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I REMEMBER ROLAND PARK...

WOMAN'S CLUB OF ROLAND PARK, It's Founders and Founding

by Mrs. Gideon Stieff (nee Claire von Mares)

In this Bicentennial Year of 1976 of the United States of America, the Woman's Club of Roland Park is approaching it's 80th birthday, Although such years may seem to mean "Old Age", the Club continues to thrive and grow, with many opportunities offered to its membership. The Junior members keep a youthful outlook which the rest are pleased to follow.

In the fall of 1896, a small group of far-sighted women met at the home of Mrs. Isabella Parlett in a new community -neither country nor city - called Roland Park, in Baltimore county, to plan and organize a club. They recognized a need for social life and mental stimulation now that they lived far removed from the city with its urban culture and opportunities.

This small meeting was a forerunner of the first regular meeting of the club held on December 9, 1896 at the home of Mrs. C. Pinkney Brown. Mrs. Charles Heath was elected President. Annual dues were set at \$2.00, initiation fe at 25 cents with fines of 10 cents for absence, and 5 cents for lateness at meetings. The Constitution was drawn up and signed by those present, and subsequent members as they were elected. These charter members numbered twenty-eight.

At a later meeting, an invited member from a neighboring club in Mt. Washington christened the Club the "Woman's Club of Roland Park" with a bottle of pure spring water from the local artesian well. From it's conception, city residents were not excluded from membership as the Roland Park women were happy to enroll their friends they had left behind when they moved to the "suburbs" (a new word).

When the meetings grew too large for private homes, through the courtesy of Mr. Edward Bouton, President of the Roland Park Co., whose wife was Vice President of the Club, the use of the Town Hall was offered at no charge. Town Hall was in the Tudor style building at Upland Rd. and Roland Ave. which housed the Roland Park Co. and the shops (now known as the Shopping Center). Soon a suitable Clubroom was secured at that address for a rental of \$20.00 per month. This room was beautifully-decorated through the generosity of its members, and soon became in great demand for rental by other neighborhood groups, children's dancing classes, and Sunday services by the Episcopalians (their church had not yet been built). The Presbyterians and Methodists used the rooms for social entertainment.

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Club programs were planned for the edification and entertainment of the members. Local problems were discussed and aided such as: the need to supply-hot coffee in winter for the motormen on the new trolley line; the endorsement of pending child labor laws; school attendance; and "anti-spitting" laws. Under discussion came the war in Cuba, a curfew law, and the need to purchase "white label goods" indicating garments made in sanitary factories with no child labor.

In the summer of 1902, the Roland Park Co. needed the space used by the club. The enterprising Club President, Mrs. Benjamin Corkran, Jr., together with a hard working committee succeeded in purchasing the log on the corner of Ridgewood Rd. and Roland Ave. from the Roland Park Co., which generously gave the Club 1/3 off the selling price. Through the sale of bonds at \$50 each to its members, the first cost of the undertaking was financed. The firm of Ellicott and Emmart was chosen as the architects. The entire indebtedness of the Club's venture - grounds and building - amounted to \$12,925 covered by three separate mortgages. In January 1904, (the year of the Baltimore Fire) the dream of a clubhouse became a reality.

The auditorium was rented frequently for benefit card parties, concerts, weddings, teas, dances, and receptions. The second floor was rented as an apartment.

The Clubhouse has had a number of additions since then. In 1923-24 an enclosed sun-porch was added to the South side. In 1935, a general enlargement of the first floor was undertaken and the former apartment was converted into a dining room and a kitchen for club use. In 1951, a new lounge and library was built over the south wing of the auditorium. Cellar space had been converted into a meeting room and use of a painting class.

Today, the Roland Park Woman's Club is a vitally active part of our community. It has over 1,000 members; fourteen Department Committees arrange weekly comprehensive programs from October to June covering subjects from International Relations, Legislation, Urban Affairs, to the various Arts, Education, Travelogues, etc. Twenty-three Standing Committees plans the social activities of the Club, the housekeeping, gardening, study programs, and arrange trips for the members. All funds raised are used for Community Projects and Welfare, spearheaded by the Juniors.

The purpose of the Club remains much as it was in the beginning:

"To provide a center for the promotion of cultural and intellectual interests and to further such work as the members may desire."

Just as times have changed, since the early days in Roland Park, so have the interpretations and fulfilling of Club objectives broadened and grown into maturity of concepts and interests.

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