

# The Ladies' Literary Club

Ypsilanti, Michigan

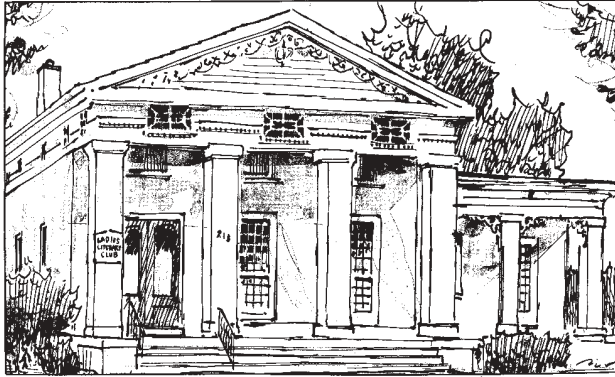


125 Years: 1878-2003

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# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

Our Wonderful Club <i>Penny Schreiber</i>	1
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## CLUB HISTORY

1878–1953 <i>Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner</i>	5
---	---

1953–1978 <i>Jeanne Jordan</i>	20
-----------------------------------	----

1978–1990 <i>Mary Claire Anhut</i>	29
---------------------------------------	----

1990–2003 <i>Carolyn Kirkendall</i>	35
--	----

## MEMORIES

Reminiscences <i>Helen J. Cleary</i>	43
---	----

## EARLY CLUB LEADERS

The Portrait of a Lady: Sarah Smith Putnam <i>Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner</i>	49
---	----

A Beautiful Life: Sarah Wadhams George <i>Penny Schreiber</i>	55
---	----

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	57
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# INTRODUCTION

## *Our Wonderful Club*

by Penny Schreiber

Member since 1990; President 1998–2000

The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti is celebrating its 125th anniversary in club year 2003-2004. It is remarkable that a women's club that began meeting in the nineteenth century continues to thrive in the twenty-first. The lives of American women have changed dramatically since 1878. Today many have careers that make it impossible for them to attend a Wednesday meeting at 1:30 in the afternoon. But the club has adapted. Ypsilanti women retire and are immediately recruited. Younger members manage to juggle some combination of children, jobs, and club work. Many long-time members, vital and active in their seventies and eighties, remain essential to the club. They are its lifeblood and institutional memory and every year they wisely and warmly welcome new members. Club membership, despite attrition from deaths and resignations, is stable at about 150.

Without a doubt, a key reason for the club's longevity can be traced back to 1913, when members made the brave, astute, and prescient decision to purchase their wonderful 1840s Greek Revival clubhouse. During the ninety-one years that the ladies have been meeting at 218 North Washington Street, the upkeep of the house has been an important goal for them to coalesce around. The ladies take great pride in superbly maintaining their home in Ypsilanti's historic district for their own use and the use of the community.

Remembrance of things past—continuity of club traditions and awareness of the splendid women from long ago whose names grace faded club yearbooks—also explains the club's resilience. Every year the club's calendar of fourteen meetings includes an irresistible Christmas Bazaar in November; a musical Christmas program in December; a Social Service Day in January; a Drama Day in March; a Gala Day in April; and in May,

the Annual Meeting that marks the end of the club year. Carried off always by bustling committees with verve and enthusiasm, these events never grow stale. The club's most important missions are connected to several of these annual rituals: raising money to maintain the house and giving back to the community through charitable donations and scholarships.

The club's first Drama Day took place ninety-two years ago, in 1912. For many years members performed in plays on a stage that eventually fell victim to a club renovation. In modern times, local amateur theater groups or musical theater students from Eastern Michigan University or the University of Michigan have delighted club members with performances.

Occasionally a member gets the bright idea of digging out of the archives a script from the days of yore. This happened at the club's most recent Drama Day, in March 2004. A portable stage was brought up from the basement and assembled at one end of the dining room. The comedy *A Long Retirement* had last been performed at the club in 1932. Three past presidents, one future president, and two prime presidential prospects were the thespians of the day. Their combined years of club membership totaled 127. The ladies threw themselves into their roles with hilarious abandon, adroitly managing several costume changes. The stereotype of a women's club president as stuffy and dignified in a hat and white gloves obviously doesn't fit the Ladies' Literary Club of 2004.

I can readily imagine gone-but-not-forgotten members laughing along with everyone else watching *A Long Retirement* this past March. To tell the history of the club's 125 years we have turned to three of those members.

Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner prepared a history for the club's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1953. Jeanne Jordan brought the history up to 1978, the club's hundredth year. In 1938, on its sixtieth anniversary, Helen Cleary presented her charming and witty memories of the club's early years. In an undated paper, Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner brought to life Sarah Putnam, the club's founder and first president.

Current members Mary Claire Anhut and Carolyn Kirkendall have written about the club's most recent twenty-five years. I have contributed a brief sketch of my favorite early member, the incomparable Sarah Wadhams George.

An anonymous early member summed up the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti in words that still ring true today:

No single mistress of a home could surpass the devotion of a group known as a board of trustees. No single family could feel a greater sense of pride of possession, as do the members of this club. While no single owner of the house ever had his daughter descend our charming stairway as a bride, many members of the club have known this pride. No married couple ever lived to commemorate a fiftieth anniversary in this house, but its walls have heard the happy greetings of such occasions. As yet we've no births or deaths, otherwise we are about as any ordinary family.





*Fourth of July 1936.*

# CLUB HISTORY

*1878–1953*

by Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner  
Member 1924-1963; President 1945-1947

*An old-fashioned club, with an old-fashioned name, in an old-fashioned house, with old-fashioned ideals for right living, right thinking, and friendliness.*

–Quotation found in the early records of the club.

The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti, Michigan, organized in 1878, is one of the oldest women's clubs in the state. In 1878 Rutherford B. Hayes was President of the United States; a young man at Menlo Park, New Jersey, created a sensation when he announced that he had perfected a practical system for lighting dwellings and public buildings with an electric current; Henry Ford was regarded as a dreamer; and many of the men who made aviation history were not yet born.

Women were not welcome in the business world in 1878. Few professions opened their doors to women and they did not have the right of franchise or equal property rights. True, back then a woman was queen in her own home and placed on a pedestal by the men in whom the spirit of chivalry still existed.

Because Ypsilanti had a fine seminary and a college for the training of teachers, the life of the mind was held in high esteem. Ypsilanti was rapidly enlarging due to the arrival of families from the eastern states. These new settlers brought their culture and education to the city, which many undoubtedly selected because the "glory that was Greece" might one day be its heritage.



Sarah Smith Putnam.

## Mrs. Putnam Comes to Town

The ladies of the growing city resolved not to be left behind their husbands and children. They, too, would improve their minds by pursuing culture and learning the art of fine living.

As early as 1861 a group of Ypsilanti women read David Hume's *History of England*, and later studied the plays of Shakespeare. The time was propitious to organize a literary club. Many of the city's women had been active in the Home Association organized in 1875 to help the needy, and they had also established a library in the city. Now as they worked in the rooms they had furnished with rugs and chairs and bookcases well filled with gifts from the Detroit Library and individual donors, the

women discussed the possibility of organizing a literary club. Mrs. Daniel Putnam suggested the plan to her co-workers. Sarah Putnam was from Kalamazoo and she remembered the effective work and good comradeship in the literary circles of that city and wished for Ypsilanti the same.

"We need a literary society here similar to the one to which I belonged in Kalamazoo before coming to this city," Mrs. Putnam told Mrs. Follett.

"But there you had Lucinda Hinsdale Stone to lead you. Who will be our leader here?" said Mrs. Follett to Mrs. Putnam.

"I can do it if no one else can be found, Mrs. Follett. What do you think, Mrs. Watling?" asked Mrs. Putnam.

"I think it is a fine idea, Mrs. Putnam," replied Mrs. Watling.

"Then we will proceed with our plan. Our superintendent of schools, Mr. William Paine, and Mrs. Paine are interested in the educational life of the city and I am sure will help us with the organization of such a group," said Mrs. Putnam.

So with the inspiration and leadership of Mrs. Putnam, who was blind, the idea grew into reality.

## The First Meeting

The preliminary meeting was held on May 7, 1878, at the home of Mrs. Paine, 206 South Washington Street, once a schoolhouse and later the home of Dr. and Mrs. Bradley Harris. The house still has some of the original walls, which add to the historic value of this fine residence.

Mrs. Putnam had asked Mrs. Follett and Mrs. Watling to act with her on the plans for the organization of the club. In June they called together seventeen ladies in the library rooms of the Arcade Building to begin the study of Africa's geography, resources, art, and literature.

The first meetings were from 4 to 6 p.m., following the ladies' work in the library. At the first meeting, the ladies chose Mrs. Daniel Putnam as their president. At the second meeting, Mrs. John Watling was elected recording secretary, with twenty-two ladies present. By July attendance had grown to thirty-seven. In the fall, the ladies prepared and adopted a constitution. Very little formal business was conducted in the club's early years.



