and political sphere; whether it be by furthering their education, improving the community, or to promote better working conditions, the women expanded their traditional gender roles and played an important role in changing their society.

⁶⁰ “History of the Moorhead club, 1893-1953, 1958-1963, vol. 12,” 10/09/16. Archives of MSUM, Moorhead Minnesota. Box 1, page 33.

CHAPTER 3: NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Part I: Travels

“European travel was increasingly possible for women of their class, and for some, at least, the encounter with other cultures raised new intellectual and moral issues”.¹

The Moorhead Woman’s Club, while conducting research papers for their regular meetings, also became interested in gaining first-hand experience of distant places and cultures. Club women became interested in international affairs by reading the *Moorhead Daily News* and the *Moorhead Weekly News*. According to the club’s treasurer accounts, the women purchased these newspapers regularly reading about events and customs in various lands such as India and Russia and sought to better understand what was happening around the world. Professors from the Normal School in Moorhead would visit foreign countries for research purposes, and then hold presentations on specific places. The women’s club members often attended those presentations or created programs inviting professors to speak on their research. Moorhead Club Women’s travels ranged from Egypt to Panama, South America, Japan, and Russia. These travels helped them to learn more about other people’s languages, culture, and civilization.

The club often became interested in travels by lectures. The first year the Moorhead women’s club invited Professor John Paul Goode, from the Normal School to lecture on Egypt. The people in attendance included not only the Moorhead club members, but the Fargo club, their husbands, and Normal School students.² This lecture made an impression on the club members and sparked their interest in other cultures. The first place the Women’s Club of Moorhead traveled to was Egypt in 1913; a group of thirty women went. They saw Egyptian

¹ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies*. 81.

² Carroll Engelhardt, *Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads & the Birth of Fargo & Moorhead* (University of Minnesota, 2007), 167.

tombs, and in the meeting minutes they described in detail the palaces and wrote of a pharaoh's tomb. In addition to the tombs, the women became acquainted with the geography, people, government, and customs.³

In an annual lecture of the women's club in January of 1914, at the home of Mrs. F.A. Weld, sixty women attended a talk on Panama. The talk given by Leslie Walker happened after Walker visited Panama. He presented his personal experiences to the guests. He described the vegetation and talked of the building of the Panama Canal.⁴ The next month the women's club met with Mrs. Chas. S. Marden at her home. Rainey presented a program on the Andes and gave a talk on the South American Mountains. A paper read by Mrs. Titus, "A Famous Journey Across the Andes," led to another talk of South America at Lulu Wagner's home for the next club meeting.⁵ These talks and presentations on different lands influenced the women to dive into the study of Panama and South America. The club visited Panama and South America to look into "Columbia's checkered history" and what the Panama Canal meant to the world. It was a rich and satisfying experience for the club. They saw many rivers, mountains, forests, and jungles, to flora and fauna they had never seen before. They learned about the land and the people, the civilization of the Incas to the present time, the great resources of Argentina, and "Brazil the Boundless"⁶. This was important because women of the time had not before had the

³ Moorhead Woman's Club Histories. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead. Despite the years in between the lecture and the trip to Egypt the minutes discuss being heavily influenced by the speakers, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the speakers encouraged an interest in traveling abroad.

⁴ Moorhead Weekly News, Thursday January 13, 1914. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives, Moorhead Minnesota.

⁵ Moorhead Weekly News, Thursday February 12, 1914. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives, Moorhead Minnesota.

⁶ "History of the Moorhead Club, 1893-1953, 1958-1963, vol. 12," Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

opportunity to travel in a group like this before to see such places. This journey made a significant impact on their lives and views of the world. They called it the “great melting pot of the world”⁷ in their meeting minutes. The ideas and works that this trip brought about was great. The women wrote manuscripts and papers on their journeys and learnings. What they found they brought back to Moorhead to share with Clay County. The club would hold exhibits and open forums for the community.⁸

In 1918, about thirty club women traveled to Russia and Ukraine. They saw the capitals Kief and Moscow, visiting the foundation of St. Petersburg. The club women learned of life in the village and country with the large estates and in the cities.⁹ The club members thought it was important to know more about Russia, its history and background. Mrs. Snarr, Mrs. Main, and Mrs. Fuglestad, the last two former teachers, became the steering committee and they challenged their minds to take on the task of the study of the Czarist Regime, the Great War, and the Revolution of 1917. They studied Russian industries and economy. The women often worried about battles taking place around them. When that worry overcame them, they would play Russian music.¹⁰ In January of 1918 full independence was declared, and West and East Ukraine lands became united. The independence was short lived, and a civil war broke out. The Bolshevik government came to power as a result of a coup and pursued an aggressive policy

