

**H i s t o r y**  
**of the**

**W o m a n ' s C l u b**  
**of**  
**A s h t o n H e i g h t s**

**A r l i n g t o n**  
**V i r g i n i a**

**1924 - 1976**

As a small group of women sat delicately poised with their sewing needles, the handsome white horses from Fort Myer, a site which had been a military installation since the Civil War, raced by close to their door. It was 1924, just four years after the community known as Alexandria County was changed to Arlington, in order to avoid confusion between the County and the City of Alexandria.

The day was hot and humid. The ladies had been meeting for a year. Suddenly the discussion focused upon the numerous women in the neighborhood who had expressed a desire to join the sewing circle. The women decided that rather than expand the sewing circle they would invite all interested women to organize and form a Woman's Club. The idea caught fire and on July 30, 1924, Mrs. Bell Millrick was elected President, and Mrs. Hazel L. Davies, Secretary. There were 35 charter members, four of them are still active in the Club, Mrs. W. P. Ames, Mrs. G. N. Dagger, Mrs. J. W. England and Mrs. Leonard Jones.

The ladies decided to appeal to Ashton Jones, then the most active real estate dealer in Clarendon, who had acquired land for a subdivision which he named after himself - "Ashton Heights". Mr. Jones was amazed at

this request, but fell in with the idea. He promised to provide a lot for the proposed clubhouse. The lot Mr. Jones had in mind was located on what is now Irving Street close to Pershing Drive. At that time Pershing Drive was known as Cathcart Road because it ended at the Cathcart farm where the Buckingham Apartment complex now stands. Cathcart Road was a narrow dirt road used primarily to exercise the handsome white horses of Port Myer. Irving Street was then known as Clarendon Avenue and contained very few houses. It was in fact a peaceful suburban area with many beautiful trees.

Mr. Jones agreed to supply a lot, stipulating that if the project was not successful, the lot would revert to him, including any improvements that had been put on it. A contract for \$4,700 was signed with a neighborhood contractor to put up the clubhouse, using the plans drawn up by Mrs. Hazel L. Davies. The women had no money but were motivated by a dream, plenty of spirit and determination. Ashton Jones helped them secure a loan and the club was named after him. Thus was the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights born.

In a letter, dated 1974, from Mrs. Davies, she recounts early experiences. There was no sewer at first, chemical

toilets were used in the rest rooms. Dish water drained out on the ground. At first the fireplace was used to heat the clubhouse, but that turned out to be impossible, so a Gasteam system was installed, consisting of hot water radiators, each one heated with a separate gas burner. In very cold weather they had to be drained after each meeting. The original kitchen was much too small, and was later replaced by a larger one. The first cooking equipment was a two burner oil stove, and a little two cover cast iron wood stove. Tenants vacated a house nearby leaving a gas stove. Mr. Jones agreed to have the women move it into the clubhouse. It took a lot of scrubbing to get it clean.

In 1927 the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights became Federated. Affiliation with the National Organization and the State Federation was accomplished.

Right from the beginning Bake Sales were one of the many ways the women earned money to pay off the mortgage. The reputation of the good cooks got around and customers came from outside of the immediate area. Lemon meringue pies were best sellers. Fanny Price's speciality was chocolate creams. She knew how to prepare the real French fondant (which has to be kneaded to make it creamy) then dipped in black chocolate - a really professional job. Each member

was paid for materials used. Some found it difficult to estimate the cost. One young member who sent delicious rolls, pondered a while to estimate her expenses, then said she had used "two sifters of flour".

In the early years a small kitchen sufficed but as the potluck suppers and crowds attending grew, the need for larger cooking and meal preparation space was dominant. The water supply was not adequate. The "Warners" allowed water to be run (by hose) from their house. Water was brought in for flushing the toilet tanks. In freezing weather someone was responsible for draining the toilets and kerosene was added to keep them from freezing.

The new kitchen was a joy with complete cupboards and with a large stove. Dishes at first were donated by members until the women were financially able to purchase a complete service for 100. That was around the number that gathered every Saturday evening for potluck suppers. A committee selected the menu, members were contacted. Meats were ordered and paid out of the treasury. A charge of 25 cents per person was made and each family was asked to bring a dish of food also.

Other methods of income were needed.

