

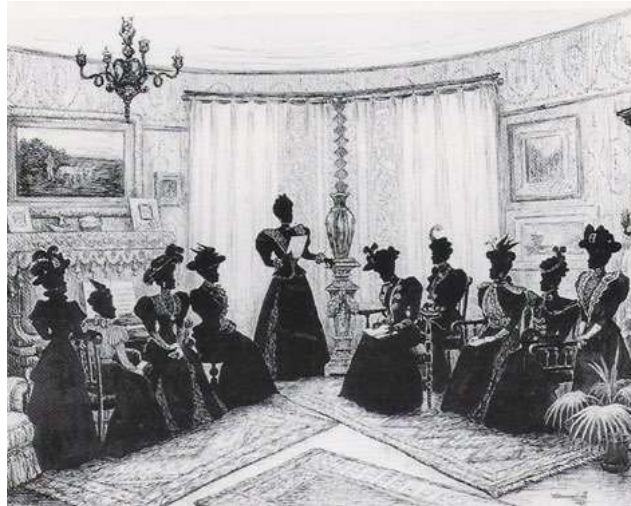
The Woman's Club of Roland Park Turns 125

By Allison Parker-Abromitis,
Club Manager

Late for a meeting? You are charged a nickel. No show? It jumps to a dime. In today's world, that nickel translates to roughly \$1.63 and a dime would be about \$3.27.

In the fall of 1896, a determined group of Roland Park women met in their new community, a blend of country and city, to establish a club. There was a need for them to create a social environment around their new homes that were far from downtown Baltimore, where they were used to having access to cultural activities and opportunities. The first regular meeting of The Woman's Club of Roland Park (WCRP) was held on December 9, 1896, at the home of Mrs. C. Pinkney Brown. Mrs. Charles Heath was elected President.

In 1904, the year of the big Baltimore fire, the vision of a clubhouse was realized and on January 11, an opening at 100 Roland Avenue (now 4500) was held.



In the fall of 1896, a determined group of Roland Park women met in their new community to establish a club. Photo courtesy of the WCRP

The members of the WCRP were serious about their mission and commitment to obligations made to the community. To this day, they remain dedicated to the growth of women through educational, cultural, social and philanthropic pursuits.

Literature remains an important part of club activities. In the early 1900s, book reviews flourished. Music was also a large part of the social scene, as was dancing, with evening functions lasting well into the early hours. Lectures were held during the day, which has become known as the "Thursday Program" series.

Speakers have included Richard Folsom Cleveland, Lieutenant

Colonel U.S. Grant III, Russian princesses, astronauts, H.L. Mencken and Senator John McCain. Other speakers of note include Ginger Rogers and several first ladies, including Bess Truman, Mamie Eisenhower and Barbara Bush.

More recent speakers have included Congressman Kweisi Mfume, Ambassador Barbara Bodine, poet E. Ethelbert Miller and international street artist Gaia, among many local and national authors.

To the members, community also meant raising money for civic causes. Between 1906 and 1916, the members purchased a piano for the Roland Park Public School on Roland Avenue, and endorsed an ordinance asking the City Council for an appropriation of \$1,000 to build Woodberry-Hampden Recreation Center. Members of the club continued their interest and work on this project for many years.


The mid-1920s saw an increase in support of Child Welfare and to the Florence Crittendon Mission, an organization that worked to reform prostitutes and unwed pregnant women through the creation of establishments where they were to live and learn new skills.

These were progressive women. Between 1936 and 1945, members' interest lay in the field of legislation. The WCRP endorsed resolutions favoring permanent registration and citywide use of voting machines. They were against the sale of fireworks in the city, wanted to prohibit billboards closer than 500 feet from roadsides and opposed discrimination against illegitimate children. On national issues, the club emphatically opposed President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's plan to enlarge the Supreme Court.

On Thursday morning, December 11, 1941, war was declared on Italy and Germany. The speaker at the club that day was interrupted as all in attendance listened to the radio to hear the message. At its conclusion, the WCRP president said, "We women should do efficiently and conscientiously our allotted tasks to be prepared to assume any responsibility

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that may be assigned to us in the days ahead. Let us avoid overemotionalism and hysteria. May this be our aim and prayer to carry on with courage and unselfishness our task, humbly relying on God for strength and direction.”

The next four years were met with a strong work ethic from the membership in cooperation with the Red Cross, USO, hospitals and military installations.

The country had gone through a critical period. A club president challenged her members by asking if they were to sit back and let other organizations carry on the work that the intelligent club women should do or shall they organize and, without thought of self-honor or self-sacrifice, do their part as they did during the trying period of the war.

The woman’s club movement has continued to evolve since the late 19th century. Women across the country gather to identify problems and influence their communities.

For 125 years, the WCRP has played an important part in our community. It has undertaken more varied types of civic and philanthropic activities and, each year, it has offered to its members programs richer in interest, wider in scope and of greater merit; it has kept faith with its founders.

Today’s members continue to form lifelong friendships, sharing in a mutual desire to educate, inspire and engage women from

diverse backgrounds and cultures. All have a place at the club and all contribute richly to the mission. The membership wants to see a difference in the world.

Through support of such organizations as Sisters Circle (mentorship program) and Days for Girls (whose mission is to internationally advance menstrual equity, health, dignity and opportunity for all), the club focuses on the needs of women, young and mature.

If you have ever driven by the building at the corner of Cold Spring Lane and Roland Avenue and wondered about its history, know that good work is being done and will continue.

For more information on The Woman’s Club of Roland Park, visit twcrp.org or call 410-889-0760. The club is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. ❖



Photo: Mary Kay Battafarano

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