⁷“History of the Moorhead Club, 1893-1953, 1958-1963, vol. 12,” Moorhead Federated Woman’s Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁸ “History of the Moorhead Club, 1893-1953, 1958-1963, vol. 12,” Moorhead Federated Woman’s Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁹ “Moorhead Woman’s Club Histories,” 11/30/17. Box 2, page 18. Moorhead Federated Woman’s Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

¹⁰ “History of the Moorhead Woman’s Club- Sharp. Moorhead Woman’s Club Histories, Box 2 page 3. Moorhead Federated Woman’s Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead. The playing of Russian music is interesting to note as it was used as a calming measure.

against Ukraine. During this time is when the Moorhead Club women visited Ukraine and Russia. They gained first-hand experience of the ways people were living, and the fear of revolutions and battles. In 1923, the club studied India and learned of the present customs of East India peoples, and studied their architecture, literature, and industries, and their relationship to England.¹¹ With the purchases of newspapers the club women learned more of distance places and strove to understand the world around them.

In 1924, the club visited Japan and learned about them in a modern political and industrial power. The club offered timely topics for reading and study. They also studied Japanese art collections and met with a woman from Fargo, Mrs Aylen, who displayed rare handcrafted collections of Japanese art and handcrafts as well.¹² The club members also held a guest meeting at the Teachers College, and a professor from the geography department, C.E. Huff, showed a collection of views of Japan and gave a talk. This exposure led the club women to devote a year to the study of Japan, its people, and customs.¹³

Afterward in 1925 they studied recent American literature, and stayed at home to study novelists and poets. In 1924, they planned a reception to the Moorhead music club, and the teachers of the city. From 1929 to 1930 the club studied the Jewish Nation and History, including

¹¹ "20 Years Later" Moorhead Woman's Club. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

¹² Ninth District Federation of the MN State Federation of Women's Clubs, Box 2 Folder 3, 50th Anniversary History of the Ninth District. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead, Minnesota.

¹³ MSUM Media Articles. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

poetry, drama, philosophy and music.¹⁴ The club tried to be as diverse in their studies as they possibly could.

Part II: Women and the War Effort

The Moorhead Women's Club not only participated in community-wide efforts with civic engagement but also participated in wartime duties, such as participating in loan drives, victory gardens, and the Red Cross. They actively helped out in various ways for the war effort including civic engagement and social activities for soldiers, such as nurse training, gathering supplies, and putting on shows. However, the women also had their own unique political stance on the war that went against the General Federation of Women's Club views and the full on support of the war. Women engaged in materialistic politics, and argued how their roles as mothers and even future mothers justified their participation in the political sphere.¹⁵ Women in clubs such as the Women's Clubs used their influence in society and public meetings to demonstrate and show their beliefs in the political arena.

Days after the United States entered into World War I, Clay County workers sought to undertake the task of raising the county's share of Red Cross production. At a meeting on April 11, 1917, a committee formed to draw recommended officers: J.A. Aasgaard, (the wife of a club member) elected chairman of the Clay County Red Cross. Other officers were Mrs. Charles S. Marden, vice chairwoman, Mrs. Hal Harris, secretary, and Mrs. R.G. Price as the treasurer.¹⁶ During World War I, there was a call for the mothers to enter the many avenues of warfare. This

¹⁴ "History of the Moorhead club, 1893-1953, 1958-1963, vol. 12," Box 1, page 33. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

¹⁵ Alison M. Parker, "Clubwomen, Reformers, Workers, and Feminists of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era" (2010) *History Faculty Publications*. 10. Pg. 117.