*Mrs. John Watling.*

The following are the names of the seventeen women who attended the first meeting:

Mrs. Daniel Putnam (the club mother)

Mrs. Clinton Spencer (wife of a Civil War captain and formerly Mary C. Wilson, daughter of Rev. J. A. Wilson, Episcopal Rector)

Mrs. A. F. Kinne (wife of Dr. Kinne, formerly Jennie Bristol, known as "a woman of deep understanding," and the first woman to serve on the school board)

Mrs. Erastus Sampson ("the patient sufferer, much loved")

Mrs. John Sampson ("a genial presence")

Mrs. John S. Jenness, (formerly Miss Emma A. Ellis, daughter of Elijah Ellis for whom Ellis Street was named)

Mrs. W. H. Crawford ("through a long illness always interested in the club")

Mrs. Frances Holmes ("a faithful librarian")

Mrs. Francis K. Rexford (formerly Harriet N. Long and wife of Dr. Rexford, city postmaster from 1845 to 1849)

Mrs. Henry Redner

Mrs. John Watling (wife of Dr. Watling and one of the organizers of the Daughters of the American Revolution Society and the Ladies' Library Association)

Miss Hattie Weed ("a sweet, devoted soul" and daughter of Rev. I. M. Weed)

Miss Helen Post ("a teacher")

Miss Delia Compton ("popular with many friends")

Miss Rocena Norris ("a gifted artist")

Miss Sarah Owen ("she had national interests")

Dr. Ruth A. French ("she moved to California")

The name Ladies' Literary Club was chosen by common consent, as the word "woman" then applied to kitchen maids and not to the mistress of the house.

In the club's early years, meetings were in the pleasant homes of members or in rooms at the library in the Arcade Building. The meeting time, 4 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays, was soon changed to 3 to 5 p.m. on Mondays.

## Programs of Study

The ladies had embarked on a very ambitious program that led them on literary and historical journeys to many interesting places and enlivened the routine of their daily lives.

- ❖ From 1879 to 1880 they read and studied the French Revolution, followed by a thorough study of Germany.
- ❖ In club year 1883–1884 they entered the Tudor period, followed by study of the After Tudor period in 1884–1885.
- ❖ Rome and its antiquities was their subject in 1885–1886, Spain in 1886–1887, and Greece in 1887–1888.
- ❖ In 1888–1889 they took pleasant journeys through Great Britain, studying its geography, people, writers, and cathedrals. The ladies made the acquaintance of Thomas Becket, Thomas More, John Knox, and William Wordsworth, among many others. In their imaginations they took literary pilgrimages to Stratford-on-Avon, Canterbury, and Oxford, and they "visited" Melrose Abbey "by the pale moonlight."
- ❖ In 1889–1890 they were still taking "Journeys Through Britain," centering their attention the following year on the south.
- ❖ Spain was studied again in 1891–1892 and the next two club years were "spent" in Italy.

- ❖ In 1894–1895 the club yearbook was white with a blue inset picture of an obelisk. The country under study? Egypt.

Meetings were now on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at 3 p.m. at the library or in the homes of members. From 1896 through 1898 the ladies learned about English literature, social problems, art, French painting, and sociology, each subject spanning a club year. The club then turned for a time to the study of American art, with special reference to artists and sculptors of the Colonial and Revolutionary periods.



## The Ladies Expand Their Interests

A change is noted in the type of programs at this time. Members were now taking up subjects like Equality, The Kindergarten, Shall the People Own the Telegraph?, Sanitation in the Home, Manual Training in the Schools, University Extension, and Our City Charter.

In 1899–1900 a Dutch windmill appeared on the cover of the yearbook, signaling an upcoming year of studying Holland. The following year Holland was still on the club's agenda, and a drawing of a tulip appeared on that yearbook's cover. In the margin of that 1901 book, pencil marks note the death of Queen Victoria. At the turn of the century, the programs were now becoming more varied and a music committee was added in 1908. The club's programs were no longer entirely literary.

The changes came, no doubt, as the club began to broaden its activi-

ties to include civic affairs and political issues. The club had joined the National Federation of Women's Clubs in January 1896 and later that same year they also joined the Michigan State Federation. These expanding affiliations came about at the insistence of Mrs. John Watling, who always had the best interests of the club in mind. From this time on club members, acting as a group, tried to shape public policy. Miss Julia Ann King told members, "Ye are the salt of the earth; you are a city set on a hill because you hold in your hearts the love of humanity."



*Drama Day on the old stage.*

## Club Firsts

From a self-centered group seeking self-improvement, the club now expanded its interests to national and worldwide affairs. Some firsts from that era include:

- ❖ In 1909 the Collect for Club Women by Mary Stewart appeared in the yearbook for the first time, at the suggestion of Mrs. Fannie Cheever Burton, who had brought it back from the State Conference of Women's Clubs.
- ❖ In February 1912 members put on a play for the first time and Drama Day became an annual event.

- ❖ On April 24, 1912, an amendment to the club's constitution was passed that provided for an advisory board comprised of officers and chairmen of standing committees.
- ❖ In 1915 the names of the board of trustees were entered in the club yearbook for the first time.
- ❖ In 1917 the number of active members was raised to seventy-five, with twenty-five associate members on the club roster.
- ❖ In 1920 a committee on social service was appointed.
- ❖ In 1921 a page was added to the yearbook for the names of past presidents.
- ❖ Beginning in 1922, for the first time a picture of the clubhouse was included in the yearbook.
- ❖ In 1925 the club appointed its first custodian.
- ❖ In 1932 the club sponsored its first Girl Scout troop.
- ❖ About 1930 the active list was expanded to 100.
- ❖ Club dues went from \$1 to \$2 to \$3 to \$5 to \$8 and at present [1953] they are \$10 for active members and \$12 for associate members.

“The object of this society shall be the mutual improvement of its members through the study of literature, art, science and the vital interests of the day” was the official purpose of the club. In 1918 a clause was added: “but also to serve as an energizing force for all that makes for civic or community betterment.” And so it reads today. True, women's main source of power at that time was their persuasive appeals to the fairness of men in “high places,” but with their truly feminine approach, the ladies found that the spirit of chivalry, though anemic, was not yet dead.



*A long-ago day on the clubhouse porch.*

## A Clubhouse of Their Own

By 1910 the group had outgrown the south room of the library. They rented pleasant rooms in the new Masonic Temple, and the first meeting there was on October 12, 1910. The club continued meeting in either the Red Cross Room or the dining room of the temple. In 1913 members learned that the Grant residence, at 218 North Washington Street, was for sale.

The Grant house was thought to be a most desirable future home for the club. One of the oldest houses in the city, it had been built in 1842 by Arden Ballard in the Greek Revival style so popular in America at that time. Much discussion pro and con ensued about this momentous purchase. The asking price of \$3,000 was a large sum for a small group of women to raise. There was not much time to consider the matter because the house had to be sold at once.

On December 10, 1913, the ladies decided to purchase the property. As early as 1896, Mrs. Ann Bassett had advocated putting money aside for a building fund, and she later left a legacy for that purpose alone. The club treasury was almost empty. Mrs. Bassett's \$200 became the seed money for purchasing the clubhouse. Members wondered where they would get the rest of the money to buy the house. Neither of the two local banks had any intention of granting a mortgage to a group of women.

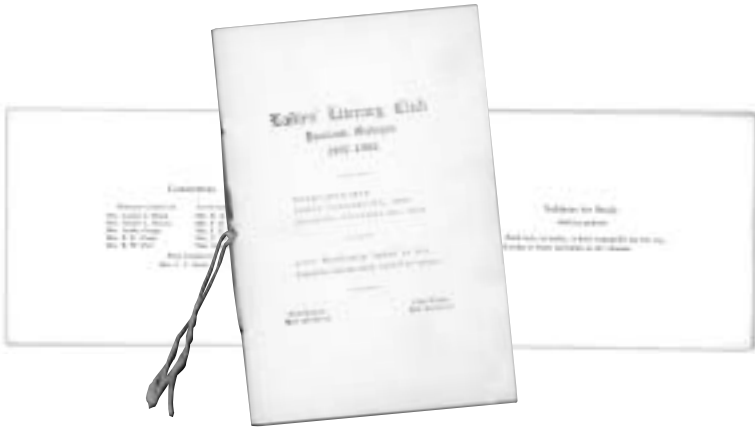
At this critical moment, Mrs. Atwood McAndrew gained the floor and announced with pride that Thomas W. McAndrew had offered to loan them \$2,000. Mr. McAndrew had more faith in the ability of the women to pay off the debt than had the presidents of two banks. With the assurance of this loan, Mrs. Kate Thompson Westfall rose to her feet and made a motion to buy the Grant property. The motion passed with only four votes against it.

