"Hide It under a Bush, Hell No!" Women's Volunteer Associations as Adult Education Initiatives

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“HIDE IT UNDER A BUSH, HELL NO!”
WOMEN’S VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATIONS
AS ADULT EDUCATION INITIATIVES

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF TABLES

vi

## LIST OF FIGURES

ix

## ABSTRACT

x

## 1. INTRODUCTION: HIDE IT UNDER A BUSH? HELL, NO!

- Preliminary Definitions: 3
- Ways of Analyzing Club Life: 4
- Problem Statement: 5
- Purpose of the Study: 5
- Research Questions: 6
- Omissions and Prohibitions: 6
- Organization of the Study: 6

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

- Historiography, Feminist Theory and Women’s History: 14
- Worldview and Metaphor: 30
- Collaborative Learning: 36
- Volunteer Associations: Origins and Development: 38
- Adult Education: 43
- Adult Learning: 51
- Patriarchy and Hegemony: 53
- Conclusions for Chapter Two: 57
LIST OF TABLES

1. Characterization of Groups Studied and Types of Data Gathered………………… 66
2. Counter-Hegemonic Behaviors Exhibited by Club or Institute Members……….. 70
3. Efforts to Organize Voluntarism in Nebraska…………………………………… 224
4. Approximate Numbers of PEO Chapters………………………………………… 254
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Manitoba Members and the Women’s Institute: A Diagram................................. 93
2. Photograph of Mary McLeod Bethune and Her School.................................. 147
3. Happy Hour Extension Club, Knox County...................................................... 192
4. Page from The Knox County Papers............................................................. 194
5. List of Articles in The Knox County Papers.................................................. 196
ABSTRACT

Economic and social changes in the status of European and North American women through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided opportunities for their educational and occupational advancement, but they suffered from a lack of formal education. Facing industrialization and geographical displacement, they turned to nonformal education. Through their volunteer organizations, they found ways to obtain necessary facts, build new knowledge, refine traditional skills, establish social networks, and increase their political awareness. They were and continue to be empowered by the planning of, participation in, and evaluation of their social events, reading circles, study groups, and community service activities.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to better understanding of the dynamics within and between these groups, and to highlight links between nonformal and formal educational initiatives. The unanswerable “If women’s groups have done so much, why don’t we know about it” was partially answered by data from the Women’s Institute (WI), the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC), and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), etc. These organizations had not been compared with each other previously. Interviews with members of various women’s organizations in Ontario, Nebraska, North Carolina and Florida showed contemporary women still use their volunteer organizations to define problems, make friends, construct learning initiatives, and evaluate their achievements. These interviews and previous publications provided evidence about how women acquired and disseminated new knowledge, and how their efforts in the nonformal sector mirrored formal education. When data on the WI, NACWC, AAUW, and other women’s groups were used to answer the research questions, a common—but complex—pattern of behavior became apparent. Volunteer groups at every level of society provided a safe haven for members and socialized them into being more efficient and modern homemakers, better citizens, and more educated members of society.

With no new younger members and an aging population, these valuable institutions of nonformal education are dying out. Older members take their skills and their institutional memory with them to the grave. Further research is needed to discover if the populations that were previously served by volunteer organizations are now gaining
their information, new friends, and opportunities for political action in other ways—or if hegemonic forces are shutting them down organizationally at the same time demographics are shutting them down individually.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: HIDE IT UNDER A BUSH? HELL, NO!

The year I was five, the closing ceremonies of Bible School featured “This Little Light of Mine,” a traditional children’s song. The other five-year-olds followed the teacher blindly, singing sweetly: “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine . . . Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine” (Scharpf 2000, 1-2). They dropped their voices nicely on “bushel,” and shouted at the end, for emphasis. I, however, thought the adults had the words wrong and belted out a personalized version of the chorus, clearly heard above the others: “Hide it under a bush? Hell, No!”

I believed I had the right to question authority, the right to fix things, and the right to amuse myself. Acting on those beliefs, I tried to correct an inexplicable error in the lyrics of the song. “Under a bushel” made no sense to her. I knew about bushel baskets, but the missing noun made the whole line perplexing. “Hide it under a bush” made sense. So did “Hell, no!” Like me at five, clubwomen believe in their right to question authority, their right to fix things, and their right to amuse themselves. My title, therefore, reflects a clubwoman’s implicit “hell, no” attitude.

The title is matched by research that came out of a series of nagging questions, which arose after I discovered a Women’s Institute (WI) pamphlet at a Cambridgeshire market in 1978. The pamphlet described the organization in such glowing terms that I asked a British friend to tell me more. She seemed to see little value in the WI and was not at all interested in its history. Her attitude was dismissive: “Oh, you wouldn’t be interested in all that. They’re just a bunch of little old dears drinking tea” (personal communication, Cambridgeshire, 1978).

Her mother did note the WI had “done a lot, especially during the war,” but said she hadn’t been interested in joining because she always had a job (personal communication, Cambridgeshire, 1978). Later, back in the states, two younger British women agreed that my friend’s assessment of the Institutes was “spot on” (personal communication, Okaloosa County, 1983). The opposing opinions puzzled me. Institute members proclaimed the worthiness of the organization, but non-members discounted its
value. Later, I found this to be a common theme. Members knew their value; outsiders were ignorant or disbelieving. One young Jewish woman, Denise Fox, once was skeptical about the value of organized groups with tinted hair, but now finds her membership personally rewarding (Caplane 1996).

There was such a surge of feminism and female volunteerism in the late 1800s and early 1900s, that it was said to be a wave of activity. The middle years of the 1900s were involved with a second wave of activism that included demographic minorities as well as the cultural minority of women. The years between those two waves of activity were supposedly quiet. In those years, however, American, Canadian, and British women became lawyers, typists, university scholars, librarians, teachers, doctors and nurses, editors, military personnel, newspaper publishers, and union members. They acquired and kept jobs. They joined unions and entered other previously male arenas of activity. Workplaces were fraught with tension, but the force-feeding of suffragists had stopped (Cott, Boydston, Braude, Ginzberg, Ladd-Taylor 1996; Milkman 1987), so coverage of women’s issues fell off. Whether media were interested or not, there were so many volunteer organizations that America was once even said to have been “forged by clubs” (Liebers 1977, 13). In the years before they were allowed to attend secondary schools and colleges, homemakers, shop girls and rural women used volunteer associations to expand their knowledge and raise their skill levels. Their volunteer work helped them create collective and individual identities, and continues to do so in the present.

Volunteer organizations are part of the general category of nonprofits. They bolster community schools and churches, provinces, states, and nations, but nonprofits—particularly women’s nonprofits—were long seen as “marginal to an American society dominated by government and big business respectively. In fact, the non-profits themselves, by and large, shared this view” (Drucker 1990, xiii).

Probably because of the idea they were marginal, volunteers occasionally fostered the notion themselves as frivolous or incompetent. With an obfuscatory and seemingly non-threatening façade in position, club members came in under the radar. This façade gave them the freedom to work toward and realize problematic goals. Their seeming abnegation of self was combined with a lack of access to certain media, with disinterest
on the part of academics, and with logistical problems that veiled their accomplishments from the general public. Female club members also were known to slight themselves or remain silent about their achievements, allowing others to take credit for their work—particularly if it meant club goals were met. Partly because they were so veiled, the organized activities of everyday women in clubs and other non-profit associations were not adequately analyzed as important episodes of adult education, as sources of lessons on learning, or as significant chapters in a larger social history. The deficit of this analysis was, and still is, exacerbated by a steady loss of original material that would be of great value to the general field of adult education. Considering the length of my study, I offer some short initial comments about methodological concerns here.

Preliminary Definitions

In 1999, a spry 93-year-old Ontario Women’s Institute member quickly redefined my terms. I had said that my dissertation was going to examine women’s clubs and adult education. She immediately stabbed the air with a forefinger in emphasis and said, “Now, you do understand, don’t you, that the Women’s Institute is not a club. The Senior Citizens’ Club is a club. The Women’s Institute is an Institute!” (personal communication, Kemptville, Ontario, 1999).

Helen Schneemeyer (1985), writing about extension clubs in Nebraska, also pointed out the importance of the naming exercise:

When a club is organized they choose their name that becomes their identity through the years. Some clubs select a name of the community they are located in, such as North Bluff, a voting precinct, or Beltline, Happy Center, or Plainview for school districts. Firth Homemakers and Davey Women’s Club were named for small towns. (66)

In spite of knowing members of clubs, associations and other organizations view their names as definitive, for brevity’s sake I used the words club, association and organization almost as synonyms. I did use capital letters to indicate some specifics. Institute, with a capital letter, meant Women’s Institute (WI), and Association meant the American Association of University Women (AAUW). I tried to reflect the preferences of individual volunteers, who called themselves feminists, womanists, suffragists,
I accepted the definition of feminism as being “any struggle, whether overt or covert, over the social construction of femininity” (Morgan, M.R., 1993, 1). I agreed with Ferree and Martin’s contention that feminism aims to empower all women, even those who assert they are not feminists (1995). I believe the counterhegemonic activities of clubwomen make their organizations feminist in nature, that feminism and sisterhood are “rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice” and that sisterhood “could never have been possible across the boundaries of race and class if individual women had not been willing to divest of their power to dominate and exploit subordinated groups of women” (hooks 2000, 15-16).

Ways of Analyzing Club Life

One way of analyzing club life is comparison and contrast—to divide clubs into the three general philosophical categories of (a) book groups and study clubs, (b) community service and activist groups, and (c) social groups. Many researchers have done this, with good results. Members of study groups and reading circles did not march up Fifth Avenue in white dresses or chain themselves to the White House fence in support of women’s suffrage, as political activists did, or hold balls and fashion shows (as social clubs did). They were “like collegians within their ivied ivory towers because they turned their backs on the world” and “maintained their sense of self as students . . . the outside world seldom intruded” (Martin, T. P. 1987, 177).

Another useful comparison concerns the ways the membership receives and shares new knowledge—informally, nonformally, and formally. I believe informal learning is ongoing and the basis of all education, but other researchers see it as a definite and separate category because it is not socially organized Informal education is largely serendipitous and occasional. Both have social, political and intellectual aspects, but nonformal education is often quite structured and rigorous. In the usual course of events, neither informal nor nonformal learners study from state-mandated curricula or receive degrees. The standardized course of study, diploma, and teacher credentialing are more likely part of formal education. Formal education includes elementary and high schools,
kindergartens, colleges and universities. It is symbolized by and usually rooted in a physical plant of some kind.

A third way of analyzing club life is to recall the biographies of individual leaders, such as Alice Cottey Stockard or Mary McLeod Bethune, compare the challenges they faced, and examine their legacy. A fourth is to delve into the processes of founding, growth, and dissolution of particular organizations. A fifth is to identify particular battles and compare the organizations whose members support or denigrate the principle for which the battles were fought. The struggle for women’s suffrage provides one example of such a battle. When the battle was over, what happened to the volunteers on the two sides?

Problem Statement

Our traditional social chronicles are gendered and incomplete. Strong female role models, who were acknowledged in their day, have been eliminated from later male-oriented records and are now unknown. Stories of club life are disappearing as older members die. Popular culture continues to replicate misconceptions about women’s clubs. We have flawed histories of public education, vast gaps in our general knowledge, and conventional [often humorous] versions of women’s stories. Volunteer archivists have not always realized the value of data entrusted to them. Rank and file club members have not always known where records were kept. Data on microfilm and microfiche require technology that was, and sometimes still is, inaccessible to the general public. Paper records have aged, crumbled, and became illegible. We must address these problems in order to expand knowledge about women’s individual and collective merit.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find and explore organizational archives and memories before they disappeared, reflect on the cultural pressures that caused much important material to be excluded from official records, consider the mindset in and achievements of women’s associations, examine the general wealth of the volunteer experience within certain groups, stress common organizational themes, and highlight connections between professional [formal] adult education and the nonformal learning initiatives of these groups.
Research Questions

(1) What have women gained from their participation in volunteer organizations? Particularly, what learning benefits have they—individually and collectively—derived from their experiences?

(2) How do organizational learners construct, manage and transmit this newly-obtained knowledge and transfer their skills?

(3) What were and are the common denominators for different kinds of women’s groups? How are the perspectives of different types of associations linked?

(4) How do a fuller knowledge and better understanding of women’s associations and their learning initiatives affect the history and social dynamics of adult and continuing education?

Omissions and Prohibitions

The sheer numbers prevented me from examining every organization that was worthy. I had to leave many questions unanswered, including the one from Esther Ngan-Ling Chow: “Where Are All the Asian American Women?” (Asian Women 1989, 362). Asian women are missing from traditional general chronicles and from this dissertation, though Japanese women in concentration camps during World War II organized themselves into Red Cross groups, sewing circles, and service clubs. Fraternities and sororities, religious societies (Daughters of Rebekah, etc.), the American Indian Movement (AIM), La Raza, the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), and other valuable assets to the community have also been left for future exploration.

Organization of the Study

I used large and small collections of data to examine women’s educational initiatives across time, ethnicities, and cultures. The study is not linear. As the achievements of individual women and their groups can not be separated, so the achievements of individual groups could not be separated from each other in this work. The complex relationships between entities mandated a networked approach.

Chapter Two reviews literature relevant to building a conceptual framework for my work. The ideas that inform the study are taken from many disciplines—-the wide literature Slavin espouses (1985, 7). The chapter expands preliminary definitions offered
in Chapter One, and categorizes data. It highlights national and international processes of change, outlines the theory and practice of epistemology, explores feminism theory and women’s history, describes systems of patriarchy and hegemony, and reminds readers of how valuable metaphor and worldview can be as tools of evaluation, as well as how individuals often focus only on certain aspects of graphic representation. Each of the fields in Chapter Two is linked to the others somehow.

Chapter Three traces my efforts to gather the academic information that fleshes out my once informal investigation of the Women’s Institutes; to connect the WI to other volunteer organizations; to categorize the correspondence, interviews, and previously published data; and to analyze it all—in connection to a wide variety of women’s groups, not just the WI. I found a plethora of facts and theories concerning associations from England, Canada, and the United States in popular culture, interviews, informal conversations, letters, academic dissertations and theses, minutes not yet archived, and fascinating biographies.

Chapter Four describes the founding and growth of the Women’s Institutes (WI), Denman College and the MacDonald Institute. It is set against a general description of conditions for nineteenth-century women in England and Canada, and begins the ongoing formative evaluation of my data by pointing out some differences in the lives of Canadian and British women and comparing the ways voluntarism manifested itself in their countries during the Victorian Era. The relationships between Institutes, Denman, and MacDonald illustrate ways nonformal initiatives and formal education can affirm and legitimate each other. Data for this chapter come from three Ontario Institute members, dissertations and books discussing the WI, various WI publications and websites, and general conversations with British women living in Florida and Cambridgeshire.

Chapter Five explores the early years of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the various ways it has enabled growth in individual members, and sets AAUW as a valuable contrast to the WI. It is an American Association, rather than Canadian or British, and its members have traditionally been urban, rather than rural. This chapter also—unexpectedly—includes a description of my experience as a branch member. Verbal and written comments by AAUW members reveal philosophical links to
the WI and, of course, there are links to any supposedly monolithic African-American experience because many AAUW members are Black women. The comments of one African-American Fort Walton Beach AAUW member provide a direct connection to Chapter Six.

Chapter Six explores various manifestations of all-women’s voluntarism in African-American communities across time. In one way it is more narrow than Chapter Five, because it focuses on women classified as “minority.” In another way, it is far wider—describing a range of organizations, not just one. It expands the scope of the dissertation because it highlights the idea of benchmarking a population different than AAUW and the WI. Information for this chapter comes from previously published data on traditional African-American clubwomen, from the interviews with two Black Floridians, and from a 40-year relationship with women of color in North Carolina. The activities and ideas of three newer groups—Friends Making a Difference (FMAD), the Ladies of Essence, and the National Hook-Up of Black Women—are explored. Descriptions of activities in all-black Reconstruction towns and biographies of exemplary African-American women leaders provide further depth to the chapter.