¹⁶ Clay County in the World War in Minnesota. 1917-1919. HCSCC Archives.

call to action meant that women took on surgical dressing posts, made sewing kits, conducted home nursing instructions that taught women and mothers' in-the-home first aid, and how to roll bandages. In addition, like others in the nation, the club women sold and bought war bonds. According to the Federation Records, "women must make earnest endeavors to keep the home fires burning."¹⁷ The General Federation of Women's Clubs in May of 1918 held a convention with the chairman of the conservation department of the Federation, Mrs. John Dickinson Sherman present. The convention in Hot Springs, Ark. called for a special Food Conservation Day, May 3rd, the entire program devoted itself to the widespread cultivation of food crops. The speakers present included the wife of Herbert Hoover and Charles Lathrop Pack, the president of the National War Garden Commission.¹⁸

In addition, women were called on to join the "Army of American Housewives" and urged to conserve in every area of the household. Women were told to avoid using delivery services for shopping to free workers for the service. Food and patriotism were also connected. Food conservation had a huge impact on lives of Minnesota residents. Minnesotans produced as much of their own food as they could and consumed less meat and wheat products, so they could be shipped off to soldiers. Even the Minnesota State Fair of 1917 held canning and baking competitions for women. The University of Minnesota Extension Service even offered courses to women in growing vegetable gardens, nutrition, and canning for food preservation.¹⁹ War Gardens or Liberty Gardens also came about in World War I as a campaign that tried to get

¹⁷ M.F.W.C. Federation Records. (152.H.5.10 (F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁸ Moorhead Daily News, May 1, 1918. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead Minnesota.

¹⁹ Kathryn R. Goetz, "Women on the World War I Home Front". MNOPEdia. Minnesota Historical Society.

Americans to garden as part of the war effort. There was a need for more food and people in cities organized into groups to garden together creating community gardens. If a lot in town was vacant, citizens would find the owners and persuade them to turn the land into a community garden.²⁰ In Moorhead, a neglected vacant lot and small backyards were important factors in food production and club women were urged by the General Federation to make use of any available land for growing food.²¹ Food was rationed in the United States and created a trial for women making the meals. The women started to grow and can their own food.²² The women's club stressed victory gardens with the view that home gardens make a significant contribution to the nation's food supply by helping every family to become partially self-sufficient. Women argued that food was just as important as guns and ammunition in winning the war. It was estimated that four million workers would be needed in 1945 to produce and harvest essential food and fiber crops.²³ This frugality showed that club women strove to become more involved during the wartime, engaging in efforts to help and promote community involvement.

During the 23rd Annual Convention of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, the members pledged their unwavering loyalty to the country and to support the Red Cross and the war measures prescribed by the government. Club women were required to take up Red Cross work in order to be considered loyal: "Any woman who has time for two card clubs a week has

²⁰ Markus Krueger, *Victory Gardens in World War II*. Presentation. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County. June 4, 2018.

²¹ Moorhead Daily News, May 1, 1918. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Archives, Moorhead Minnesota.

²² Markus Krueger, *Victory Gardens in World War II*. Junkyard Lecture. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County. June 4, 2018.

²³ Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. (152.H.6.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

time for doing Red Cross work. If she does not, she is not loyal,”²⁴ said G.M. Palmer, the chairwoman of the Mankato Red Cross. Card-playing became a popular pastime for both men and women. According to the *Moorhead Weekly News*, club members such as Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Marden, and Mrs. Macnab formed a new card club in 1914 to meet for social games.²⁵ This meant that even club women participated in other social activities outside the Moorhead Woman’s Club. The Moorhead Club women, due to the Federation issuing standards during wartime in World War II, became active in the Red Cross, and working in and with the Nurse’s Aide and the Ration Board. Mrs. Sharp from Moorhead accepted the award of merit from the States Federation for War Service for the club. They also knitted and sewed for soldiers at war, and helped to conserve fats, tin, and waste paper while contributing dimes at meetings and .50 per member. The club bought two war Liberty Loans as well.²⁶

At the annual meeting of the Minnesota State Federation of Women’s clubs in 1917, the members voted on \$27,000 towards the purchase of Liberty Bonds. Working under the direction of Mrs. A.H. Erickson of Moorhead, a band of women in every township held themselves in readiness to aid in any manner possible in raising the quota of the country’s Liberty Loan drives. Women solicitors were active during the second loan, with a total of 601 women purchasing loans.²⁷

²⁴ “State Federation of Women’s Clubs Pledges Aid to America in War” Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs, Federation Records, 1894-1998 (142.F.16.1B) General Federation of Women’s Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁵ *Moorhead Weekly News*, March 5, 1914. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead Minnesota.