It was necessary to incorporate to buy the property, a legal matter that was taken care of early in 1914. The first meeting in the club's new home took place on October 14, 1914. Now that the ladies had their dream house, they had to pay for it.

Mrs. Frederick Gorton was president at that time and Mrs. Bennett Kief the retiring president. The club's trustees were Mrs. Austin George, Mrs. Atwood McAndrew, Mrs. Charles Sweet, Mrs. Floyd Westfall, and Mrs. Steven Yerkes. Members of the House Committee were Mrs. Louise Humphrey, Mrs. Guy Davis, and Mrs. Charles Sweet. Several members loaned a total of \$700 without interest, including Mrs. Atwood McAndrew, Mrs. Bennett Kief, Miss Florence Shultes, Miss Frances Higley, and Mrs. Louise Humphrey. Other members and interested citizens gave quite generously to the fund.

As is so often the case, it was soon determined that the house needed immediate repairs. An additional \$1,500 was added to the budget to fund them. Members worked very hard, holding rummage sales and bake sales and hosting dinners, teas, and bridge parties.

Mrs. P. R. Cleary spoke of the interest the general public had taken in the purchase of the clubhouse in a paper she presented during the club's fiftieth year, on February 23, 1938 (see *Memories*, p. 43). Mrs. Cleary had been a member of the committee appointed in 1913 to look into the viability of purchasing the Grant house. One of her tasks had been to interview its owner. Another had been to approach ten local businessmen to solicit funds. Mr. Robert Hemphill gave generously, and Mrs. Cleary recalled that on Christmas morning that year she received a greeting and a check for \$50 from President Lewis H. Jones of the Michigan State Normal College.



## First Outside Speaker

The club's first outside speaker was Judge Harriman of Ann Arbor, who gave a lecture in February 1902 on the life and writings of John Greenleaf Whittier. An outside speaker was still an exception in 1902. The club's purpose had been from the beginning to raise the educational and cultural standards of its members by active participation. Gradually through the years the programs became more varied, and entertainment days began to be featured. In more recent years, a large percentage of the club's programs have been presented by outside speakers. Some members think that the pendulum has swung over too far. But there are two schools of thought, with good reasons presented on both sides.

The social side of the club is emphasized more today, with gala days, drama days, high teas, and dessert luncheons. Through the years the club has remained committed to its Social Service Day, when members sew for charitable agencies in the city. Debates are still held on the leading questions of the day, and original short stories, poems, and musical compositions continue to be popular club programs.

## A Golden Day

Like a bird of evil omen, the mortgage hovered over the lovely old clubhouse for fourteen years. Then came the day when members celebrated the club's fiftieth anniversary. It was truly a Golden Day, with the

theme carried out in the place cards and candles. The centerpiece on the tea table, a bowl of yellow roses, was the gift of Mrs. Guy Davis.

A loan of \$75 from the treasury enabled the club to make its last payment. The mortgage, dated February 7, 1914, was burned in the flames of a taper with proper ceremony by Mrs. C. V. Brown and club President Mrs. Alex Longnecker. Mrs. Guy Davis sent an original poem for the occasion and Mrs. Sarah George, a member since 1879, delighted her audience by recalling anecdotes and incidents from the club's history.

The flames of the taper had scarcely died out before Mrs. Henry Frain proposed a Sarah George Loan Fund, to be funded initially by a gift of \$5 from each member. Fund-raising activities were also proposed to bring the fund quickly to \$500. Mrs. Jennie Keech gave the first gift of \$10. Mrs. Frain set up the loan fund with the purpose of benefiting young women at Ypsilanti High School, whose selection would be based on scholarship, leadership, and moral character.

The club's Golden Day featured music by soloists Miss Margaret Bennett and Mrs. George Wortley, whose lovely voice still lingers in the club's rooms. Mrs. Atwood McAndrew and Mrs. R. A. Clifford also played brilliant piano duets.

## Club Principles and Good Works

In later years, the club has lived up to the principles set forth in the 1918 amendment to its constitution. Members have appealed to city fathers for better street lighting, a curfew, the improvement of parks, and protection for the city's youth. In any issue for the good of the community, members have used their united power to influence public opinion. They were the prime movers in assuring that milk sold here would be clean, and they have been active in the campaigns for liquor control, sanitation, and many other vital issues of the day.

In the days of the Chautauquas in Ypsilanti, club members worked faithfully to sell tickets and supported in every way this first-class entertainment that enlivened the days of summer. Members have cooperated in Red Cross and Community Chest drives and blood donor days and they have acquitted themselves well in bond sales for the southeastern district. The club sponsors a Girl Scout troop each year and it has given money to

help the Carver Community Center, the Gilbert House, and the Salvation Army. The club has always cooperated with Washtenaw County agencies offering assistance to the country in times of war.

For several years, a number of club members were readers for the blind at the Michigan State Normal College. In recent years the Club supported the Community Concert Project, the Needlework Guild, and Girls' Town, a project of the Michigan State Federation of Women's Clubs.

The Sarah George Loan Fund reached the \$2,000 mark in July 1953 and is now an official scholarship fund. The first recipient of a Sarah George Scholarship was Ypsilanti High School honor student Miss Betty Ann Curtis.

## Clubhouse Recognition

The clubhouse has undergone many changes through the years. The metal ceilings were removed early on and in 1937 and 1950 partitions were taken down. Wailing was heard as the walls came down. But these changes to enlarge the club's seating space were approved by Emil Lorch, a well-known local architect and head of the University of Michigan's architecture program. Lorch thought our clubhouse to be one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the country, although some of its features, like the ventilators in the outside pillars, would have startled the Greeks. Lorch commended the members of the club's board of trustees, who through the years have guarded and preserved our historic home.

In club year 1933–1934, with so many people out of work, a group of eight architects, headed by Professor Lorch, had the time to invade our beautiful and interesting old house. They measured it inside and out, while jotting down figures in notebooks. The architects recorded all of the house's unusual features, including its large pillars and metal lace work on the outside, and its interesting doorways, aproned windows, and Victorian fireplaces. The result of the architects' study of the house was its selection by the Advisory Committee of the American Buildings Survey "because of its age and architectural interest as being worthy of most careful preservation for future generations." This document was deposited in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The Greek Revival house at 218 North Washington Street, Ypsilanti, owned since 1914 by the Ladies' Literary Club, was the first house in the state of Michigan to be so designated.

In 1937 the rooms were made fresh and attractive with the aid of paper and paint, new curtains and draperies, and upholstery. Each year brings some fresh claim on the club's treasury for house repairs or improvement.

Other clubs and organizations rent the clubhouse regularly, and wedding receptions, teas, and other social functions are often held in its charming parlors. Many pieces of furniture and some of the floor coverings have been donated over the years by members.

Four pleasant rooms, occupied by the caretakers at the rear of the house, and the club's stage were added to the original structure. A cupola once crowned the building but, unfortunately, Mr. Grant had it removed.

## Seventy-Five Years Go By

And so the years pass, and like a sundial we have counted the sunny hours. But the club has also known days of discouragement, and days of sadness when members have been taken by death—not all have lived to their allotted three-score years and ten. In looking over seventy-five years of club records, the names of many talented and loyal Ypsilanti women come to light. The Ladies' Literary Club has been blessed by the presence of these women.

In 1953, on the occasion of its seventy-fifth anniversary celebration, the club reached its quota of 135 active members; another nineteen associate, four honorary, three life, and seven guest members were on its roster that year.

# 1953-1978

by Jeanne Jordan

Member 1956-1983; President 1966-1968

In 1978, twenty-five years later, there are still 135 active members and the club continues to honor its forty-year members by granting to them life membership. Currently there are ten such honored members.

Club archives do not reveal the exact date when the red carnation was chosen as the club flower and the colors red and green as the club colors. New members are often surprised to receive a “red and green” corsage in October when they join.



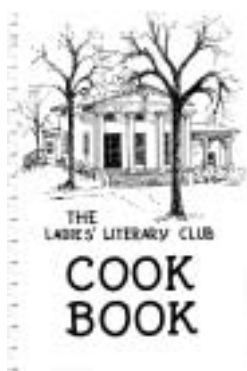
## Club Objectives

The objectives of the club have remained unchanged. The 1918 amendment, which added the clause about civic or community betterment, has led to many worthwhile accomplishments over the last twenty-five years. In 1961, members held a bridge luncheon to benefit the new Cleary College library. In April 1963, a tea raised money for the Ypsilanti Public Library furniture fund. The story of the club's connection to Ypsilanti's first library was told at regular club meeting that year in the new library on West Michigan Avenue.

Fund-raisers in 1964 benefited the Ypsilanti Greek Theater and the new Ypsilanti Historical Society. A charter member of the Greek Theater, the club worked actively for the theater until its demise. When the Historical Society moved into its new location on North Huron Street in December 1969, the club voted to give it \$100.