Chapter Seven switches to a geographically narrow focus, covering extension club members’ attempt to document the history of individual communities in Knox County, Nebraska. Rural women constructed these vignettes in the early 1960s. Their efforts may have been inspired by Arlene Binger, “a schoolteacher who liked being a county agent better” (Marie, pseudonym, 2002), or by histories of clubs in the 1950s. Individual compositions, reflecting a variety of education and experience, comprise The Knox County Papers. Original correspondence, informal conversations, memories, and minutes of county meetings provide background information on these club members’ other activities. The writing done by these women is important because it, first, shows the determination of clubwomen to amend traditional histories. The writing is important, second, because these individual histories are a direct reflection of Tweedsmuir Histories done by WI members and indicate a common belief that the past is valuable. Third, The Knox County Papers remind us that farmers, ranchers, and other rural residents are never far from pioneer days. Vast distances and precocious weather patterns still threaten those
who live on the plains, and the ideology and practices of the Progressive Era still offer comfort through extension clubs.

Chapter Eight is a further exploration of extension clubs in Nebraska, but looks at the whole state instead of one county, and focuses on the very formal Nebraska Council of Home Extension Clubs (NCHEC), as opposed to an informal folkloric effort. The earlier days they chronicled came largely before NCHEC even existed. NCHEC members were their own topic. Most of the information for Chapter Eight comes from The Golden Milestone, a history of extension work in Nebraska.

Chapter Nine also concerns Nebraska women. The P.E.O. Sisterhood is native to Iowa, but spread to neighboring Nebraska very quickly and now appears in some locations outside the plains state. The Sisterhood (PEO) is not involved with the ACWW or IFUW. This chapter outlines the Sisterhood’s founding and development, shows ways PEO influenced individual communities, and sketches the struggle of Virginia Alice Cottey Stockard to found and nurture the women’s two-year liberal arts college that bears her name. The story of how she conveyed the college to the Sisterhood illustrates a unique fusion of nonformal and formal education. Because Cottey College is a formal, accredited institution of higher education, it is like the MacDonald Institute in Guelph, but because Cottey and Denman College are both owned by an association of volunteer women, it is also like Denman.

Chapter Ten loops back through previous chapters and picks up common themes revealed in earlier delineated formative analyses, such as the comparison of the WI in Canada and Great Britain. Different kinds of data answered different research questions with “the best evidence,” rather than “statistical analyses of the entire methodologically and substantively diverse literature” (Slavin 1985, 7).

In spite of changes in types of organizations and the waning numbers of some traditional groups, there are still possibilities for future research. Thousands of church groups, patriotic assemblies, rural associations, and other volunteer gatherings are active in North American and European mainstream culture. The Mahila Samitis, African bush schools, and Native American Indian tribal groups offer abundant lessons for researchers, administrators, teachers, and modern women struggling to keep up with demographic and
technological changes and find inspiration in places that are new to them. Chapter Eleven briefly sketches possibilities for such future research.
CHAPTER TWO:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND
GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two reviews some of diverse literature from which I constructed a theory about North American and British organized women. The reading is widespread, but is not meant to provide a definitive history of women or of any particular era. It is not chronologically linear. It provides, instead, a personalized network of general information, explains the metaphors I used for clarification, and extends my idiosyncratic definitions found in Chapter One. Data like this can be separated into discrete clusters only artificially, but the following categories proved useful when I wanted to highlight common qualities:

(1) Historiography, Feminist Theory and Women's History. This section examines the idea that what constitutes valid historical content changes over time, explores some ideas about women’s place in the world in various eras, and shows how women have been marginalized in various ways. I look specifically at how female role models have been lost. The loss of knowledge about lost women should be part of an accurate historical record.

(2) Worldview and Metaphor. This section examines metaphor, symbols, charts, the idea of worldview, and other tools that help individuals understand their universe. No metaphor works for all learners, but worldview (also called a personal philosophy or mindset) and scaffolding (also called bridging the gap from the known to the unknown) have been valuable additions to the dialogue about how people and their neighbors build distinctive ideas about the world and promote acquisition of new knowledge. Charts, maps, and other graphic representations often clarify complex relationships—doing in an instant what it would take much longer to explain if words were the only means of expression.

(3) Collaborative Learning, Constructivism, and Multiple Points of View. Formal education often disregards the gifts of collaboration. Women’s groups rely strongly on cooperative effort. The idea that we “construct” language and meaning has gained credence with a wide audience in the postmodern world. Multiple points of view, though
long ignored in college classrooms and other learning situations, have always been inordinately important. Even those teachers and learners with an isolationist or elitist attitude can see that the global economy, technological advances, and changing demographics make it imperative that we work together to build opportunities for our businesses, our schoolchildren and ourselves. Only by employing multiple points of view will our efforts to make profitable contacts with other individuals, other groups, and other countries.

(4) Origins and Development of Women’s Voluntary Organizations. Though there is no documentation on any first meeting of any particular first women’s group, there is a great deal of information about Progressive Era origins of various organizations and Twentieth Century origins and developments. Because there are so many hundreds of women’s groups, I included some comments about an exemplary Florida club, initial mention of the General Federation of women’s Clubs, and one state federation. The preliminary definitions I offered in Chapter One were intended as a tool to help readers bridge the gap between their previously-held notions of certain words. The short preliminary exploration of the Vero Beach Women’s Club is intended as a tool to help readers begin to appreciate the idiosyncratic nature of volunteer organizations that, nevertheless, have many commonalities.

(5) Adult Education. Because students, teachers, administrators, governors, churches, and agencies of learning and self-help all have a particular point of view (sometimes expanded to be called a personal philosophy or worldview), adult education can be studied from many directions. Describing the types of classes and preparation for those classes is one way of beginning that study. Planning and evaluating classes is more difficult. Evaluating what part of the curriculum actually stuck with the learner is the most difficult of all. This section of Chapter Two explains how certain educators see systems of education and credentialing. Because education may threaten the status quo (hegemonic systems), counter-hegemony is a major concern. Education may be seen as good or bad, depending on the particular point of view.

(6) Adult Learning. There is a difference between education and learning. Adult education cannot discount learning; adult learners cannot disregard the role of formal
schooling. Examining the ideas of motivation and reward are important to this
dissertation, because we do not yet know enough about why and how women and other
volunteers have soldiered on, unpaid, for years. What happens in a cooperative setting
that encourages individuals to attempt to master subjects or tasks at which they may have
earlier failed? Literacy volunteers see adults learn to read late in life. Young mothers try,
once again, to cook a certain dish or to help a child with homework. The idea of self-
actualization has become part of our business and educational vocabulary, but may be so
narrowly construed that it is seen as opposing feminist theories or collectivism. Because I
see one of the rewards of club life as a life of continual opportunities for learning and
bridge-building, I believe the examination of women’s groups is enriched by knowledge
of adult learning in general.

(7) Patriarchy and Hegemony. The power networks of business, organized
religion, marriage, and the legal system are gendered. An awareness of how these
systems have operated through time enables understanding of how women’s volunteer
associations have been sidelined and women’s achievements downplayed. Women’s
history has previously been deemed unimportant because the natural role of the female
the private sector. Women in the public arena were long assumed to be ineffectual,
venial, humorous, or predatory. The old, general pattern of trivialization (that continues
today) was enabled by physical, economic, and cultural factors.

The general categories these general fields underlies my examination of women’s
clubs. Local social groups build self-esteem in individual members and social capital, but
are seldom seen as a valuable part of the community infrastructure, and the connection of
local groups to theoretical knowledge is often completely missed. To appreciate the way
women’s volunteer associations affect and are affected by techniques of informal
education, a wide background is crucial.

Recognition of a general pattern of Victorian Era culture, ideas from the
Progressive Era, and an awareness of voluntarism’s popularity in women’s lives is
necessary before we can begin to understand the subsequent pattern of loss. Various
systems of adult education programs and evaluation provide useful backdrops to general
discussion of volunteer associations and specific examination of women’s groups.
Feminist theory offers reasons for the loss of women’s history and legitimizes what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) call women’s ways of knowing.

Understanding of various theories that emphasize the importance of collaborative learning, acknowledge the social construction of knowledge, and employ multiple points of view alerts us to the importance of rank and file women as fit subjects for academic subjects.

**Historiography, Feminist Theory, and Women's History**

Popular culture still entertains the idea of separate occupations for men and women (Bagguley, Mark-Lawson, Shapiro, Urry, Walby & Warde 1990, 121-124). Many researchers see feminist theory, feminist history, and womanist theory as separate. I see both separatist ideas as spurious. Fields of knowledge are not separate or static. The following section of Chapter Two points out how supposedly factual material constantly changes, how community perceptions shift (Betts 1999, ix-xi), and how notions of history change (Peacock 1986, 60-61). In every field and every age, researchers and readers decided what was to be emphasized and what was to be eliminated (Breisach 1994; Frank, Wong, Meyer & Ramirez 2000; Hunter 1991, 26-27). Documentation of these changes comprises historiography.

**Historiography**

Joseph Kett’s very useful examination of adult education (1994) obliquely comments on the way fields of study change. He says his initial interest lay in “the myriad societies that arose before the Civil War to encourage self-education and mutual improvement” (xi), but he soon found that “‘the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties’” (xi) was multifarious. In the nineteenth century, membership mushroomed in “sundry institutions of self-improvement, including literary societies, lyceums, mechanics’ institutes, The Lake Chautauqua Assembly and its many offshoots in the 1870s and 1880s, and university extension” (xii).

In a section called “Gender and Culture,” Kett (1994) outlines factors that affected the study habits of women in clubs and other nonformal venues (150-156). He says opportunities for formal study were greater than they had been earlier in the century, but women were still behind men in higher education. Oberlin admitted women to its
collegiate course in 1837, the University of Iowa established coeducation in 1856; Vasser opened in 1865, and “by 1890 women made up 36 percent of all college students, whereas in 1870 they had been only 21 percent” (150-151). During Reconstruction, women who were middle-aged were the backbone of women’s clubs. They “had come of age when opportunities for even a high-school education were less well developed. . .they knew what they had missed” (151). Their opportunities for self-education in reading circles and literary companies were not so great as those for men, even if they were allowed to read the books of male friends or attend lectures sponsored by all-male societies. “Not surprisingly, the recollections of antebellum women were filled with rueful laments about their disorderly and unsystematic programs of self-education, and these complaints were intensified by their lack of models of self-education” (151).

Kett notes that advice books for women in the first half of the nineteenth century changed as the experiences of women who had attended college and high school were became more well known. Women who addressed assemblies or were writers were still largely shut out of public life mid-century. Young women were encouraged “not to fritter away their time on novels, to be wary of reading societies that too often degenerated into idle gossip, and to cultivate the habit of closing their eyes after every sentence. . .” (153).

Women who worked at learning on their own were told their efforts “threatened to dissipate their energy in wasted and futile stabs at knowledge” (153), but there were still hundreds of study clubs that encouraged women to write papers and read them at meetings. “Organizing their self-education around subjects enabled women to overcome their anxieties about the lack of order and coherence in their quest for self-improvement and at the same time to acquire an approximation of the formal education that was still more available to the other sex. . .” (153).

Kett’s setting women’s organizations apart in “The Homely Renaissance, 1870-1900” indicates a twentieth century acknowledgement that women’s groups were an important part of nonformal education in the United States, but also continues the tradition of considering them separately. Separating the learning tradition into chapters is as artificial as assuming there are valid barriers between disciplines (Janson & Kerman, n.d., ix-x; Chartock 2000, 96-98). Patricia Yancey Martin says such barriers shift: “. . .
gender, work and organization comprise shifting fields of power, meaning and identity that are conditioned by cultural influences and material relations associated with class, race, nation state and historical period and conditions” (1996, 190).

In an attempt to understand these shifts and this artificiality, researchers use various tactics. Stubblefield and Keane (1994) discuss the cult of true womanhood in some detail and identify early reformers and speakers. They bring back a topic specific to women in their chapter on mobility. In this discussion, they note how New York and Boston sprouted women’s clubs in the same year—1868. The New England Women’s Club of Boston were reformers, and members of Sorosis were “domestic feminists.” The founder of Sorosis is called “feminist journalist Jane Cunningham Croly” in this book, revealing Stubblefield and Keane have a much different attitude toward women’s place in society than Grattan (1955) had. It has some significance that women’s clubs, women’s rights, social reform, and the “Rhetoric of Dissent” are placed close together in their book on American adult education. The layout indicates an implicit acknowledgement of women’s voice.

Penny Summerfield perceives two types of historiography—one based on generalities and one on specifics. In the first type, a topic is understood to “have had profound effects on women’s lives, but because the focus of the historical work is elsewhere, the changes are assumed and not explored” (Purvis 1989, 307). The place of women in the universe has been both scrutinized closely and ignored. It is one of the topics interpreted in different ways and “hotly debated” (307).

Historical documents, traditional histories, and the oral tradition all contain information about women. Those historical records were affected by others’ choices (Donovan 1994, xii). “Women’s public sphere embodied American women’s ideas about their womanhood, as they simultaneously used, contradicted, and modified these ideas, in their search to create a better social order and define their places in it” (Steinschneider 1994, 95). “The need to educate women for the management of the household was a recurring theme in a (male) egalitarian republic. It assumed a continuing subordination of women. . .” (Stubblefield & Keane 1994, 107).
Written documents by or about women are often “lost, forgotten, or neglected” (Lerner 1972, ix-x); still, “Young people need to know their family history, and it’s the responsibility of old folks like us to tell them” (Delaney 1993, 18). Anne Oakley said that the growth of traditional history stifled knowledge about ordinary women’s lives and achievements (1997, 52).

Recovering knowledge about ritual, work, customs, and history has lately generated a new discipline called Applied Folklore (Jones 1993, 1-41), both indicating how barriers between disciplines shift and placing a newly-recovered value on narratives as sources of learning. Amadou Hampate Ba, an historian from Senegal, told the UNESCO General Conference that the death of an elder meant the death of knowledge (Ba 2003; Eyre 2004, 1). Patricia Longley-Cochran reiterated this idea in an Anchorage workshop on the Bering Sea Ecosystem 1997, and Richard Fool Bull went even further. He told Roger Welsch that the oral tradition preserves wisdom. Knowledge need not be written down to keep from being forgotten.

There is no one of my people ready or willing right now to learn all this. But it will not be forgotten. If everyone today, right now, forgot that aspirin from the inner bark of the willow eases a headache, would that mean that aspirin would no longer cure a headache? Of course not! Truth may sleep, my friend, but it never dies. (In Welsch 1992, xvii)

Like these storytelling informants, academics also define themselves through conversation, written and oral. Wendy Lutrell pointed out that academics write about their own fields because they believe their interests are the only really important ones. Since actions of ordinary women were not usually important to academic theories, knowledge of those women was lost (Ferree & Martin 1995, 9-11). Virginia Woolf (1981) was an important figure in feminist literature, but even she was not concerned with ordinary women.

As a result of such narrow visions, our traditional history needs revamping. Intentionally or accidentally, women’s groups (Ferree & Martin 1995, 9), immigrants, the working class, and ethnic minorities have been downplayed or completely ignored. Greek mathematicians discarded material that did not fit their preconceived notions. Arun
Tripathi (2000) pointed out they visualized a linear universe and ignored circles or spheres. The thought processes of everyone, including academics and ordinary women, are guided by presumptions; “. . . there is no such thing as non-theoretical knowledge” (Harris 1979, 17).