²⁶ “Moorhead Woman’s Club Histories” History of the Moorhead Woman’s Club 1943-1948 (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

²⁷ *Clay County in the World War In Minnesota. 1917-1919.* Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead Minnesota.

During World War II, women contributed to morale and the cause in many different ways. Some women served in the military's auxiliary units for women such as the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).²⁸ At the Executive Board Meeting in January of 1943, Mrs. Chas Colestock had a member of the WAAC talk about the organization during a meeting in efforts to recruit more members. During this meeting Mrs. Chas Colestock gave out information about WAACS and answered questions. From the information received in this meeting during the June Convention of the MFWC, Mrs. Colestock moved the endorsement of recruitment by the MFWC (Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs) of WAACS, (Women's Army Corps) WAVES, SPARS (Coast Guard Women's Reserve), and the Women's Reserves of the Marines in the State of Minnesota. The motion carried.²⁹

Members of the Moorhead's Woman's Club created courses in home nursing led by Mrs. E.K. Ingebrigtsen. The decision was made at a meeting of the club when reports were given at the state federation convention in Mankato. The theme of the convention was, "Defending America by Giving Cooperative War Service." From this theme, the club decided to organize the home nursing class and to take part in surgical dressing courses at the Red Cross.³⁰ This service was vital for the war effort since there was a nurse shortage. All women were encouraged to help assure Nursing Service for the wounded men and hospitalized citizens.³¹ The state and federation

²⁸ Jennifer Biser, "Help from the Home Front: Women's Clubs Contribute to the Cause" *Women's Clubs in WWII*. NC Museum of History.

²⁹ Executive Board Meeting January 27, 1943. MFWC Federation Records, 1894-1998 (152.H.5.10 (F)) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁰ Media Articles, Untitled. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

³¹ For more information on the role of female soldiers in the wars see; Leisa Meyer, "The Regulation of Sexuality and Behavior in the Women's Army Corps during World War II," *Feminist Studies*, Vol 18, No. 3. The Lesbian Issue (Autumn, 1992) pp. 581-601.

encouraged clubs to put on a nurse recruitment drive and to honor the nurses from their home towns.³²³³

The Women's Club banded together not only to support the war but also to engage in their own political agenda. Many of the same women in the club active in World War I restated the efforts for the next war. New members of the club became engaged in the efforts as well, as new members were always joining. During World War II, the Moorhead Club Women, in attempts to raise morals and money, presented a war bond skit: "Mother Buys a Bond." Members of the cast were Mrs. Sharp, Mrs. R.G. Price, Mrs. Paul Clarke, NW. Klooze, and Rev. Klooze.³⁴ The costs of World War II were so high that the government had to borrow money from the public, and efforts to sell war bonds and stamps were among the most significant works of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.³⁵

In addition, the club sponsored a nutrition class, also conducted by the Red Cross, and purchased a war bond. Twenty-seven members contributed to a total of 2,986 and three-quarter hours to war work during the year.³⁶ Tin collecting by women clubs was also evident during the

³²³² Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. 152. H.6.1B Gale Family Library. MNHS. February 23, 2018.

³³ For more information on local women working abroad see, Markus Krueger, "Victory Gardens in World War I", Lecture History on Tap, Moorhead, MN. Rose Clark was a member of the Red Cross, born in Barnesville, MN but lived in Moorhead before serving in hospitals in France. It was more common for nurses to serve in the Army Nurse Corps than in the Red Cross. There were two women who served with the YMCA/YWCA in France and Russia but they were not nurses, they were working in canteens and organizing entertainment for soldiers. There was one that was a dietician working in a hospital in Russia.

³⁴ Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. (152.H.6.1B)General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁵ Jennifer Biser, "Help from the Home Front: Women's Clubs Contribute to the Cause" *Women's Clubs in WWII*. NC Museum of History.