The club sponsored a bridge party benefit at the clubhouse for the Ypsilanti Youth Center in April 1968, and in 1972 it participated in the Michigan Artrain project. In 1974, a contribution of \$100 to the area Meals on Wheels program entitled the club to appoint a member to the Meals on Wheels board. Members continue to work on the delivery van on a regular rotation.

Contributions are made annually to a variety of causes, some of which have disappeared over time. Since 1953, gifts in varying amounts have been given to the Ypsilanti Community Fund, the March of Dimes, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Ypsilanti Drum and Bugle Corps, and numerous other organizations. Social Service Day continues to be a club mainstay each October and gifts are still collected at that time for the children's division of Ypsilanti State Hospital.



## More Club Firsts

An interest in the beginnings of traditions is appropriate in a club history, and some firsts include:

- ❖ Name tags were introduced in January 1963 and continue to be worn at meetings and at special events at the clubhouse.
- ❖ The first table for past presidents at the annual May luncheon was inaugurated in 1964 on the anniversary of the club's eighty-fifth year and its fiftieth year in the clubhouse.

- ❖ In 1965 the club voted to honor retiring club and board of trustee presidents with a citation and a contribution to the landscaping fund. Previous past presidents had been given a personal gift.
- ❖ The permanent screen for showing slides or movies was installed in January 1966.
- ❖ The first club cookbook was published in 1967. Priced at \$2.75, the 1,000 copies sold out and became collectors' items.
- ❖ The first meeting to begin at 1:30 p.m. rather than the traditional 2 p.m. was in January 1968.
- ❖ The tradition of offering guest memberships to wives of clergymen was discontinued after 1969.
- ❖ In 1971, the club donation to the Sarah George Scholarship Fund in honor of members who have died increased from \$10 to \$20.
- ❖ The first successful use of the new public address system took place in November 1973.

## Gifts and Purchases

Gifts to and large purchases by the club have been numerous. The board of trustees purchased a silver tea service in May 1954. Mrs. Longnecker, Mrs. Handy, and Mrs. Shaefer donated the president's desk in February 1959. The following year \$2,700 was spent on new carpeting. A legacy from Mrs. Atwood McAndrew, Sr., allowed for the purchase of a piano that was played in the club for the first time in October 1965. In the 1960s a club choral group was active; the chorus sang at both regular meetings and on special occasions.

## A Member Becomes Mayor

The involvement of club members in elected civic positions began in 1962 when Susan Sayre was elected to the Ypsilanti City Council. Susan was later chosen by council members to be Ypsilanti's first woman mayor. The club honored her with a scroll in May 1968. In 1970 Susan was elected to the Washtenaw County Board of Supervisors. The civic involvement of club members has continued with Nathalie Edmunds elected to City Council in 1970. Nathalie has completed several terms and still serves today [1978].

Discussion of the club's membership in the Federation of Women's Clubs came up periodically through the years. The strength of our club bolsters local groups, but members decided the club did not gain any benefits from its affiliation with the national and state federations. In April 1973, the club voted to withdraw all of its national, state, and southeastern Michigan club memberships, while continuing memberships with the city and county women's clubs. By April 1975 members had decided to drop memberships in those organizations, both of which dissolved by the end of the year.

## The National Register

Recognizing its own longstanding traditions has played an important part in the life of the Ladies' Literary Club. To commemorate the first meeting in the clubhouse, on October 14, 1914, the minutes of that day were read at the October 14, 1964 meeting. A brochure describing the club's history, membership requirements, and purpose was published in February 1965. The brochure explained club policies clearly, helping to answer questions that came up during policy discussions.

In November 1965 the first marker on a historic house in Ypsilanti, bearing the Michigan State Historical Commission designation No. 47, was presented to the club; and on March 16, 1972, the club was notified that its clubhouse was now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

A new edition of the popular club cookbook was published in time to be sold during Ypsilanti's Sesquicentennial celebration in 1973. In keeping with the historical theme, a new section with historic recipes was added. Recipes for cooking for a crowd were also new in the cookbook.



*The Bicentennial quilt.*

## Celebrations

The clubhouse was the site of the kick-off for the Sesquicentennial celebration and the club entered a float in the festive parade that commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Fourth of July in Ypsilanti. A lemonade stand on the club's front lawn proved a popular spot after the parade. As had been the custom at the club all spring, the ladies wore long, old-fashioned dresses while serving lemonade. In October 1973 a yearbook and a letter from the president were included in a time capsule to be opened in 2023 during Ypsilanti's Bicentennial.

In 1976 members sewed a stunning quilt to mark the 200th anniversary of the United States. Under the direction of Josephine Calkins, who also designed the quilt, members appliqued fifty squares representing the official flower of each state. The quilt was displayed for the first time at the May 1976 annual luncheon.

Miss Dorothy James, a composer of international reknown, joined the club on her retirement from the EMU music department in 1968. She was honored on her seventy-fifth birthday with performances of her works throughout the United States. The December 1976 meeting featured a mezzo-soprano, a harpist, a pianist, and a high school choral group performing music by Dorothy James.

## A Visit to the Bentley

In April 1978, a regular club meeting was held at the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor. The Bentley's director spoke to the club about the library and its contents and he explained the library's acquisitions process. A display of club records, including scrap-books and meeting minutes, was of special interest to members at the Bentley Library that day.

## Remodeling Again

While a primary purpose of the Ladies' Literary Club is preservation of its historic clubhouse, the rental of the house to other clubs and to the public has meant that the newer areas in the clubhouse must continue to be updated.

In January 1955, a \$2,500 remodeling project resulted in a new pink-and-brown kitchen located across the hall from the present kitchen. All remained quiet on the building front until October 1969, when a discussion of tearing down the caretaker's shabby apartment and replacing it with a studio apartment took place. This led to far more ambitious plans. In February 1970, preservation architect Richard Frank spoke to the membership.

A building committee was appointed, headed by Mildred Harris, and a year of intense study and discussion ensued. Mr. Frank came before the club again at a special meeting. The need for a caretaker's apartment, a larger and more convenient kitchen, additional restrooms, and space for workshop activities and storage was evident. Suggestions presented at the special meeting led to the formulation of the final remodeling plans.

Unfortunately, the club did not qualify for federal historic preservation funds since the rebuilding did not in any way alter the historic portion of the house. Members knew, of course, that the more money they raised, the less they would have to borrow. The total price for the remodeling was set at \$58,000. The club had in hand \$20,000 and a mortgage of \$38,000 was arranged, with two local banks loaning equal amounts. As of July 1978 the total still owed on the mortgage was \$6,650.84.



*Bazaar day in 2003.*

## The Christmas Bazaar

Raising money had become second nature to club members. The first Santa's Workshop, a Christmas bazaar, was held on November 30, 1962, to help repay a loan for carpeting. With plans to renovate and the need for raising money a paramount consideration, the ladies instituted an ongoing flea market, which eventually produced more than \$5,400. A Gala Day yielded \$715. Bake sales, member donations spread over three years, an expanded Christmas bazaar, and an increase in annual dues to \$25 for active members and \$35 for associate members are examples of fund-raising schemes from that time. The high quality of the articles sold at the Christmas bazaar is well known. A Detroit TV craft show featured items made by members in November 1975.



*The 1997 bazaar.*

## A Dramatic Ending

The final performance on the old stage at the end of the dining room took place on Drama Day in February 1971. The play *Barely Possible* was staged readers' theater style, with a minimum of costuming. "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" was the theme of the day's closing remarks. It was noted that members no longer wore hats and white gloves to meetings and that many even felt comfortable wearing pant suits to the club.

Because of the remodeling project, the ladies were not meeting in their beloved clubhouse in the fall of 1971. Regular club meetings were at the St. John's Elementary School library, the annual Christmas bazaar took place in the basement of the Presbyterian Church, and Ardis Elementary School was the site of Gala Day. During those months all efforts went toward the remodeling project.

On April 12, 1972, the first regular meeting was held in the remodeled clubhouse. The next meeting was an official housewarming; members brought items to replenish the kitchen. A well-attended formal tea on June 18 showed off the refurbished clubhouse to the public.

## Our Scholarship Endures

Sarah George Scholarship funds were removed from EMU in fall 1975 and put into a certificate of deposit to realize a higher income. Tuition is paid every fall for an Ypsilanti High School female graduate entering EMU as a freshman (in 1978 EMU tuition was \$365 per term).

In May 1976, the fund received a \$200 contribution from the 1956 scholarship winner. In her accompanying letter, she explained that if she had not received the scholarship, she likely would not have attended college. Her Sarah George Scholarship set her on a path that had led to great satisfaction, and she informed the club of its far-reaching influence on her life.

At the beginning of this history, it is noted that the first meeting of the club took place on May 7, 1878. The annual luncheon on May 10, 1978, marked the hundredth year of continuous meetings of the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti.