In the humanities, Whitney Chadwick (1996), Nancy G. Heller (1997), Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn (1989), and Eleanor Tufts (1974), each wrote about how male critics derided and disregarded serious biographical and critical works of female painters and other artists over the years. Even Dennis Reid’s excellent survey of Canadian art featured only Emily Carr as worthy of a color plate, though her work was treated in some depth (1988, 156-63). His comments on other women artists were sparse.

Dale Spender (1993) and Virginia Woolf (1981) discovered blank spaces on college shelves where women’s works should have been available. Spender (1989) said her whole university curriculum implied a Western literary heritage comprised solely of male authors, and wondered:

How is it we have come to lose this knowledge about so many good women novelists? How have we come to lose it so completely that its one-time existence does not even register, so we are blissfully unaware of what has been lost? . . . so thoroughly have early women novelists been edited out of the literary records and removed from consciousness, their absence does not even ordinarily prompt comment, let alone concern. (22-25)

Spender said further, male writers and critics “take from women what they want and leave the rest—which they determine to be of no value—to fade from view [. . . they] deny women's creativity and appropriate women's efforts, claiming women's achievement as their own. . . .” (1989, 29), and she worried about the fate of current women writers’ work: “They too could be consigned to oblivion so that future generations would neither know nor suspect that there has been an ’explosion in women's writing over the last few years” (28).

In the field of adult education, Joyce Stalker (1996), Carol Pateman (1989) and Jane Hugo (1990) saw that the same process had been at work (2). “Only a few voices and a few stories” were left in the record (1). “The scope and depth of women’s
intellectual contributions and their foci of perceived activity became less visible as the histories became more modern” (3). Further, “women’s work in voluntary associations like women’s study clubs, while acknowledged, was discounted as having ‘added tremendously to the range and bulk of adult education without satisfactorily increasing in depth and penetration’” (4).

C. H. Grattan (1955) has only six pages (out of over three hundred) that are noted in the index under the term “women” in any form. His coverage of the founding of Sorosis indicates a very different attitude from Kett’s, but perhaps this is to be expected. Grattan was writing before the second wave of civil rights activism that affected women so strongly in the second half of the twentieth century.

. . .the continuity has never been exactly established and we must here be satisfied with picking up the story just after the Civil War when in 1868 Jennie June Croly—mother of Herbert Croly, founding editor of *The New Republic*—started in New a Work a club for women called Sorosis, a social and study club of a kind fairly common. Mrs. Croly’s club, however, has special significance in that in 1889 it took the lead in calling a national convention of women’s clubs at the Madison Square Theatre in New York City. (258)

Through his specifying Croly as a wife and mother, by omitting mention of the incident that galvanized her founding of the club, and by saying the club (of a “fairly common” type) was important because it called for a national convention, Grattan illustrates several ways women’s contributions can be downplayed. His comments on the GFWC give the membership credit for always having education as a major concern, but also noting how Mrs. Croly was unsuccessful in getting the group to “concern itself with public education, reformatories, sanitary reform, female labor problems” and other topics that would require research on the part of the membership (259).

Grattan mentions the American Association of University Women and notes it had branches here and abroad by 1912. His also mentions the National Congress of Mothers (now the PTA), the Junior League, the National Women’s Suffrage Association (now the League of Women Voters), and two or three other groups—lumping them all together.
Women (like Croly) who had been freely acknowledged as charismatic theorists and leaders of adult education in the 1800s were gradually purged from the record as the nineteenth century wore on (Thompson & Scheid 1996). Women and other non-credentialed persons were shunted aside in the push for formal qualifications, the implementation of scientific management principles, and need for new funding sources. Women’s theoretical and practical work in the nonformal sector was easily co-opted by professionals, partly because much of women’s learning and teaching occurred in Lyceums, Chautauquas and Sunday Schools. Schooling came to be seen as crucial to quality learning.

Jim Marchand (1998) explored the historiographical processes of knowledge loss with members of the on-line Humanities Discussion Group. He said knowledge can be lost because it has not been rendered in concrete form, because the keys to its understanding are lost, because it was somehow untranslatable, because it was constrained by having been moved from one medium to another, or because a medium in which it was encoded became obsolete. Theodora Kroeber’s documented the loss of a whole language (1988, 124-146). When Ishi, the last member of his California [Yana] tribe, died, the oral keys to understanding Yana were lost. Since most of what Ishi said had not been written down (“rendered in concrete form”), almost all he knew vanished.

In medical science, modern laboratory techniques proved records concerning women’s health in antiquity were accurate. Riddle, Estes and Russell (1997) found women “… had more control over their reproductive lives than [we scientists] previously thought … The research question now becomes not what the ancients knew about birth control but why we lost what was once so well known” (208). Organized religion also marginalized women.

Most of the information and artifacts concerning the vast female religion … have been dug out of the ground only to be reburied in obscure archaeological texts, carefully shelved away in the exclusively protected stacks of university and museum libraries … accessible only with the proof of university of affiliation or university degree. (Stone 1976, xvi)
Jim Powell (1993) said that scholars, somewhere along the line, made a conscious decision to hide or destroy some of female poet Sappho’s work: “There are indications that Byzantine scholars in the tenth and eleventh centuries had access to works of Sappho now lost . . .” (36).

Jennifer Pierce (1995) examined such gendered relationships in the legal profession. She found the female employees were expected to earn less than comparable male employees, to do work that carried less status, to receive little prestige for their accomplishments, and to work with fewer resources than the men. The women had fewer opportunities for advancement, and their emotional response to the workplace was deemed unimportant. Women had to appear non-critical of male colleagues, because they were always subordinate in some way. One major problem was the “emotional labor” of managing feelings “about being treated as if one were stupid,” while they had to do their normal work (94).

A doctoral candidate in history at Florida State, “Robby” (pseudonym) recently learned of women’s achievements and influence in early Hollywood. Now he doubts the fullness of his academic program (interview, April 2001). During a conversation at the Student Union, he exclaimed, “Why haven't I heard about this until now? Everything that was done, women did!”

**Feminist Theory**

There are many theoretical answers to Robby’s question. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), for example, theorize that women have a different way of knowing things than men do. This idea provides a benchmark against which to measure individuals and societies. All the facts in the world are affected by their point of view. Facts are filtered or slanted or examined through a lens (Betts 1999, Peacock 1986). Kett (1994) uses the term “window,” rather than lens (xiii), providing readers with another useful metaphor for examining “popular motives for acquiring knowledge and for preferring one kind of knowledge over another” (xiii).

Anne Oakley (1997) said feminist issues today are those that have been around for a hundred years or more: “inferior civil and political rights, economic dependency, lack of freely available and safe abortion and contraception, and inadequate material and
social support for motherhood” (52), but Karen Blair (1980) saw feminist issues as involving the movement of women out of their traditional place and “. . .into decision-making positions, both for the advantage of women and for society at large” (104).

Feminism can be divided into ecofeminism, liberal feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism, and domestic feminism. Each category emphasizes different aspects of the individual’s relation to others, the nation and the universe. Liberal feminists were most concerned with the double standard of morality, with ideas that became popular during the Enlightenment (Donovan 1994, 1-30). Liberal feminists wanted to reform society from within existing systems (Reinelt 1995, 84). The list of concerns that were featured in the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions from the First Women’s Rights Convention included denial of suffrage, denial of the right to consent in laws that governed women, lack of access to employment, lack of equal pay for equal work, lack of access to the professions or the universities, and lack of access to leadership positions in the church. The authors of the Declaration spoke out against conditioning women to be dependent.

Cultural feminists, like liberal feminists, believed women were responsible and rational (Donovan 1994, 31), but they differed from the liberals on several points (31-65). The earliest cultural feminists focused on voting rights, assuming women voters would change society. They “recognized the importance of critical thinking and self-development,” but also felt intuition and emotions were paramount. Stressing the “collective side of life,” and differences [between men and women], they felt “. . . feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and a fount of public regeneration” (31).

Shulameth Firestone (1971), pointed out that women’s activities and ideas seen as tame in the 1900s were seen as radical for Progressive Era women. Simply going to a meeting without a male escort was radical when hundreds of women’s organizations were founded. Stella Christian’s 1919 history of Texas clubwomen cited public speaking and working for woman suffrage or birth control as radical. In the second wave of feminism, however, radical feminism was concerned with consciousness-raising, socialism, Marxism, alienation, and praxis (Firestone 665-686)
The early American Woman’s Rights Movement was radical. In the nineteenth century, for women to attack the Family, the Church (see Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Woman’s Bible) was for them to attack the very cornerstones of the Victorian society in which they lived—equivalent to attacking sex distinctions themselves in our own time. The theoretical foundations of the early W.R.M. grew out of the most radical ideas of the day, notably those of abolition . . . Few people today are aware that the early feminism was a true grass-roots movement. They haven’t heard of the torturous journeys made by feminist pioneers into backwoods and frontiers, or door to door in the towns to speak about the issues . . . Nor do they know that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the most militant feminists of the movement, were among the first to stress the importance of organizing women workers, founding the Working Woman’s Association in September, 1868 . . . (Firestone 1971, 666)

Afro-American women’s consciousness-raising efforts have often seemed radical to conservative Euro-American clubwomen because Black women addressed racial and class issues so strongly. They did not focus solely on gender discrimination. The Combahee River Collective [of Black women] believed that group power should be nonhierarchical and collaborative, with members striving for equality and treating each other as equals. They believed the insistence on equality puts them into opposition with white feminists, who—they contend—have done little for and with black feminists: “. . . we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue” (Hull, Scott & Smith 1982, 21; hooks 1981). Members of the Collective also believed that the process of change should be valued for itself. They discussed only topics relevant to the participants, built on formal coursework they had completed, and used ideas and frameworks from consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s.

Work and gender [conceptions of masculinity and femininity] was only one of the most common discussion topics for consciousness-raising groups. Cott, Boydston, Braude & Ginzberg identified the topics of (1) the body and women’s social relations to it, (2) “women’s collective efforts outside the family circle,” (3) “the potency of diversity
in religion, region, race, nationality, age, class and social status,” and (4) “women’s relation to state authority” (1996, xvi).

Aisenberg and Harrington (1998) turned their focus toward formal schooling, rather than the personal realm or the workplace. They explored the cultural rules by which academics operated and found that, just as in the law or in the arts, the system was “constructed to cast women in subordinate, supportive roles in both their private and public lives . . . common marginality and exclusion from the centers of professional authority” (xii).

The cultural rules about hopes and behaviors for women of the twentieth century were passed down by women raised in the nineteenth century. Even expectations were gendered:

. . . it was seldom said to little girls, as it always has been said to boys, that they ought to have some definite plan, while they were children, what to be and do when they were grown up. There was usually but one path open before them, to become good wives and housekeepers. And the ambition of most girls was to follow their mothers' footsteps in this direction, a natural and laudable ambition.” (Larcom, in Conway 1992, 322).

“To be a ‘perfect housekeeper and homemaker’ was the ideal held before us and how dreary it did seem . . .[my parents] did not believe that their daughters should prepare themselves for professions” (Nice, in Conway 1992, 106).

In spite of the homemaker-as-ideal bias, many women came to call themselves feminists. S. Josephine Baker, for example, wrote, “I did not start out as a feminist at all. But it was impossible to resist . . . active participation in the great struggle to get political recognition of the fact that women are as much human beings as men are. Fundamentally that was what we were all after” (In Conway 1992, 165).

The goal of feminism is to empower women as a group, not just individual women

. . . [this] is one of the few ideas on which feminists have agreed virtually from the beginning . . . the movement creates the possibility of empowering all women,
even those who are opposed to its goals and those who are not conscious of those goals relevant to their lives. (Ferree & Martin 1995, 408)

There is no clear line of demarcation between feminist theory and feminist history, womanist theory and history, or feminist and womanist thinking. A comprehensive women’s history needs to take into account ordinary women who would not have called themselves feminists, those who are currently opposed to being called feminist, and those who were or are not even conscious of feminist goals. The charismatic leaders who captured the eye of the media did not necessarily represent grassroots women, and do not necessarily represent them today.

*Women’s History*

In every generation, there were class, racial, gender, and ethnic tensions (Stubblefield & Keane 1994). Likewise, in every generation, women were often told they were better off than their mothers. Younger women, however, usually derided attempts to convince them of their comparatively elevated status. They struggled continuously for a “more radically equal society”(Andrews 1997, 15). As a result of that struggle, the links between women’s history and feminist history are strong “. . . and one frequently finds these terms used interchangeably . . .” (Purvis 1995, 6-7).

Canadian and American farm women of the mid-19th century expected more from rural domestic life than their mothers had, and saw their work as more difficult than the work of earlier women. At the same time, middle-class urban women conceived of themselves as more delicate than pioneer women had been. Columnist Faith Rochester reflected these ideas when she wrote for the “Ladies Department” of the *American Agriculturist* in 1870:

Don't point me to our grandmothers, and say that they had larger families and did even more work than the women of the present day. They were stronger in health to begin with; but it is a question with men whether we are not suffering the visitation of their sins upon us, in the way of weak constitutions. It is certain that the children today are much more difficult to take care of than our grandmothers' were, and our houses are harder to keep . . . (Borish 1995, 105-06).
Settlers on North American frontiers were constrained by gender roles, but these constraints were countered by a certain sense of freedom. Women did their own work, but took over men’s jobs when men were absent or incapacitated (Brown 1958; Schlissel 1982; Holmes 1983). Anne M. Butler (1983) said women “in the halcyon days of the Manifest Destiny” knew about the finances, even if they didn’t speak openly about political issues.

With family survival wedded to successful farming, women had to know about agricultural practices and market prices. Western women [in the US and Canada] could not afford the luxury of economic ignorance and they did not expect to be marginal voices in the management of family finances . . . they accommodated and resisted the constraints of gender. In the process, each defined her personal sense of womanhood and found her western place. Accordingly, these women fashioned their roles within their own community, built onto the scaffolding of cross-cultural interactions, added to the patterns of regional experience, and enhanced the course of national events. (In Holmes 1983, 6-7).

New communities were “maintained in large part by women’s labor” (Kerber & Matthews 1982, 23), but women had little access to “the innovations that made the colonies most distinctive from the Old World” (24). Their names were absent from deeds, voting rosters, collections of speeches, volumes of literary criticism, and rosters of professional schools. Their participation in the arenas of politics, war and business was undocumented. This lack of interest led one 91-year-old leader of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to ask, “‘Were there no mothers of the Revolution?’” (Hunter 1991, 27).

Even when women fought to protect their communities and homes, their names did not appear on authenticated army records. “Of the siege of Boonesborough in September 1778 . . . only men are counted as defenders of the fort, [but] ‘women should have been reckoned in—they certainly deserved to be—for in courage and marksmanship they were not to be despised’” (Irving 12).

The lack of documentation made it easy for men to take the credit for women’s efforts, and for historians and sociologists to usurp or overlook women’s contributions
(Collinson & Hearn 1996; Gamm & Putnam 1999; Milkman 1987; Reskin & Padavic 1994; Reskin & Roos 1990). The historical process is very clear through which women who had made major contributions to various war effort were pushed back into their place (though they had successfully operated farms and industrial plants, fought in battles, or supported families while the men were in the military) (Beddoe 1989; Enloe 1988).

After World War I and again after World War II, British women were assaulted by media stereotypes, as portrayed in magazines, advertisements and films, [that] played a powerful part in shaping women's lives . . . only one desirable image was held up to women by all the mainstream media agencies--that of the housewife and mother. (Beddoe 1989, 8)

Women in the army usually served as nurses, cooks, and cleaners (Enloe 1988, 1-6), but there were exceptions. Some of these exceptions dressed and acted as men, unbeknownst to their colleagues—examples of counter-hegemonic action. Dr. Mary Edwards Walker dressed as a man and served as a uniformed soldier during the Civil War (also called “the War between the States”), earning the Medal of Honor. The medal was later stripped from her (Hunter 1991), when her transgression was discovered. This is one tangible example of how women’s contributions to society were excised from history.