³⁶ Media Articles, Untitled. Moorhead Federated Woman's Club (S2687) Northwest History Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

war. The United States had its supplies of crucial materials, including tin, cut off. The War Production Board encouraged scrap drives throughout the war.³⁷

While the Federation pressured the club women to help with war efforts, the Moorhead Woman's Club also had their own views of the Second World War. The club women sent letters and committees to the City Council Members to protest, and even advocated for peace speakers during wartime, which only slightly contradicted what the Federation issued.³⁸

Distraught that their sons and husbands were off fighting away from home, many club women wanted to discuss peace options, seeking to bring families back together. "Dictators study to make war, we must study to make peace,"³⁹ Mrs. Edgar Sharp, the president of the Moorhead woman's club during WWII, said during an open forum discussion on peace proposals of Dumbarton Oaks.⁴⁰ The purpose of the meeting was in answer to the Secretary of State, to challenge American citizens to accept and discuss the conference at Dumbarton Oaks. The club wanted to present material for study and discussion in order to see what might be done in reality. An S.G. Reinertsen exhibited the historical background of their meeting at Dumbarton and explained the framework and plan. In addition, they discussed the Yalta Conference in detail, where vital points were made clear by Mrs. Geer of Moorhead, who said the Yalta meeting held the whole scheme of things. The purpose of the plan was the establishment of an international

³⁷ Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. (152.H.6.1B) General Federation of Women's Clubs of Minnesota. Federation Records. Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁸ Course Catalog for Moorhead. (MSS 185) Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, Moorhead Minnesota.

³⁹ Media Articles, Moorhead Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest Historical Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

⁴⁰ "Women's Club to Hold Discussion" Peace Proposals to be Studied by Group, 1945. (S2687) Northwest History Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

organization for maintenance of peace and security with the power to enforce its conditions and to make conditions for peace.⁴¹

The Moorhead club awoke to the importance of crucial decisions made on world peace proposals in the near future. They met on the 6th of April in Moorhead, giving serious thought and dedicated time for research to the peace plans, in addition to the proposals made at the Yalta Conference and a report of proposals made at the recent Pan-American conference in Mexico. The conference was an open meeting for any interested. Mrs. S.G. Reinersten presented on Dumbarton Oaks, while Mrs. Geer presented on the Yalta Conference, and Mrs. Byron Wilson on the Pan-American conference. The general purpose of the plan was to establish an international organization for maintenance of peace and security with the power to enforce its conditions and to create conditions which make peace. The members and those in attendance discussed how the plan differs from the old League of Nations and how it would be more beneficial to all involved.⁴²

⁴¹ Media Articles, Moorhead Woman's Club. (S2687) Northwest History Center, Moorhead State University Moorhead.

⁴² "Women's Club to Hold Discussion" Peace Proposals to be Studied by Group, 1945. (S2687) Northwest History Center, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

CONCLUSION

The women's club movement founded in the 19th century provided women an independent opportunity for education and active community service. Most women's associations before the 19th century were auxiliaries of men's groups or church groups. While women worked in these groups, the direction and leadership came from men. In 1868 Sorosis, founded by Jane Croly gave new prospects for women to direct and lead their own club movement in America.

Far from upholding the domestic ideal of the early 20th century, the Moorhead Woman's Club sought to better the local community and advocated for reform via municipal housekeeping in the public sphere. These club women helped others gain a foothold in local government by applying maternalistic arguments for women's involvement and leadership in reform activities. While the women used a materialistic approach to further their cause, they were not only able to help better educate themselves on local and national politics and history, but the community as well. Through lectures and utilizing the local colleges the woman's club created a dialog among the community members to strengthen and help evolve the town from a tent town to a diverse community.

From the beginning on the Moorhead Woman's Club, the members strove for better education and mental stimulus. Leaving the social norm for a few hours a week to seek the betterment of society these women engaged in activities out of the private sphere and into the public. Their meetings had rules just as any other organization, keeping treasury records, meeting minutes, and voting on committee members. They demanded to be treated seriously in anything they conducted. While working on legislation and civic aspects in the community the women in the club enhanced their public speaking abilities while learning about history and

politics. This advanced study helped in the later years of the club when they sought out new challenges by traveling to other countries and starting their political path during the war years. Without having conducted themselves in such high regard these women might not have spoken at Dumbarton Oaks, or gone into the public demonstrating for peace. Their years of practice and learning helped them to sharpen their skills with the public to create a better community.

The membership of the Moorhead Woman's club decreased after World War II. A reason for this could be the fact that the original charter members passed away and left no one else to take on their tasks. Another reason might be that more women entered into the workforce and with taking care of families had less time for other activities. The Moorhead Woman's Club officially ended in 2010; the club left their meeting minutes, year books, and journals to two archives in the area. Their legacy still lives on through their impact in education via the Moorhead Public Library.

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