You are cordially invited to our Centennial Tea  
on Wednesday, October eleventh  
from two-thirty to four-thirty o'clock  
Ladies' Literary Club  
218 North Washington Street  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

## 1978–1990

by Mary Claire Anhut  
Member since 1965; President 1992-1994

What a splendid occasion the beginning of the Ladies' Literary Club hundredth anniversary celebration was in 1978! Carolyn (Mrs. John) Kirkendall was the first speaker of the day, delightfully recounting anecdotes from the club's history. Our club flower, the red carnation, topped a scrumptious three-tiered cake centered on the tea table, flanked by additional arrangements of red carnations. President Jean Nelson (Mrs. James) presided at the tea prepared by Margaret Williams and her committee. Jane Moore (Mrs. Alan) and Marian Elliott (Mrs. George) had co-chaired the Centennial Committee with careful thought. All present and past members, the Mayor of Ypsilanti, and other dignitaries were invited to the first meeting of our Centennial Year.

### Pigeon Problems

Throughout the year the pigeon problem continued to obsess Board of Trustees President Phyllis Clark (Mrs. Donald), whose responsibility it was to research and resolve the problem of continuously cooing intruders. A Plexiglas solution restricted pigeon access to the upper beams of the clubhouse. On a brighter note, that year a handsome wood-and-glass case was installed on the wall in the dining room alcove to preserve and display the club's magnificent Sesquicentennial quilt.

### Mrs. Putnam Returns

Near the end of the club's Centennial Year, a properly gowned Phyllis Clark introduced "Mrs. Daniel Putnam," the 1878 club foundress. Mrs. Putnam reviewed a 100-year-old book on housekeeping, exhorting young mistresses of the house to keep their lazy Irish servants strictly in check. Because Sarah Putnam had been blinded by lightning in the early years of her marriage, the eyes of our speaker that day remained closed during her presentation.

Club members continued their civic involvement with Marcia Harrison-Harris (Mrs. Douglas), and following her, Mary Claire Anhut (Mrs. William) elected to the Washtenaw Community College Board of Trustees. Jean Nelson was elected president of the Ypsilanti District Library Board. The Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce sponsored a historical festival with Nathalie Edmunds (Mrs. William) as co-chairman. The club was urged to open its house for tours and to sell lemonade and cookies. This was the club's initial contribution to what is now the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

## A Disagreement with the City

In 1980 the city of Ypsilanti decreed that the club must pay property taxes. On May 19 an Internal Revenue Service employee appeared at 9 a.m. to conduct an audit. He was given shoeboxes of receipts and records and lists documenting every occasion when the clubhouse had been rented. Overwhelmed with minutiae, the poor man beat a hasty retreat. Under protest the club paid its property tax bill.

For the next four years, attorney James Nelson diligently lobbied City Council to overturn the decision to levy property taxes. Finally, City Council voted on the issue. It was a huge relief when notice was received in 1984 that property taxes would no longer be assessed. The club had clearly demonstrated that it is an asset not only to the city of Ypsilanti but to the many nonprofit organizations that regularly rent it. The Board of Trustees voted to send kudos, along with a check for \$2,000, to Mr. Nelson as a token of profound appreciation for his efforts on the club's behalf.

## Another Mortgage Burned

President Mary Baker (Mrs. James) presided at the October 8, 1980, meeting. Mr. George Elliott, retired board chairman of the Ypsilanti Savings Bank, and Mr. John Renton, past president of the National Bank of Ypsilanti, assisted members in burning the \$38,000 mortgage that had been taken out eight years earlier at 7 percent interest to pay for remodeling the clubhouse. Dr. Rudolph Reichert, head of cardiology at nearby St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, was the speaker at that day's memorable meeting.

## Modernizing

In 1981 a new furnace and air conditioner were installed, creating a more comfortable venue for rentals. As her term ended, President Mary Baker expressed her admiration for the dedication of members, one third of whom had joined the club more than twenty-five years earlier!

In 1982 Patricia Cox (Mrs. Daniel) assumed leadership of the club. At her first meeting, President Cox called on Thelma Warmington (Mrs. Floyd). Thelma reported glowingly that numerous cookbooks had been sold on the sidewalk in front of the Ungrodt family's Crown House of Gifts store on State Street in Ann Arbor during that city's annual Art Fair. Concern over the fate of the Ypsilanti Public Library prompted a vote to donate \$150 to the Save Our Library Fund. In its earliest years, the club had been instrumental in the organization of the city's library and members continue to believe it is important to support this valuable community resource.

## Always Fund-Raising

In 1983 an unusual fund-raiser was announced to help with expenses for the care of member Mary Belle Blodgett's (Mrs. James) grandson Jim, who had been paralyzed in a diving accident. A Fantasy Circus took place in members' imaginations as they listened to descriptions of sequin-garbed Jane Salcau (Mrs. John) riding astride an elephant and Rachael Lamb (Mrs. Jerome), parasol in hand, cavorting across a tightrope. Top hats were passed, and the only thing not imaginary that day was the \$714 raised to buy a computer to help Jim communicate more easily.

Additional financial matters were discussed: Members voted to donate the first \$500 profit from the annual Christmas bazaar raffle to the Sarah George Scholarship Fund; it was announced that the \$10,000 account at the National Bank of Ypsilanti was drawing 10.5 percent interest; Thelma Warmington reported that JoAnn Geer (Mrs. Worden) had sold forty-three cookbooks; our late past president Jeanne Jordan (Mrs. Hoover), an outstanding woman who wrote the 1953–1978 club history, was memorialized with \$1,070 in donations to the scholarship fund; \$500 was pledged over three years to support EMU's Quirk Theater Development Fund; members were informed that smoke detectors had finally been purchased for the clubhouse.

## The Men Help

The year 1984 began with renowned sculptor John Nick Pappas, a distinguished EMU art professor and husband of club member Mary Pappas, presenting a fascinating program on sculpture. Professor Pappas was the recipient of the Prix de Rome as well as other awards for his outstanding work.

Sons and husbands arrived, as usual, at the club in November to help set up the Christmas bazaar. They returned several days later to carry boxes and shelving back to the basement. No one was more generous with his time and assistance than Jack Weiss, our number-one handyman and husband of member Barbara Weiss. The amount of that year's bazaar profit—\$6,093—was due in part to the wonderful raffle donations. Don Porter's (Ruth) colorful eight-car toy circus train, George Elliott's (Marian) miniature wood-and-marble dresser, and the much-sought-after Cabbage Patch doll that someone had purchased in Canada (the U.S.A. was "all sold out") resulted in the sale of many raffle tickets. A vote is taken every year to decide to hold a bazaar in the upcoming year. It was no surprise when members unanimously voted "Yea!"

In 1985, Ypsilanti's first African-American city manager, Matt Hennessee, gave a talk on The State of the City. Guests were now signing a guest book, which recorded prospective members' attendance at meetings. President Rose Budd (Mrs. Patrick) announced that Thelma Warmington had agreed to continue her faithful role as chairman of the cookbooks (\$132 this year), despite her decision to become an associate member.

For Drama Day, Camilla Damoose (Mrs. N. G.), assisted by Jane Moore, produced a delightful scene from Cornelia Otis Skinner's *The Women* to appreciative applause. Camilla was presented with a lovely bouquet in honor of her years as a dedicated and professional theater director for club Drama Days.

Mary Baker, chairman of the board of trustees, called a vote to ratify the board's decision to purchase new carpeting for \$9,800.

## Venerable Members Honored

In 1986, President Carolyn Kirkendall opened her first meeting with a salute to new fifty-year members Alice Warner Woods (Mrs. James J.), Marie Cleary Mangas (Mrs. Jesse), and Lucille Curtis (Mrs. Carroll). It was announced that fifty white snowdrop crocuses would be planted in their honor in the clubhouse yard. Mary Wiedman (Mrs. Allen) introduced David Weikert, President of Ypsilanti's High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, who spoke about its internationally recognized preschool training project. The program has been a success in countries all over the world.



## Leading Lady of Cookbooks

Phyllis Clark reported initial sales of \$582 for the new *Soups & Salads* cookbook. Her mother, Thelma Warmington, proudly announced that 192 red cookbooks had been sold at the Gilbert Residence! Since 1973, when the sesquicentennial cookbook was printed, total sales have reached \$3,446. Thelma was roundly applauded!

Club membership in 1987 was ninety-nine Active, thirty-two Associate, fourteen Life, and one Honorary, for a total of 144 members. Carolyn Kirkendall, who always left us laughing, ended her first year as president by quoting humorist Erma Bombeck: "I am always suspicious of a president who enters a meeting in a pair of flats, with a bottle of vitamin compound, a calendar, and a tank of oxygen strapped to her back."