Jill Ker Conway (1989), an Australian sheep rancher turned college president, educator and author, said she grew up knowing her physical labor was of value to the family and that she helped the ranch hands with their work: “. . . my contributions to the work of the property really mattered” (50). When she left the ranch to attend college, she could not escape a sense of duty and guilt: “I felt I had no right to exist unless serving the family in some tangible way” (156). Knowing she had been an asset to the ranch and a capable scholar, she was astonished at being passed over for job offers after graduating near the top of the class: “I could scarcely believe that my refusal was because I was a woman . . . my sex rendered my merits invisible” (191-92).

Mary Roberts Rinehart (1931), a wildly popular novelist, nurse and war correspondent, discovered the marginalization of women in the chaotic Washington social scene between the two world wars. When she volunteered for her chosen political
party, she found women volunteers were only allowed to lobby, raise funds, and “do the chores, the dirty work” (363). She said, “[Women may] go out and get the vote, if they can and will; they can be grateful for being permitted to work. But that is all” (363).

Walker, Conway and Rinehart all discovered ways women were excluded from an equal place—in spite of documentation they could do the work necessary. The process of sidelining women’s contributions changed little over the years. Before the American War between the States, women were keepers of the culture, though many had been brought to Virginia as an “economic commodity. Much like slaves, these early women settlers were plucked from the Old World and deposited in the New” (Clinton 1982, 3). In the antebellum South, they were often “sold off into marriage with little regard for their human status and dignity” (3), as were young British women brought to Canada to work as domestics decades later (Jackel 1982, xiii-xiv).

Families on early farms everywhere were the basic economic unit of society before industrialization. Rural women did as much domestic labor as the men, but didn’t get credit for their work. “Within agricultural production, chores were sex-differentiated. Women might do men’s work when the male was absent, and conversely, men might fill in for the women, but farm labor was ordinarily divided along gender lines. Despite this partnership, only male work was highly rewarded . . .” (Clinton 1982, 7).

Whether women were on the frontier or in more settled areas, they cooked, sewed, cleaned, gave birth, baked, raised gardens, and stored foodstuffs. In rural areas and on the road, they drove oxen, pitched tents and did other heavy outdoor work beside men, but had the responsibility for women’s traditional tasks as well. During wars and other times when men were absent, women were expected to select seed, plant, plow, and reap; shoot, skin and butcher domestic or wild animals; dry and salt meat or fish for winter use; chop and haul wood; tend the sick and dying; and take care of household and children, but their accomplishments were consistently downplayed, ignored, or co-opted, and their “distinctive needs tended to be discounted as trivial”(Kerber & Matthews 1982, 25).

The challenges of bad roads in rural areas, threats of runaway slaves, and popular fiction contributed to the perception that white women in the antebellum South were surrounded by danger (Clinton 1982). In the urban north, women were largely
segregated, but they could busily transform “the liability of segregation into the asset of collective identity. Southern women, however, were often “isolated from one another, scattered across a hostile environment, and subject to the demands of an oppressive system that, ironically, they had to help maintain” (14).

Though women in Victorian North America often faced challenges wrought by vast empty miles of farmland, loneliness, bad roads, and unreliable communication systems, in some ways they were less constrained by gender rules than British women were. The British attitude toward girls was oppressive (Conway 1992, 248). Cecilia Payne Gaposchkin said that women’s position in her native England hadn’t changed much, even after she’d been in the United States for fifty years. Though she was a scientist with a Radcliffe doctorate, she was forced to teach for twenty years without her courses being listed in the catalogue and without being paid appropriately (In Conway 1992, 249). It was still expected that professional women would remain unmarried. If they did marry, they were demoted in their fields of expertise and in society. Linguist and scientist Margaret Morse Nice, Gaposchkin’s contemporary—said she [Nice] “was truly frustrated. I resented the implication that my husband and the children had brains and I had none. He taught; they studied; I did housework” (In Conway 1992, 211).

African-American women and women of other cultural minorities felt the same gender constraints those of European ancestry did. Maya Angelou said that “the Black female is . . . caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power,” but [she] often emerges “formidable” (In Conway 1992, 117). Black women “have been victims of double jeopardy, of scholarly neglect and racist assumptions. Decades of oversight contributed to the small amount of collected manuscript sources and archival data pertaining to black women” (Cash 1986, 7).

Catherine Clinton (1992) noted the lack of literature on black women, both as slaves and as free persons (201). We “cannot equate the plight of the plantation mistress with the brutal dehumanization of slaves, yet the nature and extent of women’s oppression is revealing for the history of whites and blacks . . . (15).

Gloria Watkins [bell hooks] noted, in 1981, that ascribing gender roles and stereotyping by race are involved in much patriarchal activity and philosophy. Other
women of color also suffered from European ideas of patriarchy (Smith & Wilson 1999; Nies 1996). After the British arrived in North Carolina, Cherokee women were cheated out of their property and denied access to tribal voting activities. The European worldview and male Cherokee naïveté or greed robbed the women of their status in the community (Smith & Wilson 1999). In the 1960s, three hundred years later, Native American [Indian] women founded Women of all Red Nations (WARN) to help re-educate themselves, work for the environment, recover their civil rights and examine leadership roles in traditional Native cultures (Nies 1996).

Women’s history is in a state of flux. There is little chance we will ever know as much about women’s labor unions, sororities, auxiliaries, and other groups as we do about men’s volunteer associations, but the recovery process is ongoing and heartening.

Worldview and Metaphor

Worldview [Weltanschauung] helps explain feelings. It is part of human attempts to account for the nature, structure, and functioning of the universe and their place in it. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986, 3). Volunteers work for or with other humans according to their worldview, as it derives from their experiences, abilities, and habits (Follett 1991).

Women’s volunteer associations provide a safe arena in which members can “organically and historically” (Aerts, Apostel, de Moor, Hellemans, Maex, Van Belle, & Van der Veken 2000) articulate, understand, and develop their view of the world. Kerber and Matthews, though talking about writers of women’s history, cite the extraordinary collegiality and mutual support of the field as “most rewarding” (1982, vii). Their “network of [professional] historians that spans generations and geographical distance, bonding together those who seek to recapture women’s historical experience” (vii) is bound to the network of clubwomen who labored to document their organizational experiences—with no expectation of publication or academic credit. Smith-Rosenberg (1976; 1982) specifies exploration of worldview and social structure as the historian’s first task. New questions arise from that exploration.

One Tallahassee member of AAUW said my original question (“If women’s organizations have done so much, why haven’t we heard about it?”) could “never be
answered in this lifetime.” Still, responses to interview questions and archival data provided a partial answer. Simply put, women have allowed their accomplishments to be co-opted or downplayed in order to further organizational or personal aims.

Figures of speech (metaphor, simile, symbolism, etc.) help us communicate clearly. In this dissertation, I attempted to clarify my thinking by using figurative language, including a metaphor employed by Mary P. Rowe in 1974. Rowe explained her vision of patterned sexist behavior when she addressed the AAUW Conference on Graduate and Professional Education.

The minutiae of sexism appear to me a major problem for women in educational institutions. Saturn's rings, if one lived inside them, would appear as random encounters with dust and ice. Perhaps the dust and ice would even appear so scattered as not always to deserve defense against them. But the objective eye, which observes from a distance will see that many grains of sand taken together obscure the planet, and create formidable barriers (Rowe 1974, 2).

My vision of club activities (dinners, yard sales, book groups, business meetings, etc.) involves an equally patterned behavior. Amadou Hampate Ba (2001) used three figures quoting one of his teachers: “Writing is one thing and knowledge is another thing. Writing is a photograph of knowledge, but it is not knowledge itself. Knowledge is a light which is in man...as the potential for a baobab tree is contained in its seed” (3).

Metaphors are situation specific. They concern the ways “in which humans approach a problem, putting the problem in a describable context” (Martin 1995). Worldviews are larger and general. Worldviews, politics, and a “sense of self” can be shaped by organizational experiences (Ferree & Martin 1995, 6).

Each of us has a personal worldview [Weltanschauung] that accounts for the nature, structure, and functioning of the universe and helps explain our feelings Harris (32). Vella (1994) uses the phrase “boilerplate of concepts, skills, and attitudes” (126), instead of worldview or mindset. Our basic assumptions “...about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986, 3).
People manifest fundamental patterns of behavior peculiar to their own culture. These sets of customs and habits include verbal and nonverbal communication, which defines the manner in which we view the world around us. There are certain assumptions of this reality which form the basis of all our actions . . . these assumptions have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of group interaction in adult learning situations. (Bouchard 1986, 41)

Worldview affects every aspect of our lives, including the culture of our organizations (Sackmann 1991). Mary Parker Follett wrote that giving orders was affected by “[our] past life, our early training, our later experience, all our emotions, beliefs, prejudices, every desire that we have, have formed certain habits of mind that the psychologists call habit-patterns, action-patterns, motor-sets” (In Shafritz and Hyde 1991, 66).

Edward Lindeman (1989) saw dialogue as central to getting intellectual content from experience. He believed learners who had special information needed to talk about their experiences with other stakeholders—“those who are likely to be influenced . . . (117). “Discussion is more than talk,” he said (117); “discussion is organized talk” (119).

The history of the adult education needs narratives (“oral evidence”) as much as it needs lists of facts and analyses of organizational structure. Stories of club life taught, and still teach, members ways to nurture friendship and strengthen others. “Oral history makes a critical addition to oral evidence” (Ritchie 1994, 93); even if it is sometimes unconvincing (92), and reviewers do not all follow the same rules in translation and interpretation (105). Folklore and other qualitative data reveal feelings and motivations that remain hidden in quantitative research. Stories from the oral tradition may yield undiscovered wisdom link informal, nonformal and formal learning experiences.

Josephine Donovan (1994) also gives discussion center stage. She says that communication is not just “undirected talking. It is not a coffee klatch . . . there are certain ground-rules, and often there is an implied and expected analysis” (85). Donovan also notes that consciousness-raising is “a rather dictatorial means of imposing ideology” (87).
Every worldview, picture, boilerplate, is limited in some fashion, but realization of those limitations encourages people to strike out beyond them, therefore enhancing change. As worldviews change, new knowledge is constructed (McCarty 1999), and “new learning is usually risky business; the outcome is seldom a certainty” (Wlodkowski, 1985, 47). Theoretically, knowing education changes attitude made detractors withhold certain subjects and opportunities from various groups of people (Kett 1996, Solomon 1985).

The origin and development of attitudes depend on a range of factors: genetic factors, physiological state of the subject, his direct experience, the social groups to which he belongs, and the kinds of communication to which he is exposed (Kidd 1973, 110).

It is metaphor that gives us the power to virtually construct new fields of interest. We depend a great deal on metaphor to clarify our thinking. Even point of view is metaphorical (McCarty 1999). Humanities Computing was born at the intersection of economics, literature, art, music, technology, cyberspace, and sociology. The interaction in the new field attempts to account for meanings constructed from our “. . . private constellation of intellectual parents [and . . .] landscape of ideas” (McCarty 1999).

Another new field is autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner 2002), which blends different worlds—“. . . reaching across boundaries to make connections, and [realizing] how our worlds can never quite be the other’s or the other’s ours” (389). It can “. . . encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding in ways that, among others, are self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, and self-luminous” (222).

Literary forensics (Roberts 2001), another new field, attempts to account for changes in historical analysis and publication. "...any writer's style was so full of quirks and idiosyncrasies that it could render identity as accurately as DNA or fingerprints" (104). Don Foster once said, “No single detail is telling. It's a holistic thing. . . . Not even a clever fellow like Ten Kaczynski can escape the cabin of his mind's linguistic system” (In Roberts 2001,106).
Not all change results in whole new disciplines. This will probably be the case with the juxtaposition of women’s club life and education. The realignment in thinking will go unnamed—but may be important. Sally Helgesen (1995) chronicled difficult obligatory changes when front-line personnel at Beth-Israel Hospital suddenly inherited research, management, and evaluation functions from higher-level management. Previously marginalized nurses and other staff had more power, but more responsibility. The nurses and staff were the “permeable border through which new information flows” (125), so they felt the mandated changes unnerving and complicated. Housewives were the permeable border through which information from children flowed to heads of household or vice versa, so the Helgeson study is pertinent here.

Nurses who were front-line personnel in the Persian Gulf War were also faced with uncertainties and duties on a frontier (Steblin 1993). Though fearful of fear of nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare, they were still supposed to be efficient caregivers. Their tensions varied with the area in which they were stationed and their branch of service. “Some of the [other] stressors were . . . common to all wars: poor living conditions, threat of capture or torture, threat of life and limb and threats to our underlying moral beliefs” (71).

Though the word, “worldview,” was not used, Steblin noted nurses’ emotional wellbeing was shored up by altering their individual perceptions of stressors, by identifying and obtaining coping resources to meet their challenges, and by having had adequate training for the job to be done. A network of peers and friends proved to be a major coping strategy (74). Social support was the overall most helpful tactic. That tactic was closely followed by “planful problem-solving and positive reappraisal behavior” (iii).

If one accepts historian Nancy Cott’s general threefold definition of feminism (1972) as opposition to a hierarchy that posits one sex as superior to the other, the perception of women as a social as well as a biological grouping, and the recognition that woman’s condition is socially but not divinely constructed, then NCJW was only partly feminist. It adopted Cott’s first two conditions but steadfastly clung to the primacy of motherhood as woman’s divinely assigned role. (6)
Like many other groups of women, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) does not fit neatly in the scheme of American feminism or the development of the women’s movement (Rogow 1993). NCJW features a diverse membership and reflects constant shifts in thinking about women’s place in their lives. Their surroundings and their worldview are symbiotic.

. . . [T]he interplay of social, economic, political, and geographic circumstances would unfold a different story for every setting. [For example] the sense of purpose, of distinctiveness, of loss, and of common nostalgia, which mark the southern region, spill over into the [Atlanta] women's groups . . .[they] echo, clangorously, the sentiments expressed by Jennie June Croly, founder of the General Federation, who conceived of the women's club as a proper forum for the expression of womanliness, and who saw at the center of that womanliness a sense of duty. (Rogow 1993, 16)

Because there is such a breadth of organizational purpose and activity (Gamm & Putnam 1999), any examination of volunteer groups must be multifaceted. One of the facets concerns cultural identity and the conflicts that arise when groups and individuals are faced with mandatory change. As change is involved with constructing and generalizing new knowledge, the link between philosophy and adult education is a strong one. Because this examination highlights different points of view, explores change, and illustrates organizational cooperation, it reflects postmodernist assumptions.

The idea of worldview became increasingly important as the data for this study thickened and worldview’s importance as an analytical tool became apparent. The “Clubwoman’s Worldview,” as I came to call a certain mindset, was manifested through time and across geographical space. Women volunteers’ view of the world drew them to cooperative associations. They joined groups because their friends belonged, and they were looking for an expanded social network, or because they perceived a problem for which they believed only collective action could provide an answer. Once a part of these volunteer associations, members flourished among others who exhibited the same “boilerplate of concepts, skills, and attitudes” (Vella 1994, 126), and their collective worldview shaped the culture of the organization (Sackmann 1991, 16-31).
Collaborative Learning

Relying on the oral tradition, we have become very aware of how ordinary women’s associations (now involving consciousness-raising meetings, study clubs or book guilds, etc.) flourished before writing changed their lives. In the 1800s, study clubs were often rigid and reflected classes in formal institutions of learning. By the 1900s, they were often serendipitous and informal in their founding and development, thus coming full-circle—back to a time most working class people, women, and other members of cultural minorities had no access to books. In every period, some meet for years; others disband after a few months or weeks, or after a specific task has been accomplished (abolition of the slave trade, women’s suffrage, etc.). The gendered expectations of household, church, and workplace were common discussion topics. Organizations supposedly meeting just for fun offered the chance to hone communications skills and be of service to the community.