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The clubhouse was rented to Marjorie Schuster, a dancing instructor, for years. Young churches rented the clubhouse on Sundays. The Faith Lutheran Church used it for many years until they were able to build their own on Jackson Street and Arlington Boulevard.

Going back to Saturday night suppers, tables were built by the husbands, who also helped to clear them after suppers, fold them up and put them to one side as they prepared for the dance to follow.

The AA group have been renters of the building for years. A big break came when the women could afford a woman to come in and clear away all dishes after meals. At first committees were used to keep the clubhouse clean, then in time it was possible to hire a qualified man or woman to take care of opening and closing the clubhouse as well as cleaning, putting up chairs for meetings, and placing along the wall (folded) after the meetings.

Through the years, as circumstances permitted, the women made payments on the clubhouse mortgage. But in the pre-depression and depression years, money was scarce and there were many years when only the interest on the mortgage was paid. When Fay LeBeau became president in

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1941 there was still a sizeable mortgage on the building. She and a group of like-minded members decided the balance of that mortgage would be paid! They set to work squirreling and scrounging every dollar they could for the mortgage-lifting fund; proceeds from rentals, card parties, bake sales, style shows, and dinners; dinners; dinners! During Ray's term of office and the Presidency of Billie Booker, which followed, the goal was accomplished. Early in 1945 the final payment was made and a mortgage-burning party, to which husbands were invited, was staged on Saturday evening, April 21, 1945. (To this date only one other Woman's Club in the Northern District Federation own their clubhouse).

Now that the club was debt free the members were able to spend more time in service to its members and to the community. Of course many worthwhile activities were carried on while working off the debt. It was hoped that in the years ahead the club would experience a new spirit of independence and freedom from anxiety that would reflect in richer programs of service.

Accounts in Press Books show that the women were very active in community affairs. To name some - Girl Scouts, charity drives, a drive for a school for the retarded, art exhibits, Civil

Defense classes were held in the clubhouse. Hearing tests were given to children at Children's Hospital, safety classes were held and the ladies did youth work. Elsie Whitney was always interested in the music of the community. At one time she had 15 instruments that were rented out to school children for \$10.00 a year. A record has been found of a check for \$350.00 which was given to Judge Reid to pay for psychiatric treatments for a ward of the court.

The club belonged to the builders club of Arlington Hospital, and gave \$1,000.00 to furnish a room there. They also presented the hospital with two wheel chairs.

A scholarship is given each year to a deserving college girl.

For more than 23 years the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights has maintained a patients library in the National Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Hospital located on Army-Navy Drive, Arlington, which they originated.

This past year, 1975, 2,073 hours have been given in service to Meals on Wheels, Friends of Kennedy Center, Veterans Hospital, FISH (For Immediate Sympathetic Help), Cancer (including transportation of patients to the doctor), Red Cross, Reach to Recovery,

Bloodmobile, PTA, Civic Associations, Senior Citizens, School Board Advisory Committees, political campaigns, working with Vietnamese children in a program in the elementary school, church work. Our women are busy in the community doing a variety of services that are meaningful.

In preparation for the Bicentennial Celebration of 1976 a committee was formed with Lucille Pickett as chairman. In August of 1975 this committee drew up plans and presented the following projects to the membership for their approval. Needless to say, everyone agreed to accept the committee's recommendations.

- 1.(a) Present a National Bicentennial Flag to the Longbranch Elementary School, Fillmore Avenue, Arlington.

- (b) Purchase a Bennington flag for the clubhouse.

The National flag was presented by Mrs. Robert Abbott, President, and Mrs. C. Whitesell, 2nd Vice President and member of the Bicentennial Committee, to the children at an assembly at the Longbranch Elementary School, October, 1975.

The Bennington flag was donated by Alice Crabbe and Abby Taylor for the clubhouse.

- 2. To promote an essay contest with a Bicentennial theme at the Thomas Jefferson Junior High School, 3501 S. 2nd St., Arlington, with a first prize of \$10, second prize of \$5.

Mr. Macekura, principal of T.J. Jr. High, informed us in early January, 1976, that the children had started to work on their essays. Deadline was set for January 30.

On March 2, 1976 we received a list of winners. The 8th grade did not participate. The prize money was split four ways.