## A Notable Change

When Maebelle Arlin (Mrs. Francis) assumed the Presidency in 1988, members voted to begin referring to members by their first names rather than by their formal married names. Ann McCarthy (Mrs. William) searched the Ypsilanti Historical Museum's archives and added first names to the past-presidents' list in our program book. Another sign of the times was the program "Role Reversal in Retirement" presented by EMU professor of sociology Marie Richmond-Abbott.

## Travels with Nathalie

Programs by members were always well received, including Nathalie Edmunds' exciting travelogues. In 1990 she brought slides and told tales of India, finishing with a demonstration of proper sari draping as she encased President Maebelle in a gorgeous orange chiffon sari, sprinkled with rhinestones.

Club member Marcia Harrison-Harris spoke of the extraordinary plans for development at EMU in collaboration with Ypsilanti and neighboring Ypsilanti Township; Marcia also told us about Radisson Hotels' plans for a new complex in conjunction with EMU, on Huron River Drive near the old Armory and Ford Lake.

# 1990-2003

by Carolyn Kirkendall

Member since 1970; President 1986-1988

The last twenty years, spanning the final decades of the twentieth century, have been vital and tumultuous ones for our country and our world. In the 1990s disruptive events confronted our sensibilities and tested our mettle: the O. J. Simpson trial; the Columbine High School shootings; the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City; and the September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center. Madeleine Albright blazed a trail as the first female secretary of state, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg became the second woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

## Changes, Changes

During this era, the women of Ypsilanti's Ladies' Literary Club saw many changes in their organization:

- ❖ An answering machine at the clubhouse streamlined rental procedures.
- ❖ E-mail addresses of members are now routinely added to the annual booklet.
- ❖ A lovely standardized logo is now engraved and reproduced on gifts.
- ❖ Smoking is prohibited in the clubhouse.
- ❖ A handicapped-access ramp and bathroom (unisex) have been installed.
- ❖ Holiday parties and a silent auction sponsored by the board of trustees raised funds for furniture repair and clubhouse upkeep.

- ❖ Club members now begin meetings singing “America the Beautiful” and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
- ❖ In 1991, the family of Charlotte Ungrodt donated in her memory two complete silver services, two silver candelabra, and 10 silver thermal beverage servers.
- ❖ A grounds committee was established in 1991.
- ❖ In 1992 a professional sound system was installed.
- ❖ The club choir (active in the 1960s) was temporarily resurrected in 1992.
- ❖ The club revised its constitution and by-laws in 1992 and 1999.
- ❖ Our 160-year-old clubhouse (still maintained by a live-in caretaker) was featured in 1993 on the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation Historic Homes Tour, an annual August event during the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.
- ❖ In October 1999 the Club opened its membership to the ladies of the Ypsilanti Women’s Study Club, which had dissolved the previous May after many years in existence.
- ❖ In 2000 the Ladies’ Literary Club Foundation was incorporated to oversee gifts to two scholarship funds.
- ❖ An informal, drop-in bridge group began to meet in 2001.



*Joan Willoughby*



*Sarah George*

## A Second Scholarship Fund

The Sarah George Loan Fund, established in 1928 with contributions of \$500, has grown into the Sarah George Scholarship Fund. Every year two female graduates of Ypsilanti High School attending Eastern Michigan University are awarded a \$1,500 scholarship. Selection is still based on scholarship, leadership, and moral character.

The Joan Willoughby Scholarship was established in 1999 by Robert Willoughby in memory of his wife, a past president and dedicated club leader. The scholarship is awarded annually to an area high school graduate or nontraditional student pursuing a degree in health care at Washtenaw Community College.



*Members at a 1970 tea table.*

## Afternoon Tea

Writer Henry James famously said, “There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.” Club members continue this comforting and elegant tradition after each meeting. They still wear name tags but not the mandatory gloves and hats from the days of yore. Our tea fare includes sandwiches; cheese; hors d’oeuvres and candy; cakes and cookies; raw vegetables and fruit, with dips; and tea and coffee (always decaffeinated!).

## Always Traditions

Traditions are valuable, comforting, and necessary. Since the Ladies’ Literary Club’s beginnings, they have played an important part in the life of the club.

- ❖ Our annual Christmas bazaar is now forty-one years old (decades of hot-glue-gun workshops). The bazaar is the club’s primary moneymaker, with all funds going to the preservation and maintenance of its historic clubhouse.

- ❖ The historian continues to collect photos and other materials for club scrapbooks as well as club minutes, to be deposited in the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library archives.
- ❖ An annual Social Service Day, named in 1993 for member Marguerite Smith because of her dedication to the project, continues to gather members together to pin, cut, and sew flannel baby blankets and gowns to distribute to the needy.

## Change and Continuity

Parliamentary procedure drills, pure milk crusades, and “Indian Love Call” musical solos are now in the club’s past. But programs, by both members and outside speakers, continue to be informative and entertaining, reflecting the traditional emphasis on culture and the topics of the day. Drama Day, Gala Day, book reviews, travelogues, music, art, holidays, antiques, humor, gardening, and cookery are still subjects of programs. Civic issues are also addressed, including municipal charters, millage votes, women’s health and finance, wills and trusts, and recycling.

Annual dues remain a requirement. In 2003 they are \$50 for active members. This is a steep increase from the \$2.50 charged in 1890!

## Still Donating

Members continue to espouse the club’s objective: “To serve as an energizing force for all that makes for civic and community betterment.” In the past twelve years alone, money has been donated to the following causes: restoration of EMU’s Pease Auditorium, Safe House, Meals on Wheels, SOS, United Way, Dawn Farm, the Corner Health Center, Beyer Hospital, the University of Michigan’s Mott Children’s Hospital, the Education Project for Homeless Youth, the Salvation Army, the Ypsilanti High School Chamber Singers, the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, Hope Clinic, the Ypsilanti District Library, Prospect Place, Catholic Social Services, Hospice of Washtenaw, Habitat for Humanity, Yorkwood Center, and Ypsilanti’s Riverside Arts Center.

## Thriving

In spring 2004 membership numbers 154. Until her death in late March 2004, past president Marie Cleary Mangas, who joined in 1937, had held the record at sixty-seven years!

Time inevitably marches on. Touching memorials are still read at meetings in honor of members who have died. The majority of young women now work during the day, which is a big change from 1878 when women were not welcome in the business world. Attracting new members is a constant and challenging effort. But just as they did 125 years ago, loyal Ladies' Literary Club members find value, reassurance, and satisfaction in meeting, learning, and working together as part of a beloved and traditional club society.



The State of Michigan recognizes the club on its 125th anniversary in 2003.



*Helen J. Cleary.*

# MEMORIES

## *Reminiscences*

by Helen J. Cleary

*Helen Cleary was the wife of P. R. Cleary, the founder of Cleary College. When Helen died in December 1939, she had been involved in the club for a half a century. She presented her reminiscences on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the club, on February 23, 1938.*

I came to Ypsilanti as a bride in July of 1889. Mrs. Higley and Miss Higley had been intimate friends of my family at St. Clair for over fifty years. In the fall of 1889 or 1890, Miss Higley proposed my name for membership in the Literary Club. I was accepted and received my notification of membership, which I still have. The first meeting I attended was at the beautiful home of Mrs. Joseph F. Sanders on Huron Street. It had just been completed and was one of the showplaces of the town. It was built by an architect by the name of Van Falkenburg, who also built Cleary College and the Dodge home and Miss Kitchen's home on Adams Street. Mr. Van Falkenburg was very partial to towers and left his imprint on many of the houses he built. He did excellent work as has been proved in the college, which has developed undreamed of possibilities for expansion.

At this time, the club was meeting about at the homes of the members. I remember that the dues were \$2.50 and it looked like a lot of money to me at that time as we were struggling to pay for Cleary College.

There was a ruling that if a member was absent three consecutive meetings she was automatically dropped from the membership roll. I

think I resigned when I found circumstances were such that I could not be at all certain of being able to attend the meetings, but I am not sure I was not dropped. I think I must have attended a good many of the meetings that year for I so well remember many of the homes of the ladies. As I was an occasional guest in these homes, I can not be sure they were club meetings. These homes were all so interesting and different—each had a distinct atmosphere of its own.

The Walton home was in the old Starkweather home, which is now the Ladies' Library. Mrs. Walton in her lovely laces and her white gowns, winter and summer; sweet, gentle Miss Minnie; and Miss Walton, so many years at the Normal library, whom very many of you knew and appreciated.

Mrs. Rexford was charming and quite my idea of a lady. Cordial, but a little reserved, tiny, always beautifully dressed and delicately perfumed, a perfect hostess in her delightful old home with its mahogany furniture. I recall the candlesticks with crystal pendants, the many unique ornaments and pictures, and the heavy Brussels carpet with a very light ground in which bright red roses were scattered.

The Putnam home was lovely too, with its rows upon rows of books in leather bindings and its photographs of authors, which leant it a scholastic atmosphere lightened by Miss Ruth's grand piano music and pictures of composers.