In every conversation, meaning and deconstruction of “what she said” are in a state of flux. Multiple points of view are in play. Because postmodernism and poststructuralism are concerned with the deconstruction of meaning, examining of discourse, and multiple points of view, they can be used to better understand these discussion groups. Postmodern and poststructural are often used interchangeably, but either or both can be effective tools to highlight connections between social structures and individuality. Tisdell (1998) sees these philosophical underpinnings as crucial to feminist pedagogy: “. . . feminist postmodernisms of resistance would keep the interests of women in mind, while attempting to change educational systems to also benefit those who have been marginalized by race, class, sexual orientation and ableness” (146).

Postmodernism and poststructuralism assume transformatory change, assume open systems (which exchange energy and matter and have to have perturbations and anomalies to work), and assume structures are complex (like webs) (Doll 1989, 243-253).

In poststructuralist theory meanings are cultural and learned, but they are also unfixed, sliding, plural. They are in consequence a matter for political debate. Culture itself is the limit of our knowledge: there is no available truth outside culture with which we can challenge injustice. But culture is also contradictory,
the location of resistances as well as oppression, and it is therefore ultimately unstable . . . a site of political struggle (Belsey & Moore 1989, 18).

In spite of the fact they may not use the terms *collaboration* and *constructivism* for their learning activities, women’s volunteer organizations do collaborate and construct. They may be more familiar with the terms *cooperation* and *creation*, but their work should not be discounted because they do not use more scholarly language. Nonformal cooperative learning initiatives should not be downplayed because they are separate from formal schooling.

Likewise, cooperative learning and constructivist attitudes that have made the leap to higher education and other formal schooling venues should not be ignored. Catherine Marshall (1999) brought techniques familiar to nonformal learners into a higher education course for educators: “. . .[Y]oung school children, mentor[ing] teachers, university students, and professors, were able to construct important new knowledge because of the partnership” (400). Marshall said that effective education of the future will “be represented in a plethora of configurations since they are birthed out of diverse needs, expectations and opportunities . . .” and that “. . . learning is most effective when the learner is actively involved . . .” (400).

Her ideas are important to this dissertation because she shows how alike are the efforts of rank and file teachers, clubwomen, extension club leaders, literacy instructors, and volunteers.

She joins clubwomen who—through their volunteer work, if not through academic publishing—believe that having more adults involved in learning exercises helps children and other learners. Marshall believes that “. . .in-service teachers learn new ideas from preservice teachers”—just as homemakers who kept house for many years learned new skills and ideas from young wives who had had more formal schooling. She further believes that “. . .university professors need continued experiences working with children and in-service teachers in order to nourish their own instruction about teaching. . .” (400). Clubwomen believe that extension club leaders and others with college degrees do not necessarily know everything about motherhood, cooking, ecology, public speaking, etc. Perhaps Marshall’s most important message is: “. . .teaching, like learning,
is a dynamic experience for which one is never totally prepared and opportunities for tutelage come from a multitude of sources . . .” (400)

Because members of women’s associations seek out and employ many sources of information, they are important role models for teacher or leaders aspiring to better facilitate consensus in situations that are plagued, but enriched by diverse populations.

Volunteer Associations: Origins and Development

Eduard Lindeman (1989) believed in collaborative effort so strongly he stated, “Collectivism is the road to power, the predominant reality of modern life” (97), and “By uniting in a voluntary association, those with common interests strengthen themselves in the struggle for the enhancement and protection of those interests” (Hausknecht 1962, 303). Versions of that belief led to the formation of thousands of volunteer organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States, the numerous associations provided opportunities for exercising self-government on a small scale, thus enabling democracy on state and national levels (Gamm & Putnam 1999, 511-512; Hausknecht 303).

In 1999, Gerald Gamm and Robert Putnam wrote, “. . . in virtually every city and town, Americans have built dense, complex networks of voluntary associations: churches, clubs, lodges, choirs, mutual-aid societies, and ports teams . . . hundreds of thousands of institutions that are obscure, scattered, and often small” (512).

Behaviors within such clusters must have been set early. By the time Anne Hutchinson started a discussion group for church women in the American colonies, she had a clear pattern to follow. The pattern usually included a women-only membership and individual learning without male guidance (Scott 1991, 262). Group had charismatic leaders, an initial religious purpose, and lists of topics that quickly broadened. Suffrage and abolition were two of the transformational ideas that concerned eighteenth and nineteenth century voluntary associations.

The women’s club movement was so widespread and important that Nancy Cott called her study of New England women from 1780-1835 The Bonds of Womanhood (Clinton 10-12). Between 1880 and 1900, membership in women’s groups increased 300%, and church membership mushroomed. The Daughters of the American had 23,000
members by 1898, and 110,000 in 1920. The American Association of University Women was founded when recent college graduates in the 1890s realized their economic, political, and social opportunities were limited by gendered rules.

Increased secularism and greater individual rights had sapped some religious thought from club life by the time Jane Cunningham Croly rebelled against male journalists and started Sorosis after being barred from attending a dinner for Charles Dickens (Ely and Chappell 120). The aggregation of women chose its name very carefully, taking “Sorosis” because some valuable fruit result from an aggregation of flowers and seed pods” (121).

Alice Cary, the first president, said the organization “. . . proposed the inoculation of deeper and broader ideas among women; proposed to teach them to think for themselves, and get their ideas first hand, not so much because it is their right as because it is their duty” (121).

The typical pattern of development in women’s clubs was for one person to become concerned about some problem or issue, or to become aware of some function that an autonomous learning group could perform—for her and for others. She then discussed her ideas with one or two other women, made several tentative plans and decisions for the formation of a group and called the first meeting. (Knoepfli 1971)

These neophyte clubwomen wanted to be able to “use or apply the knowledge or skill” gained (146), but the founders usually planned the programs and became the chief learners. Meeting format and timing varied. Some met monthly, some more often. Members often read reports they had written or led discussions on particular topics. They met in members’ homes. “Half the groups in the study did not have a formal leadership structure, others appointed an executive committee, and a few appointed a single leader. (146)

Groups helped members create a sense of community, sustain their traditions and respond to economic and political systems that shut out their members (Gamm & Putnam 1999, 511-513). “Organizations bless a major role in American democracy. These organizations have at least three major functions: to present a concentration and centralization of power; to help individuals understand how political processes operate,
and to serve as mechanisms for social change” (Cartright 1972, 303). Examples of early Missouri organizations were The St. Louis Woman's Club (formed in 1904), the Equal Suffrage League of St. Louis (formed in 1910), and the study club Kate Chopin helped found in 1890 (Saunders 2006).

The women’s groups Eve Chappell and Mary Ely studied in 1937 also had diverse purposes, but Chappell said they were all “outcomes of the movement which in the last third of the nineteenth century was hailed as the middle-aged woman's university” (119).

Effective female leaders and organizers were positive role models who concentrated on individual and organizational development. Edna LaMoore Waldo, for example, published her Leadership for Today’s Clubwoman in 1939, citing concerns for smoothly running groups. She included the need for belonging to a club and choosing the right one, time management, finances (fund-raising, dues, honoraria, mortgage or rent of clubhouse, lunches, etc.), organizing new clubs or revitalizing old ones, understanding organizational structure, committee membership, providing relevant programs and managing conventions, publishing yearbooks and newsletters, etiquette and dress, public speaking, holiday celebrations, ethics, protocol, clubhouse, members in revolt, and service to the community. About the same time, and possibly thinking of Waldo’s “members in revolt” or need for revitalizing old clubs, LeCron and McElroy wrote, “. . . but we aren't going to better things simply by staying at home and refusing to belong . . .” (2).

Vero Beach Women’s Club

With their hoop skirts protecting them against the Florida mosquitoes, pioneer women in Vero Beach organized a formal group as soon as there were enough candidates to make it feasible. Suffrage, the railroad, schools, a bank, and the library were major concerns (Lockwood 10). The Unity Club name was changed to The Vero Woman’s Club later (founded in 1915 and chartered in 1926). “Vero was where the action was, and the Woman’s Club was usually in the middle of it” (15).

The group employed rites and rituals as links to their ideals, used green and white to signify life and purity, and took “In essentials, Unity; In non-essentials, Liberty; In all things, Charity” as their club motto. Their club song (Suwannee River) connected them
to their geographical area and to a Florida spirit that partook of Victorian mores, Progressive Era philosophy, pragmatic attention to bugs and alligators, and a certain pioneer freedom from some of the more stringent rules of ladylike conduct practiced in other areas of the country. Music was part of club, school, and informal family gatherings. “During World War I, the club members voted to include patriotic music at every meeting. Accompanists’ names were included in the minutes of the meeting, with names of vocalists” (15).

Business meetings were on the first Tuesday of the month; cultural programs were on the third. The history of the group names its earliest officers, indicating a determination to give credit to the women who struggled to make disparate elements into a cohesive and supportive community. They identified problems (inadequate library, no school or church, etc.), dealt with them, and evaluated their results. They cooperated with other organizations, such as The Aladdin Club, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, PTA, and Red Cross (16). Their individual and collaborative actions can be divided into three basic types of clubs: (1) study groups (concerned with books, discussions, writing papers, and other intellectual pursuits); (2) social groups (concerned with parties, summer picnics, Christmas programs); and, (3) activist groups (concerned with service to the community) (Scarborough 1953, 234-235).

Members helped raise money for a new clubhouse and library in 1916, provided reference materials for schools, and offered to let congregations hold church services in their building. Members “assumed their role as first service club in town while continuing to improve their building and increase their library service” (12-13). Though dances and socials were common, there was another side to club life. “When, in the early days, the baker’s daughter died of diphtheria, the Woman’s Club members cleaned the bakery, disinfected to the satisfaction of health officials and announced that the bakery was safe” (17), and three members borrowed an acre of ground and raised cabbages to pay off the last of the $400 mortgage on the library (13).

Vero women organized a Junior Woman’s Club in 1940, a reading group, a “Soiree Department,” and a quilting group. When they chose their activities, they followed State Federation guidelines, emphasizing “. . . the Arts, conservation,
education, home life, International Affairs and Public Affairs” (21). These were the basic concerns of most North American women’s organizations, though individual clubs and federations worded their aims differently.

Exemplary Federations

The General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) was formed when members of Sorosis joined members of other clubs in New York City the year Sorosis turned twenty. In 1937, GFWC had 14,500 clubs with two million members. The original object of the new federation was “to bring together women engaged in literary, artistic, scientific, and philanthropic pursuits, with the view of rendering them helpful to each other, and useful to society” (Scarborough 1953, 121).

GFWC still facilitates acquisition of new knowledge and retention of traditional skills and principles. Its first constitution, adopted in 1890, provided that any club seeking membership should have in its plan of work no sectarian or political test; that its purpose should not be primarily philanthropic or technical; and that its chief object should be literary, artistic, or scientific culture, though the more broadly human movements might be recognized. (125) [Emphasis appears in original. PJM]

Kett’s examination of adult education (1994) also included information on the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC). He said GFWC had approximately 5,000 individual rural and urban American clubs by 1906, and that it was concerned with the arts, the preservation of natural resources, education, community health, civic involvement, and world peace. Its Washington headquarters is a National Historic Landmark and houses a Women's History and Resource Center. Kett notes, “The General Federation itself was never more than its name implies, a loose association of local organizations that arose more or less spontaneously and that marched to their own drummers” (154).

A smaller federation was formed in the state of Wisconsin. Leaders of the WFWC (Wisconsin Federation of Women’s Clubs) varied in style, rationale for volunteering, and contribution to their groups, but all “... found organizational activities and community
works an appropriate and attractive way to express their ambitions and ideals” (Steinschneider 72).

The Federation bought the old Wisconsin Territorial Legislature building in 1912. Their purchase of this visible public entity emphasized their role as guardians of community traditions and history. They might not have been allowed to work in the legislature, but they appreciated the value of the landmark as an asset to the community, as a repository for their archives, and as a venue for meetings. The structure would have been lost to subsequent generations had women volunteers not raised the money necessary to save it.

The Federation’s other activities reflected concerns with education and health. The “work of any one woman’s club, in Wisconsin or elsewhere, may seem small or historically insignificant, but the combined efforts of clubwomen gave them an important place in Progressive efforts to transform and modernize urban environments” (94). They also laid the groundwork for opportunities for women outside the club movement’s structures, for example, by securing the appointment of women to public positions. Also, club experience frequently gave clubwomen themselves entrée to official public roles. Finally, the Wisconsin Federation’s relationships with other volunteer organizations were vitally important to its success in creating a public sphere for its members” (94-5).

Blair’s idea of “domestic feminism” fit many situations and was malleable (93). She said . . . women’s separate public sphere was not a distinct entity existing side by side in the male public sphere. Rather, it was a set of relationships between male and female public activity, and among female activists, which insured that women’s public activity was not isolated in, or swallowed by, the male-defined public realm. (95)

Adult Education

“Education is connected to life and dispensed according to the circumstances that present themselves” (Ba, in Hunt 2), and adult education covers the world. An examination of its history might easily focus on the Boston Mechanics’ Institutes, the Philadelphia Junto started by Benjamin Franklin, learning circles in the Islamic world (Al-Rawi 1993), or the Freedman's Bureau in the American South (Denton 1993). Kett (1996) says that adult education is “for those who believed that they had completed their
Theorists and practitioners struggle to divide adult education into categories to make that history manageable. For example, Ilsley (1989) arbitrarily bases his typologies of education on structure (hierarchical-bureaucratic; individually-oriented, task-oriented, or charisma-governed; on types of action and purpose; and, on context (105). He divides volunteer groups into equally arbitrary categories, which may overlap: “(1) institutionally directed organizations, (2) volunteer-group directed organizations, (3) problem-directed organizations, and (4) social-change directed organizations” (103).

In 1929, one iconic adult educator, Eduard Lindeman, said, “Each of us is capable of bringing intelligent influence to bear somewhere” (38). He believed cooperative effort to be “the road to power, the predominant reality of modern life” (1989, 97). Lindeman is a foundational person in American history and in the development of our educational initiatives. He is often uncited in contemporary adult education works. People borrow his ideas, sometimes not realizing he influenced their thinking. His copyrights ran out, but he is the foundation upon which many of the contemporary educators built their theories. Believing that “Human nature is predisposed to optimism” (23), he shared the worldview of the Progressive Era with clubwomen of the time. Because he brought his work--theoretical and practical knowledge--from Europe, and put his theories into practice here, his experience reflects the experience of many immigrant clubwomen. He espoused the concept clubwomen exemplify: “the whole of life is learning” (5) and said, “Adult education presumes that the creative spark may be kept alive throughout life, and moreover, that it may be rekindled in those adults who are willing to devote a portion of their energies to the process of becoming intelligent” (55).

It is important to remember Lindeman’s words, because he lived and worked in the Progressive Era that gave birth to innumerable formal, nonformal, and informal learning initiatives; because he brought European ideas to the United States and made it richer; because he was a life-long learner and teacher—a model for others; and because his work—now out of copyright—is so often the source of un-cited data. While agriculture waned and industry waxed, Lindemann and others like him struggled to
provide opportunities for farmers, the urban working class, and those who had been shut
out of opportunities for obtaining literacy, social coping skills, job training and
numeracy. He defined adult education as a process “through which learners become
aware of significant experience” (109) and “an agitating instrumentality for changing
life” (104).