7th grade 1st prize	Betty Ann Clarke	\$5.00
2nd prize	Rachael Davis	\$2.50

9th grade 1st prize	Lourdes Sio	\$5.00
2nd prize	Andy Cates	\$2.50

The school sent copies of the winning essays and those receiving honorable mention. These essays are in our Bicentennial Scrapbook.

3. Give a History Major Scholarship to George Mason University.

Mrs. Mary S. Farr, a student at George Mason University, was the recipient of this scholarship for \$150. On April 20, 1976, Dr. Joseph L. Harsh, Chm. Dept. of History, and Leon E. Boothe, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, were our luncheon guests when we presented the check to Mary Farr.

4. Have the history of the club written up and present each member with a copy and each new member joining the club.

This book will be presented in the Fall of 1976.

5. For the "Keep America Beautiful, Inc." Mission 76 Phase III Program, we will give an award to the outstanding science student's project at the Washington Lee High School Science Fair.

A check for \$20.00 was presented to Barry S. Boyd, who had been selected by the High School panel to receive our award. Barry's project, "A Comparative Study of the Effect of Attitude and Emotion upon Pupil Size

v. the Effect of Light Only" was remarkable in that he not only collected his own research data but also built his own equipment.

6. Tour the following historic places in Arlington:
  - a. Glebe House
  - b. Ball-Sellers House
  - c. Hume School

On April 20, Miss Anne Webb, Arlington Historical Society, showed slides of the History of Arlington. At a later date members visited the Ball-Sellers House.

7. Selling Virginia Bicentennial Coloring Books, \$3.00 each, proceeds to be shared by Camp Easter Seal. A Federation project.

8. Have a fashion show so that all money to be used for Bicentennial projects will be raised.

Our club put on a fashion show by Town & Travel of McLean with our women as models. Delicious refreshments were served. Approximately \$240.00 was raised.

In addition to completing the out-

lined projects, members and husbands have taken much time to landscape the clubhouse grounds, paint the exterior of the clubhouse building and interior necessities.

The club received recognition in the Arlington County Bicentennial Newsletter, October, 1975, for our many projects.

On April 20, at our Bicentennial Luncheon meeting a representative of the Arlington Bicentennial Commission presented to the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights a "Certificate of Recognition".

A special "Bicentennial Salute" to Arlington's citizens and organizations participating in America's 200th Anniversary was held February 8, 1976, at the Knights of Columbus Hall, Arlington. Your president was invited to represent the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights at this county affair. The club was recognized for their Bicentennial achievements.

For 1975 and 1976 our club sent a contribution toward the expenses of the Arlington Day Parade.

The Ashton Heights Civic Association invited our club to participate in their special program "Ashton

Heights History Night", which we did. It was held at Clarendon United Methodist Church, 6th and North Irving Streets, Arlington. On June 5 we agreed to have the same display at the Parking Concourse which showed the history of the club.

On January 15, 1976 the Northern District Federation of Women's Clubs met at the Lyon Village Community Clubhouse, 20th and N. Highland Streets, Arlington, to celebrate "A Bicentennial in Every Heart". Mrs. Faye Shaw, Fine Arts Chairman, arranged the program. She invited your president, Dorothea Abbott to lead the group in singing "A Joyful Celebration", for which Dot wrote the words and music. Mr. Richard Henry Lee, a direct descendant of the Lee family, introduced Dot and she sang her second Bicentennial song, "This Land, Our Land, My Land". Copies of the songs are in the Bicentennial Scrapbook.

Mr. H. R. Haskins, our secretary's husband, beautifully framed various Bicentennial certificates and they are on display at the clubhouse.

Billie Booker received 1st prize at the Northern District contest for her Bicentennial costume which she made. She wore this beautiful dress at our own Bicentennial program.



Without the support of all the women this history could not have been written.

Let us hope that the Woman's Club of Ashton Heights will continue to serve the community and uphold the high ideals and spirit of determination of the ladies that came before us.

Dorothea Abbott  
President, '75-'77

Bicentennial Committee  
Lucille Pickett,  
Chairman  
Virginia Whitesell  
Ann Knight

Committee for  
Compiling History  
Alice Crabbe  
Maude Hammeleer  
Bertha Henderson  
Dorothea Abbott  
Mae Leonard