Mrs. Watling's home was still quite different. The circular stairway going up out of the hall in the tower and its beautiful steel engravings and paintings and other works of art gave it an artistic setting.

Mrs. Julia Sherman, a prominent clubwoman, was way ahead of her times and was our first businesswoman. She went into partnership with her brother in Real Estate and Insurance. I think the firm name was Edwards and Sherman. Mrs. Sherman wore severely tailored suits with shirt-waists, low-heeled shoes, a fedora hat and an eyeglass, and she carried a cane. She was a tiny woman but affected a very deep voice and a mannish stride, and had several distinctive mannerisms. One would need to know her to appreciate her.

Another faithful attendant at the club for years was Miss Rocena Norris. She belonged to one of our oldest and most prominent families. Mrs. Mark Norris and Mrs. Follett were closely associated with Mrs. Putnam in

organizing the club in 1878. Miss Norris always came into the club meeting alone and I never saw her talking to anyone. She was so secure in her sense of birth and breeding that she wore, with serenity and an air, the hats, dresses, and cloaks of a previous decade quite undisturbed. I have been told she was an artist of unusual ability and had painted some lovely portraits.

Another lovely lady was Miss Elizabeth Lamb. She had a gentle dignity, but was gracious and kind to everyone. A true lady in the highest sense of the world. She had exquisite tact and was always smoothing over turbulent water of the club. She and Miss Bonsteel were warm friends and usually came together to the club. Mrs. J. M. B. Sill and her sister, Mrs. Graham, were active in club affairs.

While I was still very young, Mrs. Sill and Mrs. Graham came to call upon me one afternoon. In those days, ladies would start out on a round of formal calls making about fifteen or twenty in one afternoon. The Sills had a two-seated carriage and a big, fat brown horse. They stopped at our gate (we had them in those days) and sent their coachman in with their cards to see if I were "receiving" that afternoon. I was, but I was so overwhelmed I could not think of a thing to say. They did not stay long—less than fifteen minutes, the fashionable time allotted for each call then. I think Principal Sill would have enjoyed being jolly and friendly if he had dared.

Then Miss McMahon became President and she urged me to come back into the club, but by then I had three little children and my health was very poor. For ten years I was quite unable to do anything outside of my home and Cleary College duties, which came first, and I felt that it was not fair to the club—when there was always a waiting list—to hamper it by useless members.

In 1896 the Study Club was formed by the Literary Club as an auxiliary and Mrs. W. H. Sherzer as vice-president of the Literary Club was its first president. In 1898 Mrs. Sherzer served as president of the Literary Club. After Miss Pearce became president of the club in 1902, she decided that I was not going to have any more babies (my youngest was then two years old). She had my name proposed, and I was accepted and reinstated, but she did not mention the matter to me until after I received my formal notification.

By this time the club was so large it could not conveniently meet at the homes of the members so it met at the Ladies' Library and later at the Masonic Temple after that was dedicated in 1909.

I so well remember a Colonial Tea the club gave at the old country club, for which Mrs. Paton, Mrs. R. A. Clifford (the first Mrs. Clifford), and I were members of the committee in charge of the affair. We each had a formal colonial over-dress made for the occasion. I think we all wore the skirts to our wedding dresses. Mrs. Clifford was so lovely with her beautiful red hair and lovely pink and white complexion in the dress which, if I remember, was in shades of green. Mrs. Paton still has her gown but the children wore mine out in "dressing up" and the last of it perished in the fire. We all so regretted Mrs. Clifford's early death.

About this time the first Mrs. Jefferson stirred up the entire country with her pure milk crusade. She persuaded the club to sponsor the project of demanding an investigation of all milk supplies and sources. The farmers and dairymen were all up in arms and it was said that even the cows arose in wrath and protest and bolted wild-eyed, snorting around in their pastures. It resulted in our present splendid dairies. She was also a leader in the anti-tuberculosis campaign, which later became the Red Cross Society, and in women's suffrage, which I think resulted in the League of Women Voters. The club took part in these movements but was quite conservative. However, they were always intensely interested in every good work for the town, the community, and the student body.

Mrs. Jefferson was a very remarkable woman. She was a graduate of Radcliffe and intensely alive and interested in all affairs affecting the town, although she bought almost everything for her home and family in Boston by mail order. I felt constrained to remind her that, upon borrowing a spool of thread, it did not come from Boston but was purchased at the Bee Hive, the forerunner of the "five and ten," which at that time was owned by Trim and McGregor and did a thriving business in dry goods and notions.

At this time the outstanding women in the club were Miss King, Miss Pearce, Mrs. George, Mrs. Humphrey, Mrs. Pease, Mrs. D'Ooge, Mrs. Barbour, Mrs. Burton, and Mrs. Kief.

I remember a very crude paper I prepared for the club on Edgar Allen Poe. I have loved him and his books ever since—in spite of his sins and eccentricities.

I also spent many weeks on a long paper on "In Memoriam" which was dry as dust but which was of great benefit to me, if it did not edify the club.

I also took part in a story writing contest sponsored by Mrs. Humphrey. It was a serial and several members wrote different chapters. I think I received the third prize, which was a package of flower seeds.

When we began to discuss the possibility or desirability of owning our own clubhouse, I believe that the suggestion came almost simultaneously from Mrs. E. R. Beal and Mrs. W. H. Sherzer that we purchase the old Grant homestead. I was on the committee to look over the house and interview Mr. Grant.

Later I was given the names of ten businessmen from whom to solicit funds for the clubhouse. Mr. Robert Hemphill was one of these and he subscribed liberally. President Jones was another. He came up to our home to talk the matter over. At that time he was considering a project that was very close to his heart—that of establishing a social center for growing boys downtown. That Christmas morning we received a letter of Christmas greeting from President Jones and enclosing a check for \$50 for the Literary clubhouse. It was also my great privilege to present to the club on behalf of Mrs. Watling the beautiful mirror, which had adorned her home for so many years and is so cherished by us.

All of these lovely ladies of the Literary Club of long ago have entered into the higher spiritual life "in realms beyond the stars" and their mortal remains are sleeping in lovely Highland Cemetery. Let us hope that they are carrying on the activities which they so loved here with happier and more satisfactory results yonder. I wonder if there are Women's Clubs in heaven?

In looking about the club I see many prototypes of those earlier Literary Ladies in the young women of today. They may not be so conservative and conventional as were these ladies of the past, but they are carrying on the work with the same zeal and enthusiasm and I feel sure that they will carry the standards of the club and the work for humanity to higher and nobler heights than those of the past ever dreamed.

And now with the poet Whittier let me say:

*And death and life in my old time lay  
Mingle in peace like the night and day.*



*Sarah Smith Putnam.*

# EARLY CLUB LEADERS

## *The Portrait of a Lady: Sarah Smith Putnam*

*Painted by an amateur  
And mixed in the beautiful pigments  
of the unusual, vivid personality  
of our organizing president.*

by Lu Lu Carpenter Skinner  
Member 1924–1963; President 1945–1947

It is always interesting to know something about a person who is the organizer of some special group or the leader of a particular movement. The person who stands out as the leader in the organization of the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti, Michigan (a Pioneer Club), is Sarah Smith Putnam. She is especially interesting because she was almost blind when she organized the group. With her handicap, most women would have thought that everything was finished for them. But Sarah Putnam was a woman of courage and foresight and she went on with her life with bravery and fortitude.

Sarah Smith Putnam was born March 24, 1828, in Buffalo, New York. When she was six months old her family moved to New Hampton, New Hampshire, where her father became head of the New Hampton Institute. In this college atmosphere she grew to womanhood, and all of her life she was connected through her family with college activities, academically and socially.

She had many pleasant childhood memories of happy days spent at her grandfather's farm in Shoreham on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain. As she grew to womanhood, her family decided that she should

have the advantages offered in historic Boston, a city of culture and learning. So it was arranged for her to study music and drawing there, and she continued to avail herself of these cultural advantages for several winters.

When she was twenty-four years old, Sarah married Daniel Putnam. Two years later, in 1854, they told their friends they were going out to Kalamazoo, Michigan, and no doubt being pitied—for to an Easterner the middle west was “the wilds” or a place to be spoken of as “the provinces.” But the Putnams were young and their hopes were high. Mr. Putnam had been offered a good position teaching Latin and Greek at Kalamazoo College.

The President of Kalamazoo College was Dr. J. A. B. Stone, and his wife, Lucinda Hinsdale Stone, was beginning to be known beyond her own “vine and fig tree.” Mrs. Putnam soon met Mrs. Stone socially in college circles and they became friends. It was a great privilege for a young woman—a stranger in the town—to become associated with someone like Mrs. Stone, one of the foremost women in the state. Mrs. Stone was interested in higher education for women. She was to become nationally known for her leadership in literary, educational, and patriotic circles. Mrs. Putnam was an apt pupil, and the friendship between the two women flourished.