Courtney (1989), writing many years later, noted that adult education is so various
in its forms and venues that it is difficult to define and describe: “. . . it is rare to come
upon a single sentence that will do justice to the full range of this phenomenon or that
will satisfy the many different kinds of practitioners who call themselves adult educators;
but this need not be considered a problem” (15).

In whatever fashion adult education is defined, communication will be crucial part
to it. Dialogue is central to all adult education (Katzenstein 1995; Vella 1994), and “can
serve a hegemonic function in that it may promote dominant ideas and practices as
normal or natural, and the language used to describe them as a form of common sense”
(Pratt & Nesbit 119).

Adult education may be analyzed by dividing learning initiatives in a general
fashion and contrasting them (as below, in formal, nonformal and informal categories),
by showing them as part of a historical process (charting growth of professional
credentialing), by comparing structures as in Schroeder’s popular typology published by
in 1980, by identifying particular philosophies (behaviorist, feminist, liberal, etc.), or by
presenting voices and biographies of charismatic adult educators like Ida B. Wells
Barnett or Malcolm Knowles. It may also be analyzed by looking at the learning itself,
rather than at the buildings, the facilitators, and the professional organizations that service
the facilitators. Motivation and reward systems are key in the examination of learning.

Malcolm Knowles’ contention that education must be a process of continual
inquiry has now been borrowed by educators of all levels. In 1972, Knowles said, “And
one of the crucial new realities is that education must be lifelong to avoid the catastrophe
of human obsolescence” (160). He called the field of education “an abstraction
representing a complex mosaic of many elements . . .” (In Smith, Aker & Kidd xxii).
Clubwomen would agree with Lindeman:
Each of us is capable of bringing intelligent influence to bear somewhere—in home, neighborhood, community, trade union, cooperative society, trade association, et cetera. Adult education specifically aims to train individuals for a more fruitful participation in those smaller collective units that do so much to mold significant experience. (38)

In 1970, Wayne Schroeder said, “There is still no single definition universally accepted by adult educators nor is there a universally held public image of adult education” (In Smith, Aker & Kidd 29). He later conceptualized three “operating systems” (Apps 1989, 278). His first system involved separate agencies and institutions, such as consulting firms or private schools; community service agencies, such as libraries, museums, health agencies, and recreational centers; and, special interest groups, such as churches, the military, businesses and industries (278). His second OS was concerned with volunteers:

1. pressure groups—labor unions and farmer organizations,
2. community betterment organizations and service clubs—League of Women Voters and Rotary Clubs,
3. mutual benefit societies and social clubs—Moose and Elks, and
4. professional organizations—American Bar Association, American Medical Association, American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (278).

His third OS concerned “individual agents” . . . “entrepreneurs providing their knowledge to others for profit and volunteers who share their knowledge for personal satisfaction and service” (278).

Both he and the United States Department of Education lean toward structural examination as the most valid way of approaching the field of adult education. Apps (1989) records the nine categories of instruction providers listed by the DOE:

. . . (1) four year colleges or universities, (2) two-year community colleges, junior colleges, or technical institutes, (3) vocational, trade, or business schools (including hospitals), (4) elementary or high schools, (5) other schools, (6) private community organizations . . ., (7) governmental agencies . . ., (8) labor
organizations or professional associations, and (9) tutors, private instructors, or others (278).

For academic purposes, adult education may be divided into formal, nonformal and informal (Tight 1996; Walters 2000), though “at some level all education can be described as voluntary. . .” (Kett 1996, xiii). Adult education programs may be goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning oriented (Houle 1961), and most students “. . . fit clearly into one or another of the three groups but none is completely contained thereby” (19).

**Formal Education**

Formal education usually is associated with a building or set of buildings that are set aside for training and learning. Homework, tutorials, practical exercises, field trips and other excursions may be part of a formal education program, but museums and art galleries are not institutions of formal education. Adult formal education may be subdivided into university, secondary and continuing education. “A predominant purpose of formal education in schools is to facilitate learning outside them” (Bigge 1976, 271).

Formal education and adult education merge in military leadership schools (Cremin 1988, 502), cooperative extension, adult basic literacy courses, high school diploma programs, ESOL (English as a Second Language) programs, and continuing education courses. In formal education, curricula, syllabi, minimum achievement requirements, and attendance are set by the instructor, by administrators, or by statute. Compulsory attendance involves tabulation of hours per day, days per week, weeks per year, and years per level of instruction. Because formal education is mandatory and statewide, students theoretically are able to move from one school to another with minimal angst.

Students, teachers and administrators in formal programs must meet minimum standards (including standardized testing and certification examinations). They are constrained by tradition and the expectations of the institution (Chartock 2000). Though teachers of college classes may have more freedom than do teachers of younger people, college instructors usually must submit proposals for new courses or changes to existing
ones to department heads and/or other administrators and wait for permission to deviate from the previous standard.

Formal education, attempting to deal with the constraints and challenges of the technological, medical and demographic changes of the twenty-first century, appropriated the idea of lifelong learning, but put a new spin on it. Educators concerned with lifelong learning in any venue, however, work to improve

the quality of life of the general public . . . to increase the educational qualifications of working people, and . . . to expand educational opportunities for school graduates and fulfill the needs of individuals and society. <http://www.stou.ac.th/Eng/Visit/Edu_stu/ed_gen.html>.

Some colleges now give credit for learning acquired through life experience and work or independent reading and study. Courses sponsored by associations, business, government, industry, the military and unions may be labeled formal by the sponsoring agencies, but for my purposes, those would be nonformal initiatives unless their completion was approved by a standardized formal testing service somehow. This awarding of college credit for learning accomplished in the informal or nonformal sectors illustrates the porous quality of barriers between the types of education, and indicates again the reasons that we need to remember rules change. A hundred years ago, there was no American Council on Education to monitor earning of college credit for non-university work.

Continuing education is “post secondary instruction designed to meet the educational needs and interests of adults, including the expansion of available learning opportunities for adults who are not adequately served by current educational offerings in their communities,” and governed by the ACCET (Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training) in Washington, D. C. ACCET requires a “clearly identified institutional objective within the operational entity” and strangely refuses to award college credit for any learning done at an institution that grants a degree <http://www.accet.org/scope.html>.

Nonformal Education

Diven (1998) defines nonformal education as including literacy and numeracy
classes, community education and consciousness raising, and vocational and skills-training programs ranging from midwifery to pump repair to bookkeeping” (84). She says it can “take place in a classroom or under a tree,” is for everyone, may or may not utilize formally trained instructors, and “can both replace and enhance formal education . . .” (84).

Nonformal, informal and community education are all committed to furthering the “well-being of young people [. . . and encourages a] commitment to their neighbours; and participation in, and development of, local, democratic forms of organization” (Smith 8-9). Participatory decision-making may or may not be involved. Nonformal education can be used to make formal schooling stronger, or may even take the place of formal education. Nonformal education is “. . . a new force through which educational and socioeconomic change is believed to occur at both the individual and societal level, and the vision of it as an exciting new strategy for combating poverty, ignorance, inequality, ill-health, and oppression” (Bock 1983, 166).

There is a section on informal education below, but there is little agreement on the definitions of nonformal and informal education. Nonformal, logically, straddles the gap between formal and informal, and many adult education initiatives exhibit characteristics from all three divisions. There is seldom a specific border between the types of programs, because each program and each learner constructs and names an identity, just as towns or women’s associations do (Martin, T. P., 8-9). Germany’s social pedagogy, French animation, and South American popular education all concern learning obtained outside of schools.

[We] can get into all sorts of side alleys if we spend too much time arguing for our own way of naming the work. We can focus too much on difference and not enough of what is common. However, there is a serious point in thinking about these things. Naming the work in this way or that brings out different qualities, emphasizes different things. (Smith, M. website).

Malcolm Tight (1996) used Coombs and Ahmed’s 1974 study in Africa to help distinguish between formal, informal and nonformal education. In that framework, agricultural extension, farmer training programs, cooperatives, adult literacy classes,
on-the-job (OJT) skill upgrades, youth clubs, and courses in what are often viewed as women’s issues (health, nutrition, and family planning) are all nonformal education. Anything outside of formal education that is an organized and systematized learning activity is nonformal education. It’s a “lifelong process involved in everyday experience” (66-67).

Jack Bock (1983) pointed out that nonformal education may deliver to its participants the same skills and cognitive growth as formal education can, but it will not necessarily provide access to a better job, supervisory status, or formal education. “Nonformal education is not chartered to confer access to authoritative societal roles--and the participants in these programs learn this through both the direct and indirect socialization within the program itself . . . (174)

Joseph Kett (1996) was more hopeful. He noted that some members of self-improvement societies, Chautauqua participants, and veterans were able to use knowledge acquired nonformally or informally as a conduit to college. At the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the idea of higher education as a passport to upward mobility gained credence among those who had been shut out.

Informal Education

Alan Tough said informal education is multifaceted learning we undertake for ourselves. Mark Smith said it may be, but is not limited to, organizations that see professional educators as critical to learning. Eduard Lindeman (1989) said the adult learner’s textbook is experience, “a homely matter” (87). Malcolm Tight cited Coombs and Ahmed’s 1974 definition: “Generally, informal education is unorganized idiosyncratic and even unintentional at times, yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person’s total lifetime learning—including that of even a highly ‘schooled’ person” (70).

Text and teachers may be involved, but are not mandatory. Informal education includes a tradition of salons that started in eighteenth-century Paris (Atwood, In Slezak 1995), continued through Victorian Improvement Societies, and is still apparent in today’s book clubs.

Mark Smith (9) also said informal education works through and is driven by conversation (9). It is unpredictable. This unpredictability sets it apart from formal
education. Informal education takes place in any setting, and expands the envelope of personal experience. One of the major goals of informal education is increased involvement of people in the issues that affect their lives. Facilitators should, therefore, “value people’s experiences and feelings,” “work in ways that help people to deepen their understandings and commitments and to act on them,” and be concerned with justice and democracy (9).

**Adult Learning**

One of the more difficult ways to get at what actually happens in adult education is to try identifying how the knowledge is developed, grown, and disseminated. The interplay of motivation, activity, and reward requires a constant reworking of focus. “Learning, in contrast with maturation, is an enduring change in a living individual that is not heralded by his genetic inheritance. It may be considered a change in insights, behavior, perception, or motivation, or a combination of these” (Bigge 1976, 1).

“Maturation or learning, or a combination of the two, is the means by which lasting changes in persons occur” (1).

Kurt Lewin said, “Learning occurs as a result of a change in cognitive structures . . .” (In Knowles 25). Learning’s four aspects concern growth of knowledge, change in motivation, change in allegiance to group or idea, or change in control over the body (Kidd 1972).

**Motivation**

Wlodkowski (1985) wrote that motivation “is a bit of a beast” (44), partly because there were over twenty viable theories on motivation in operation in 1985. Nevertheless, motivation is one of the major factors to consider in the study of adult and continuing education. “Motivation may spring from a variety of needs, . . . may appear as a generalized need for achievement, or . . . may be specifically associated with a need to obtain a particular reward” (Bigge 1976, 304).

Motivation and empowerment are constantly being redefined. This redefining mirrors the naming of self that was mentioned in the introduction and the process of historical change explored above. Kett (1989) says people make verbal distinctions that reveal they see choice as an integral part of mutual improvement institutions that and
nineteenth century self-improvement required “self-denial, persistence, and resilience” (xiii).

Motivation is central to all education. Motivation is what makes us react in certain ways. “Motivation is usually employed as a general term to designate the active kinds of relationships that an organism has with its environment” (Kidd 102). Everyone wants a certain fulfillment. Money is not the only reward. A feeling of empowerment (the building of new strengths) may be gratification enough for some.

Virginia Jenks (1983) ties motivation to communication, and subdivides it into internal, external, and organizational. Needs and drives provide internal motivation; work and reward systems provide external motivation; organizations provide a combination of motivations. She sees motivation, good communication and effective leadership as three key elements in worthwhile human relations.

Kidd says that motives and drives are sometimes seen as identical, sometimes different. In the latter case, drives “denote such physiological needs as hunger or thirst, and motives to include interests, attitudes, and purposes. Both wants and needs are included under motives . . . Motives may lead either to approaching or avoiding behavior, and sometimes both” (102).

Abraham Maslow believes people are motivated to move on (reach out, push the envelope, climb the ladder of success, etc.), only after having had their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter met (Knowles 1990). Business and education have used Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs widely. His ideas are often represented by a triangle (Maslow 1992). This graphical representation bothers some researchers, who seem to see a personified Self-Actualization as having climbed rough-shod to the top. Yes, Maslow used the term “higher needs,” implying an ascending scale, but his motivational theory could as easily be graphed as a series of concentric circles. Basic physiological needs would provide the core of human development; the circle signifying security and protection would surround that core. The next ring, moving outward, would indicate the need for love and belonging. The outermost circle, the shell of self-actualization, would stand between the individual and the rest of the world. There is no one metaphorical design that pleases all readers, so the representation of ideas is always problematic. If
readers see the building of a self-actualized human being as a turning inward toward an increasing awareness, the series of circles could be reversed, with the need for basic sustenance standing between the interior self and the rest of the world. How exactly does one chart the idea that only after the individual is warm, dry, well fed, and safe do needs for recognition, status, and self-esteem assert themselves? Who can argue with meeting basic needs first? How does one draw a diagram of self-preservation? People of all philosophies will save themselves first if they are in a boat that tips over. Like Malcolm Knowles (1990), “I believe that I’ll have to go along with Abraham Maslow in assuming that the highest human need is for self-actualization and that we work at it until we die” (85), but I also believe that there are many ways of graphing the concept. One of the alternate ways of graphing Maslow’s work has been offered by Steven J. Hanley and Steven C. Abell (2002). In their diagram, concentric circles represent family and parenting, the natural environment and interpersonal relationships, and spiritual relationships. Against these circles, they posit a rectangle with Maslow’s needs typed in neat rows. Arrows from the Maslow rectangle extend out through and beyond the spiritual relationship circle (52).

Carl Rogers (1980), a humanist counselor whose name is often linked with Maslow’s in general academic conversations (Knowles 1990), notices his own behavior is affected by his feelings. He feels “small” when he is underappreciated (Corey 1990, 23). In facilitating his sessions, Rogers tries to provide a setting marked by “genuineness, prizing, and understanding” (43). He feels that people in comfortable safe settings become less rigid, moving toward “process living, away from dependence toward autonomy, away from defensiveness toward self-acceptance, away from being predictable toward an unpredictable creativity. They exhibit proof of an actualizing tendency” (43-44).

Patriarchy and Hegemony

Patriarchy

Religious, educational, cultural, business, and sports cultures placed men in positions of power over women. Tradition helps keep them there.
Merlin Stone (1978) and Peg Streep (1994) explored women’s shifting place in major Western religions. They pointed out ways the erosion of historical knowledge enabled patriarchy the churches. Stone compared androcentric religions to communism and fascism because they did not tolerate “any deviation from the ‘true’ faith” and because they all offer a “comprehensive worldview, encompassing most, if not all, aspects of familial, social and political life. Extreme rightists still cite the Bible as authority for male-dominated families” (Stone 181).

Jennifer Pierce (1995) investigated the status of women in law firms; she found that specific outstanding women who had attained higher positions, such as female litigators, were somehow always at the bottom of the grouping at each step of the ladder. She also found that gendered strategies for keeping women in less important positions involved a “double bind in selecting coping mechanisms” (175). “Being a paralegal is not the same job for men as it is for women” (175).