Mrs. Stone, who has been called “the mother of women’s clubs,” was at this time laying the foundation and doing the pioneer work for the organization of women’s groups for study and culture. Her work eventually led to the organization of various city, district, state, and national women’s federations. Mrs. Putnam joined the Kalamazoo Ladies’ Library Association and the Ladies’ Literary Club of that city.

Mr. Putnam, in time, became superintendent of schools in Kalamazoo. A daughter, whom they named Mary, was born to the Putnams. She brought much happiness to their home, but their joy was soon overshadowed by a great tragedy. On a summer day, as Mr. and Mrs. Putnam were watching a severe thunderstorm from a window in their home, a bolt of lightning entered and deprived Mrs. Putnam of her sight. She became very ill from the shock. When she recovered, she realized that she could discern light from darkness and see moving objects and outlines, but could no longer see the faces of her loved ones nor could she read or sew as she had so loved to do. She could not go on with her sketching, and the music that she had learned in Boston seemed to die within her.

Many women would have given up their outside activities and concluded that from now on life had little to offer them. But Sarah Putnam was a person of great force of character. She resolved that she would become neither a clinging vine nor a parasite. She resumed her normal life and reared a family of five—three daughters and two sons—to adulthood. She also kept her home, assisted her husband in his schoolwork, and kept up her interests in her clubs and social and church activities. She remained interested in civic affairs and all vital questions of the day.

In 1868 Daniel Putnam was asked to come to Ypsilanti to teach in the State Normal School, as it was then called. Mrs. Putnam was only forty years old. In spite of her handicap, she entered with enthusiasm into Ypsilanti's church, club, and college life. She and Mr. Putnam affiliated with the Baptist Church and became very active in its affairs. Mrs. Putnam joined the Home Association, which had been organized in 1857 in the Baptist Church to help the city's poor and needy. She became a member of the Ladies' Library Association, which had recently been organized, and later became its president.

Mrs. Putnam still kept in touch with the clubs in Kalamazoo. When she became president of the Ladies' Library Board, she began to talk to the women about forming a group to read and study. She eventually appointed herself and two others to a committee to consider the group study plan and the formation of a literary society. This was in April 1878. In May they met with Mrs. William Paine, wife of the superintendent of the city's schools, to make further plans. The first official meeting was in June 1878.

Mrs. Putnam was elected the first president. As I write this, I wonder if any other Pioneer Club in this state was organized by a woman who was almost totally blind. This brave woman efficiently attended to all the details of putting a new organization in proper order. At first the club met at the homes of the members (there were many charming homes in Ypsilanti). The ladies always enjoyed going to the Putnam home because they loved the rows and rows of leather-bound books, walls adorned with pictures of authors and composers, and an open piano. Those who were musical would gather about it, while a daughter of the house played. Music had not died in that house because its mistress was blind. One felt in the presence of scholars in that hospitable home.

Mrs. Putnam's life was an example of courage and brave initiative.

Her family always said that she was the best-informed member of the household. Mr. Putnam read aloud to her the science and psychology that he taught in the Normal College, and their children shared many things with their mother, reading to her from newspapers, magazines, and books. Mrs. Putnam was an intelligent and appreciative listener.

Mr. Putnam's position was one of importance in the community. The Normal School loaned him to the Ypsilanti School District one year to fill the post of superintendent. Mr. Putnam was an alderman and then mayor of the city, and at two different times he served as acting head of the State Normal School. During these years, Mrs. Putnam was truly the city's First Lady and her influence was far-reaching. She had the happy faculty of passing on to others her best thoughts.

Sarah Putnam's picture hangs in our clubhouse, although many of us never knew her. She was a tiny woman, with dignity and poise. In the Gay Nineties, the style of the day was full skirts that swept the floor, waists with voluminous sleeves, high-buttoned shoes, and wide Merry Widow hats. But Mrs. Putnam dressed in one-piece gray wool gowns, buttoned on the side or from the shoulder, and they were rather short so she would not trip and fall. She wore soft lace at her throat and a small close-fitting bonnet trimmed with jet and tied with a ribbon under her chin. Over her shoulders, she wore a heavy, black silk-beaded mantle. In dress, as in many other things, she was ahead of her time.

Can you not see this quaint Dresden-like figure, with head held high, in her interesting Victorian setting? If you cannot, then I have failed to portray her as I find her in the records so carefully preserved.

Sarah Smith Putnam died in 1909. Her husband had preceded her in death three years before. Those who knew her best speak of her loyalty and devotion to the causes which she espoused, of her kindness to her friends, and of the neighborly instincts that she demonstrated to everyone, but especially to those who were sick or suffering a tragedy.

The impress of her life is still interwoven in our club work like the golden thread of memory. The presidents who have followed after her have all been outstanding women in the community and they have preserved the dignity and the prestige of the Ladies' Literary Club.

So my Portrait of a Lady is finished. In this time of stress and strain, just to read the story of her life gives one courage to face the challenges that each new day presents.



*Mary Burnham Putnam.*

In 1925, Mary Burnham Putnam (the Putnams' daughter born in Kalamazoo) was elected president of the club. It seemed fitting that she should have this honor and privilege. For many years Miss Putnam was professor of political science and economics at Michigan State Normal College. She held several degrees, including an M.Ed. from the Normal College, a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, a Ph.M. from the University of Chicago, and she had studied at Harvard.



*Sarah Wadhams George.*

# *A Beautiful Life:* *Sarah Wadhams George*

by Penny Schreiber  
Member since 1990; President 1998–2000

*A composite picture of energy, force, progressiveness,  
alertness, tact, and sweet womanliness.*

—Sarah George, as described in the 1912  
Ladies' Literary Club magazine.

Sarah Wadhams George was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1847. She came to Ypsilanti in 1879 when her husband, Austin, was appointed professor of English at the Normal College. One of Sarah's first tasks after arriving in town was to join the fledgling Ladies' Literary Club. She plunged in enthusiastically. During her forty years of membership, she was a vital and beloved force in the club. Sarah twice served as club president, in 1882–1883 and 1910–1912, and she was appointed head of the board of trustees in September 1912.

Sarah and Austin George raised six children in their house on Normal Street. Both were deeply involved in city affairs. Sarah helped raise money for the expansion of the Congregational church, she was a leader in the local women's suffrage movement, and she served as president of the Ypsilanti Home Association, among many other community activities.

Sarah George bubbles up everywhere in the archives of the Ladies' Literary Club at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. Sarah enriched those archives by saving so many club programs and memorabilia. Sifting through the early club records, one discovers a much-appreciated Sarah George, with her hand in everything.

Sarah served on the first finance committee, which met to consider the purchase of the clubhouse. In notes she made about the home-purchase negotiations, she describes the house as "an opportunity to do a

beautiful and honorable thing for the community.”

In the 1928 yearbook Sarah is still listed under “active members.” On the club’s fiftieth anniversary, May 9, 1928, Sarah George, in her eighty-first year, gave a talk, vividly recalling many long-ago members. After Sarah spoke, Mrs. Frain stood up, saying, “I wish to propose, at this time, a Sarah George Loan Fund, not only to honor Mrs. Sarah George, but to help worthy high school students to continue their education in a college or university.”

Sarah George died eight months later, on December 29, 1928. The headline on her long obituary in the Ypsilanti newspaper read, “Death Closes a Beautiful Life.”

It is fitting that seventy-six years after her death Sarah George, Ladies’ Literary Club member extraordinaire, is still remembered and honored through the annual scholarships given in her name.

# Acknowledgments

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Fourth of July 1936, p. 4, courtesy University of Michigan

Bentley Historical Library

The Bicentennial quilt, p. 24, Paul Schreiber

Clubhouse on bazaar day, p. 26, J. Adrian Wylie

The 1997 bazaar, p. 26, Peter Yates

Sarah George, p.37, courtesy University of Michigan

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Members at a 1970 tea table, p. 38, Gary Cooperman for the

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Helen J. Cleary, p. 42, courtesy Ann Cleary Kettles

All other photos and graphics are from the archives on the second floor of the clubhouse, with the exception of the photo of Sarah Smith Putnam on p. 48, which hangs in the clubhouse entryway.

The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti, Michigan, celebrates its 125th anniversary in club year 2003–2004. It is remarkable that a women's club that began meeting in the nineteenth century continues to thrive in the twenty-first. Remembrance of things past—continuity of club traditions and awareness of the splendid women from long ago whose names grace faded club year-books—partly explains the club's resilience. But without a doubt, a key reason for the club's longevity can be traced back to 1913, when members made the brave, astute, and prescient decision to purchase their wonderful 1840s Greek Revival clubhouse. During the ninety-one years that the ladies have been meeting at 218 North Washington Street, the upkeep of the house has been an important goal for them to coalesce around. The ladies take great pride in superbly maintaining their home in Ypsilanti's historic district for their own use and the use of the community.