Sarah and Elizabeth Delany (1993), celebrated African-American sisters, worked with Amy Hill Hearth to document oral reminiscences of their negotiating patriarchal administrative and educational hierarchies to become a teacher and a dentist in New York City during the Victorian Era. Race and gender limited their hiring and promotion. Elizabeth (Bessie) Delany emphasized other “little rituals that bind you together” (19).

Alert to the position of women’s writing in the literary world, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1985) produced an anthology that seems intended to answer Dale Spender’s concerns about how modern women’s work might disappear in the same fashion early women writers’ books did (Spender 1993, 1995). Ruth Milkman (1987) found rampant sex-role stereotyping in business and industry after World War II. She said a historical perspective was necessary to understanding how women were lower in the system than men (157).

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1978) also take the general historical perspective. They cover aspects of medicine and science in women’s lives from the industrial revolution to the twentieth century, showing how female healers were gradually subordinated to credentialed males that came to dominate medicine in the Victorian Era, how certain bizarre treatments were used for women’s sexual problems, how new
knowledge affected housework, and how changing ideas about children affected women’s lives.

Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler and Wieringa found that Western scientific discourse elevated middle-class white males above “women, children, other races, foreign cultures, lower classes, handicapped people and nature” (30-31). Women were “. . . both defined as and compelled to be closer to a private realm that was seen as synonymous with nature, feelings and emotions, and caring for others . . .” (30-31). “Women’s supposed link with nature has been both a justification of their subordination (biological determinism) and a source of inspiration for women in their struggles against their oppression” . . . (7).

The extension activities in the early 1900s were gendered (Cremin 1988, 225). When Home Demonstration Agent Jane Simpson McKinnon (1867-1937) started her career in North Carolina, she steered into tomato clubs and boys into corn clubs (Smith and Wilson 251). Housewives told extension agents that “their husbands simply refused to take seriously any ‘nonsense’ about the need for a better-equipped kitchen [men . . .] controlled options for women at home and in public places” (251).

Gloria Watkins [bell hooks] examined sexism as it intersects with racism. The sexism in patriarchal systems “fosters, condones, and supports male violence against women, as well as encouraging violence between males. In patriarchal society, men are encouraged to channel frustrated aggression in the direction of those without power—women and children” (105).

Throughout American history white men have deliberately promoted hostility and divisiveness between white and black women. The white patriarchal power structure pits the two groups against each other, preventing the growth of solidarity between women and ensuring that women’s status as a subordinate group under patriarchy remains intact (hooks 155).

Feminist organizations “question [patriarchal] authority, produce new elites, call into question dominant societal values, claim resources on behalf of women, and provide space and resources for feminists to live out altered visions of their lives” (Ferree & Martin 1995, 6).
Hegemonic influences vary from country to country (Entwistle 61), but the pattern of subordinating women in patriarchal hierarchies is universal. “Tradition transmitted orally is so precise and so rigorous that one can, with various kinds of cross checking, reconstruct the great events of centuries past in the minutest detail, especially the lives of the great empires or the great men who distinguish history” (Ba, in Hunt 3).

Varying definitions of the phenomenon posit hegemony as “the way one social class exercises political, cultural, or economic influence over other classes” (Rubenson 56), and a “relationship between two political units where one dominates the other with the consent of that other” (Audi 304).

Antonio Gramsci conceptualized a party as concerned with collectivity, a mandatory intellectualism, and specific concern with language: “. . . the history of a language is, for Gramsci, taut court, the history of social and political formation” (Lawner 187).

[His . . .] notion of hegemony provides us with a way of coming to understand the context in which informal educators function and the possibility of critique and transformation” (Entwistle 126). Susan R. Golding sees Gramsci’s theory as promoting democracy; W. L. Adamson said it would have continued to change if Gramsci had lived (229), but that “his concerns were always those of his day and his people” (230).

Vero Beach husbands and other townsmen had hegemony over the energetic clubwomen described above. At one time they even spirited away an out-of-town dignitary who had agreed to speak at a Women’s Club reception, and the welcoming committee was left waiting downtown. In another instance, the state took 3000 slash pines that the women planted and nurtured on land they had been told was theirs. The women lost their labor and their land. In spite of this setback members planted 500 lilies in the late 1920s, and provided a dollar each for water oaks to be “planted on Seminole Avenue . . . In time, almost every avenue and street in down town Vero, that is Original Town, had its trees” (15).

Jessop told a Tokyo conference in 1997 that such hierarchies are in a state of flux, constantly under negotiation. Spalter-Roth and Schrieber (119), and Ferree & Martin
(1995) point out that the construct of hegemony can be used to enable understanding of
the contested and limited public space allotted to women. Robson used the idea of
hegemony to clarify the complex social landscape of Northern Ireland. Michelle Wucker
(2000) used it to explain the cultural ascendancy of Euro-Americans in the United States.
Crane used it to explore the influence of the media on women’s attitudes toward
photography and fashions (Crane 1999).

Lawrence Cremin (1988) pointed out that the relationship between Jane Addams
and John Dewey exemplifies the way patriarchal assumptions shape our thinking. He
says there has been “a tendency among scholars to see . . . Dewey as the mentor and
Addams as the disciple. The interpretation is incorrect on several counts” (179).

Flexner (1973, 23) Collinson and Hearn (1996), and Nelson discussed the ways
in which custom kept men in the ascendancy. Lennie Flank said that working-class
families in capitalistic societies are stereotyped as including fathers who are the
breadwinners. Patriarchal systems give men authority in the public arena and award them
elite status in the home.

Conclusions for Chapter Two

Chapter Two reviewed already-published material from a range of disciplines,
explored some initial ideas about importance of the oral tradition, and linked adult
education and volunteer action.

The original motive for volunteering may give way to new motives as volunteers
become acculturated to the norms and values of an organization . . . three simple
but pervasive concepts provide a basis for analysis of the link between voluntary
action and adult education: (1) voluntary action provides learning potential for
adults, (2) volunteers’ learning needs evolve over time, and (3) volunteers remain
in service longer, and exhibit a higher commitment, when permitted to participate
in the decision making of their institutions. (Beddoe 1989, 102)
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In spite of the fact that the activities and ideas of clubwomen have been discounted as too small or too marginal to affect the way society works, their modest efforts, like tiny pieces of grit or ice (Rowe 1974, 2), have built and removed troublesome stumbling blocks to progress. They have manufactured some fearsome responses to illogical and unreasonable rules over time. This chapter describes the resources used to answer my research questions, explains my choice of groups to be studied, tells how I collected and analyzed the data, spells out how I gained access to respondents and publications, discusses my personal biases, outlines the ways I ensured reliability and validity, and briefly recalls the way the work was accomplished. No previous single study on adult education or women’s groups addressed the relevant data broadly enough to generate grounded insight across geographical, cultural and chronological divides. Widely diverse and different-sized collections of records provided sufficient evidence to illuminate underlying principles.

Description of Data

My exploration of the data was intended to generate answers to the research questions I posed earlier:

What have women gained from their participation in volunteer organizations? Particularly, what learning benefits have they—individually and collectively—derived from their experiences?

(1) How do organizational learners construct, manage and transmit this newly-obtained knowledge and transfer their skills?

(2) What were and are the common denominators for different kinds of women’s groups? How are the perspectives of different types of associations linked?

(3) How do a fuller knowledge and better understanding of women’s associations and their learning initiatives affect the history and social dynamics of adult and continuing education?

The data required to address these questions were scattered. To get a detailed and more accurate picture of what women have accomplished through activities in their
volunteer associations – past and present – I had to move beyond the easily-accessed traditional histories and official records. To get a sense of how those activities have been understood by the members themselves, I needed archives and microfilmed records of the Nebraska State Historical Society and Florida State University's Strozier Library. I examined original documents at the Knox County [Nebraska] Courthouse and in the homes of Women's Institute and Knox County Extension Club members, following up those examinations with informal conversations or structured interviews. I added depth to the intelligence found in secondary sources by exploring historical narratives, first-hand testimonies and previously-unexamined material from documentary records. I included popular culture sources.

Some of these data were gathered from “large literature” (Slavin 1985, 7); some were inferred. Behaviors and things I overhead when I participated in group activities or listened to the individual memories that make up oral history added details that a mere reading of meeting minutes and lists of delegates to convention could not. My research questions demanded both objective and subjective information—facts and perceptions. I used a variety of written sources to develop a rich database for the study and help insure reliability (the reproducibility of a set of test results). I analyzed data from minutes, agendas, correspondence, memoirs, and biographies of club leaders against a theoretical background provided by earlier sources—some only in the last years of the twentieth century.

This is a qualitative study that covered over a hundred years and featured the lives of women from Cambridgeshire to Oklahoma to British Columbia. Demographic information (multiple memberships, specific dates, types of federation, numbers of officers, etc.) was often important to the writers and editors of previous publications, but I did not focus on demographics to characterize club life or clubwomen. I made only general statements about age or income, because I was more interested in finding a common rationale for membership. I noticed goals, aims and accomplishments that were typical parts of every organization. I inferred members’ ideas about motivation and reward from their actions, tried to formulate new knowledge from those inferences, and attempted to delineate the power clubwomen draw from new knowledge.
My second, and unexpected, major source of data was participant observation. Memories of organized women in my life had previously gone unremarked, but I intentionally recalled, recorded, and reflected on them for this work. I put in more than a hundred hours with Family Services on military bases and was an AAUW member and officer. I was only twelve when I took my first nonformal class as an adult—a Red Cross course in first aid.

Gathering the third type of data involved meeting new people. I conducted first-hand interviews with five women volunteers. In the course of these interviews, I encouraged members to probe for the attitudes indicated by what they had just said. I listened to their voices and looked always for the reasons they had gone out of their way to be club or Institute members, seeking a clear idea of their motivation. Their testimony revealed the kinds of knowledge they had constructed and disseminated through the years. Three women interviewed were Canadian. Two were Floridians. I had gathered information informally from Nebraska women for years before I started this formal exploration of voluntarism, and continued to add knowledge about their clubs throughout the exercise.

A fourth major source of information was the body of already-published works on women’s associations, women’s history and overtly feminist actions—the large literature Slavin (1985) feels is necessary. Discovery of these kinds of resources was never finished. I was soon able to compare volunteer (often sub rosa) activities with those legitimated as adult education according to criteria proposed by professional educators. The literature noted in the previous chapter helped me gather and compare analyses of women’s associations that had been prepared by other researchers. Using many types of data provided triangulation and gave me the strong basis necessary for academic research. Comparisons drawn by earlier writers proved invaluable. Many of these scholars, having previously addressed certain of my concerns, provided a depth to my study that I could never have obtained on my own. I am grateful to them.

Voice

Voice is important in this dissertation in many ways. First, I intended there be a strong narrative quality. I consciously attempted to use what bell hooks [sic] called an
“engaged voice” to fill in empty spaces throughout and between bodies of data. I blended objective and subjective data, as recent management manuals have done (Armstrong 1992; Neuhauser 1993; Stewart 1997). The scene was never “fixed and absolute but always changing, [but] always evolving . . .” (1994, 11). Lack of voice is one reason women’s groups have not received the recognition they deserved. Their stories were written only in club histories or handed down to new members orally. I attempted to document individual stories that exemplified historiographical change and whose tellers’ sense of humor leapt across the gaps of time and space.

An analysis of voluntarism that only involved statistics and eliminated emotional content would be a simple study—but it would make dry reading. Recounting the folklore of women’s individual and collective achievements would probably draw a wider audience—but the facts would seem vague and unsubstantiated. Volunteer women have known these things for over a century. Their lessons and training reflect this knowledge. Interestingly, business managers and administrators have also come to recognize the need for blending quantitative and qualitative information to inspire a corporate culture. In some cases, policy manuals have given way to corporate narratives, anecdotes, and humor that enable identity building. Training now reflects participatory practices that have trickled down from the nonformal sector of education, as well as elements inherited from formal schooling.

Selection of Particular Groups and Subjects

I chose the publications necessary for this study from bibliographies listing hundreds of American and Canadian women’s clubs, from suggestions of instructors and colleagues, and from uncatalogued assortments of books at sales in Ontario and the United States. I utilized interlibrary loan services from the Mary Esther Public Library, Troy State University-Florida Region Library, the Nebraska Historical Society, and Florida State University. Knowing that the stories of volunteer groups have often unrecorded, I realized it would be impossible to research all volunteer learning experience (or even sample it adequately in some quantitative fashion), so I chose a set of organizations that I think embrace some of the most important dimensions of the variability characterizing the amorphous population called "women’s club members."
The resolution of my inherent research dilemma lay in qualitative sampling (Denzin 1989; Easton 1997), which involved:

(a) Examining and delineating the various ways in which women’s clubs differ among themselves;

(b) Identifying through analysis and careful reflection those axes of variation that are most closely related to the issues; and

(c) Selecting a set of women’s clubs that seemed most likely to reveal relevant data across a wide spectrum. (to the degree possible within constraints of feasibility and access).

Qualitative sampling of this sort is concerned with thick description and identification of key informants. Using qualitative sampling allowed me to illustrate multifarious events and obscure ideas that seem to have the close relationships to my research questions. My research design ensured the efficacy of the qualitative method. I chose five dimensions of variation that seemed significant because those dimensions were indispensable to examinations of historiography, adult learning, construction of new knowledge, building self-esteem, and exercising counter-hegemony. These were central to answering my research questions:

(1) Focus of activity: Study, service to the community and socializing may be said to be the three basic arenas for activity and the three general areas of concern in volunteer associations. The task was to discover which general concerns affected which certain institution. Upon what foundation were built its constitution and agenda?

(2) Locale: Is the group rural or urban in membership and activities?

(3) Geography: How are chosen groups different from each other, across countries?

(4) Depth of History: How long has the group in question been operative?

(5) Culture/Ethnicity: What is the cultural heritage of association members?

Thinking always of providing the widest possible array, I selected several exemplary populations for primary investigation, reserving others for passing comment. The first major group in this study was the Women’s Institutes of Canada and Great Britain (members of the Associated Country Women of the World). The second group
was the American Association of University Women (part of the International Federation of University Women). The third, and heterogeneous, group was comprised of Black women's volunteer organizations, including the National Hook-up of Black Women, the Ladies of Essence, and Friends Making a Difference. There are three chapters on Nebraska women, one specifically dealing with writing of Knox County women in the 1960s, one concerning the statewide Nebraska Council of Home Extension Clubs, and one involved with the PEO Sisterhood.

Any one of these groups alone offered a range of appropriate research topics, but I chose to group the organizations for logistical reasons. The older organizations, such as the Women’s Institute and the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs have been already been studied, but newer organizations (i.e., The Ladies of Essence) have not yet been research subjects to any great extent. This may be partly because they have no hundred-year-old documents to prove the efficacy of their operations, as NACWC does. Comparing traditional and newer African-American organizations triangulated the data. Mine was a first attempt to document the role of FMAD and Ladies of Essence.

Dividing the population of women’s groups into any kind of distinct categories was highly arbitrary, because each group’s achievements and activities reflect all three purposes. Placing any particular association in only one category is problematic. Scott distinguishes community activist groups from study groups and social groups. Ida B. Wells (Barnett) documented her work against lynching. White, Flexner, Levine, Irvin and Sims wrote separately about the struggle for voting rights and for temperance. Women’s actions in the public sector drew media attention (giving rise to the idea there were waves of feminist activity). These activist groups, however, have occasionally held fashion shows or sponsored other social events on certain occasions.

Study clubs and book groups, on the other hand, have always focused on their own their own more private learning experiences for their fulfillment (Martin, T. P. 1987, Blair 1980). Study groups also have a social side. Conversely, the groups that say they only aim to have a good time, are sometimes very active in the community (Graham 2000).
This threefold characterization does provide a useful set of relative distinctions, even if it should not be applied too literally. Some groups are predominately activist, study or social, but it was more common—and more accurate—to say that a certain activity of a certain club exhibited characteristics which placed that activity in one category or another. Three other dimensions of variation also were important: (a) geographical location (rural-urban, North American-European, etc.); (b) chronological period (currently active-strictly historical); and, (c) cultural or ethnic reference. I maintained perspective on the categorization of women’s groups by using the parameters or axes of variation identified above and shown in the sampling matrix of Table 1. No characterization has absolute validity. None should be thought definitive.

My sampling method was what Bogdan and Biklen have called purposeful, not random or even stratified random. While not yielding statistics in the quantitative sense, purposeful sampling its own kind of reliability and validity. I examined specific women’s associations vis-à-vis particular characteristics of the adult education field, always aiming to show how clubs’ achievements proved them to be institutions of nonformal learning. This approach, of course, resulted in the overlap Stephen Miller saw in debates about quantitative and qualitative research. I excluded formal schooling from this discussion, except for situations in which clubwomen documented their volunteer efforts on behalf of kindergartens, elementary and middle schools, junior or senior high schools, colleges and universities.

Sampling Redux

I make no claim to having included every all-woman group, but this was a multicultural and international study. Though I excluded women’s auxiliaries of all-male organizations, only mentioned sororities briefly, and put. African-American women’s organizations in a separate chapter, I was aware this was a highly artificial practice. Members of women’s organizations regularly cross the borders between groups, and groups cross federation lines. Many African-American clubwomen belong to organizations that are for both sexes and/or for all races, just as other clubwomen do. Unfortunately, logistical constraints meant I was unable to gather data on Native American, Latina, and Asian experience, and even had to reserve examination of
Africanadian knowledge for the future. These omissions were not intended to indicate any organization’s being unimportant, but rather that they were outside the scope of this particular study or beyond my budget.

The groups I chose to employ (WI, AAUW, African-Americans and Nebraskans) were not picked for match size or scope. The chapter on the Women’s Institutes focused on rural women in England and Canada, thus were alien to the US. The chapter on AAUW featured some of my own experiences, but examined AAUW for evidence of educational achievements. My original focus had been strictly on the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and the Ladies of Essence, but here again, I felt I had to widen the focus. The associations chosen gave me a broad base from which to seek further answers. The work done by extension clubs and PEO members in Nebraska were lumped together, pulled apart, and probed for commonalities and proof of a sisterhood Deborah Fink said was not evident in her work with Nebraska women (1992). I was intrigued by her comments, as I felt the clubs my mother had belonged to were highly collegial and supportive of each other. I wondered how strongly the variable of time affected the socialization and formed the interests of Nebraskan women.

I insured reception of thick data by initiating the continual review of relevant literature. Even as I completed this dissertation, at least twenty recently-completed dissertations (1999-2001) could have been reviewed to glean further insight for this examination of women’s learning initiatives. The unpublished data on women’s associations proved to be very widely spread, and sometimes members alluded to clubs that remained hidden or had been lost. Example of still-hidden associations are the “savings clubs” alluded to by one of the Ladies of Essence and by my mother-in-law in North Carolina. I had neither time nor money to stay to find out more about these two so similar sounding groups.

The material examined in Chapter Two could not exhaust the field of relevant work. Doctoral dissertations, masters’ theses, biographies, memoirs, speeches, letters and other archival materials, trade paperbacks and other popular culture sources provided a multivoiced history.
Table 1: Characterization of Groups Selected for Study and Types of Data to be Gathered on Each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Dimension of Variability</th>
<th>Sources and Types of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>Study Rural</td>
<td>Interviews, dissertations and theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1896</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canadian and British WASP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCHEC, PEO</td>
<td>Early days—rural; now</td>
<td>Informal Discussions with Extension Club Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mixed USA</td>
<td>Books, previous studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WASP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACWC, etc.</td>
<td>Varied Varied USA</td>
<td>Informal conversation; interview; meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Late 1880s</td>
<td>attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Books, programs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAUW</td>
<td>All Urban USA</td>
<td>One interview. Personal Experience, Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Books, Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMAD/LoE</td>
<td>Varies Urban USA</td>
<td>LOE Interviews, Participant Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>FMAD and LoE brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 summarizes the intersection of exemplary groups with the dimensions of variation just noted. Selected thumbnail sketches follow.

The Women’s Institute is widely known and cannot be classified as only one type of association. It has altered, shriveled, and grown with demographic changes, exemplifying the viability of voluntarism. Its lessons are mix of intellectual focus and
hands-on techniques. Each institute has a unique relationship with its community. It has strong ties to Farmers’ Institutes and is linked links to other rural women’s organizations. Several recent studies tie the WI to the fields of history and sociology, but not to the field of adult education. The Nebraska Council of Home Economics Clubs provides both comparison and contrast to the WI, helping make this a reliable study through overlapping data. Closely tied to the GFWC, NCHEC has been an important source of knowledge for rural Nebraskans for over a half century. Unlike the GFWC, NCHEC has not yet been included in major historical studies. The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs is one of the oldest volunteer associations for Black women. Its data offers an opportunity to examine the unique problems facing Black women, but also gives us further general information on American women and rural women. The American Association of University Women is comprised of people who have college degrees. It is a strong contrast to the WI because it is rooted in urban spaces instead of rural areas. As a group, it strongly middle-class and white, though it has made great strides in diversification. The Ladies of Essence in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, is a small independent group. They are linked to Eglin Air Force Base through men they call sponsors, making them unique.

Data Collection

My specific kinds of data ware indicated roughly in Table 1. I retrieved and analyzed speeches, newspaper articles, letters and other historical data from the nineteenth century. Mormon Relief Society members sent me information. As the word spread, relatives from Kentucky and California sent pamphlets and brochures they thought I might be able to use. I conducted interviews with three Women’s Institute members, but a strike of city employees in Toronto prevented me from visiting the archives there. I interviewed members of the Ladies of Essence as a group at one of their meetings. I interviewed one branch member from the Fort Walton Beach branch of the American Association of University Women, and reflected on my own activities in AAUW. A few AAUW members responded to some of my questions by e-mail. I interviewed no women who had information concerning all five organizations cited above. This lack of prior knowledge insured a certain amount of validity. (Omission of
other associations is not meant to imply they are not valuable to their members or to their communities.) I used an audiotape recorder to help gather field notes and other data.

Data Analysis

Gathering, comparing, and evaluating the data was an on-going exercise. I looked at founding and growth, organizational structure, worldview, reflection of the surrounding community, reward to individual members, and contrasts to other volunteer groups. In my search for specific information on how volunteers felt themselves rewarded and on reciprocity between personal growth, club life, and education, I formulated what I came to call the Club Woman’s Worldview, a particular state of mind that appears to be universal. I used this worldview as one of the filters through which I examined experience and achievements of volunteer women.

I did not limit my examination of women’s groups to describing their structure. Such a study would have yielded no data on motivation and reward. My use of qualitative method required refocusing, as new information on motivation, practices, and attitudes came to light. Rural and urban working women, housewives, and women without degrees were as important to this study as college alumni (Table 1). I used questionnaires to provide a certain amount of structure to my interviews. I did not use USPS to send out any survey instruments, but some AAUW members sent comments via e-mail. I used a best evidence technique because it bridged the gap between traditional and meta-analytical studies.

Best evidence synthesis incorporates the quantification and systematic literature search methods of meta-analysis with the detailed analysis of critical issues and study characteristics of the best traditional reviews in an attempt to provide a thorough and unbiased means of synthesizing research and providing clear and useful conclusions. (Slavin 1985, 10)

The best evidence method requires an extensive literature review (8), which explains the number of secondary sources I used. In fact, my first step was to continue reading about the Women’s Institutes and the other groups, so I could later identify essential themes. McElroy and Houghton, among others, made some common threads very apparent. Among these common threads was knowledge about huge federations like
ACWW, an acquaintance with multiple women’s organizations, and instructions and suggestions about how to run a successful women’s club. The earliest publications indicated a written concern for ladylike dress and decorum and a determination to be a sign of the best in whatever situation might arise. Literal constraints on speaking out, determination to learn and help others learn, acknowledgement of personal growth, a selflessness that manifested itself in collective action, exhibition of every human emotion and how to deal with them, counter-hegemonic attitudes and behavior, building and maintaining friendship networks that sometimes overlapped kinship or religious borders, and economic or social spaces that were continually in a state of flux.

After I identified these and other themes in Women’s Institutes (WI) documents, interviews from Ontario, and videos, I checked to find congruencies with other organizations. The same themes displayed themselves in documents from other organizations and in further interviews. I conducted no interviews with GFWC or NACWC members. AAUW documents, personal observations, interviews, and personal reflections were analyzed in the same fashion. I followed this pattern with the Ladies of Essence and the other groups.

After discovering previously hidden common themes, I assessed the ways, and degrees to which members of various groups committed themselves and their resources to each other and to the community. I found an array of possible actions running the gamut from ultra-conservative to quite radical within each association, as mapped on Table 2 below. Though this table is not the only possible way of mapping members’ actions, I believe it was useful in revealing types and intensity of learning activity, as well as for indicating strength and types of individual or collective growth and achievement.

In meta-analysis, a chart is the end result of the research. In best-evidence synthesis, the table is a point of departure for an “intelligent, critical examination” (Slavin 1985, 10). I hope the tables I propose will serve as such a starting place for the written discussion of themes uncovered, activities documented, and relationships found. Table 2 shows one way of looking at counter-hegemony in club members. There are many ways of assaulting power structures.
Table 2: Counter-hegemonic Behaviors
Exhibited by Certain Club or Institute Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Overt Verbal Behavior</th>
<th>Overt Physical Behavior</th>
<th>Covert Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antagonistic</td>
<td>Yelling</td>
<td>Pushing back when pushed.</td>
<td>Writing a check.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marching in parades.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Giving rides to the polls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Going to the confrontation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In earlier days—bombings, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Today—going nude for a calendar.</td>
<td>Lobbying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>Writing letters.</td>
<td>Hunger Strikes.</td>
<td>Writing a check.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gathering signatures on petitions.</td>
<td>Education of self.</td>
<td>Mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education of self.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Giving or raising money for scholarships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Attending meetings. Collecting books, making cookies, typing recipes, etc. for fund-raisers.</td>
<td>Writing a check.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues of Bias and Access

As other qualitative researchers, I tried to be aware of the personal biases that might influence my perceptions and analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Peshkin 1982). “[Since] reviews of social science literature will inevitably involve judgment, neither traditional nor meta-analytic method has the advantage. No set of procedural or statistical canons can make the review process immune to the reviewer’s biases” (Slavin 1985, 7).

I struggled to overcome a romantic tendency to see women’s voluntarism as normal and always good, because my long history of positive involvement has engendered such feelings. My mother, grandmother, aunts, great-aunts, and friends were members of cooperative extension clubs, auxiliaries, social clubs, the Rebekahs, the Red Cross, and/or the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

As a small child, I went with my mother to extension club meetings, played outside with the other children, sometimes tiptoed inside to listen, and enjoyed the delicious lunches that were always served at the end. At twelve, I completed my own first
nonformal learning experience, an American Red Cross first aid workshop for clubwomen in Knox County. As an adult, I later joined the NCOWC (Noncomissioned Officers’ Wives’ Club) in Labrador. I also volunteered as a publicist, stagehand, director and actress for base little theatre productions, and worked on the Welcoming Committee for Family Services. After returning to the United States, I unpacked the boxes of uncatalogued books that comprised the found the “library” at Port Austin Air Force Station, Michigan, then organized a check-out system and shelved the books in Dewey Decimal order.

On Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, I continued my work as a Family Services Welcoming Committee member, greeting new personnel and their families. I started consciousness-raising groups in Labrador, Michigan and Texas; attended the Mormon Women’s Relief Society, and went to a few Women’s Institute meetings in England. I am currently a member of the Florida Women’s Consortium and was a docent at the Valparaiso Historical Museum for several years. I have been a branch member of the AAUW for over fifteen years, served as a branch and state board member, and attended state and local conventions. I presented papers at two state conventions and several area leadership training conferences (called “clusters”).

I was warned not to romanticize the data, but this was difficult. First, it was difficult because club life has often been founded on ideas of religion (the ultimate transformative experience). Second, women’s associations exemplify some standard romantic themes, thinking (a) communication across social barriers is valuable, (2) transcendence of the ordinary is possible through faith, (3) sharing emotional experiences, (4) appreciating the natural world, and collaborating with others for personal growth (Chadwick 1996, Gilbert and Gubar 1985, Hugo and Spacks 1999).

Though the work of women’s organizations is often spoken of as having stopped in the Progressive Era, the fact remains that their continuing activities exemplify a romantic belief that the world can be made better.

I had no problems arranging meetings with any groups or individuals. The work of Ely and Chappell’s 1938 study of women’s associations and adult education and Levine’s 1995 examination of AAUW gave me an excellent starting point for my
interviews and informal discussions. Women who were not aware of their own association’s history proved curious about our collective past. Various AAUW Educational Foundation publications on girls and women provided valuable information on scholarships and grants. I completed only one structured interview with an AAUW member, though members I contacted were supportive and gave permission for interviews. No AAUW member or other volunteer seemed reticent about sharing her experiences. Our similar experiences created an instant rapport. Women’s Institute members, for example, were open and forthcoming, though I never belonged to this organization. There was no point in this study at which I was shut out. Everyone seemed quite willing to explain about the NFWI, the ACWW, Denman College, individual community projects, esteem-building activities over the years, and plans for the future of the Women's Institutes. My having been involved with women’s voluntarism most of my life was surely part of the reason I was always welcomed. I never felt the need for any covert research (80).

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative data is often called subjective, soft, amorphous, or difficult to categorize. It can deal, however, with motivations and feelings. My work, being qualitative,

relies on a coherence (agreement) notion of truth . . . one interprets reality . . .
there is no uniform way to separate acts from values, and . . . there are no uniform procedures which may be applied correctly[ . . .] the truth [validity] of things as they exist out there is not possible. (Miller 24)]

With Lincoln and Guba, I believe theory and practice depend on each other and that there was constant interaction between the two. Their six justifications for belief in this constant interaction were: (1) “theories and facts are not independent,” (2) “purposeful sampling and emergent design are impossible to achieve without interaction,” (3) “to move beyond ‘mere’ objectivity requires a level of mature judgment that can be achieved only by continuous interaction,” (4) “human research is inherently dialectical,” (5) “meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding
of the respondents,” and (6) “it is the quality of the interaction that provides the human instrument with the possibility of exploiting its own natural advantages” (101-105).

This study was credible. It involved living people whose lives were widely different from mine, but also much the same. My personal experiences provided some emotional depth and some of the data as well. I evaluated my own memberships. I provided triangulation through multiple dissertations, theses, interviews, and autoethnographical research, and through use of different sized bodies of data and through choosing organizations that had been operational for differing lengths of time. Lincoln and Guba felt transferability is “very different from the establishment of external validity by the conventionalist [who . . .] expects (and is expected) to make relatively precise statements” (316).

Mental border crossings and sudden flashes of insight, such as Cohen and Blanc or Woolf described. Transferability concerns thick data (Lincoln and Guba 316). Secondary evidence might not have been sufficient to prove my contentions about the value of women’s associations over all, but it provided much “valuable supplementary evidence” (Lyman 73) and constituted the “thick data” necessary for transferability.

I believe in becoming part of the community in which I work, just as Luttrell did. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability reflect an insider’s view. I preferred those terms, instead of validity and reliability. Lyman said that there is no “perfect correlation in actual practice” (57), but there is valid contextualization, if sources are compared across time. It seemed obvious, even at the start, that my research questions would have face validity, because of the many previously published articles and dissertations that asked much the same questions I did. If the questions, historically, had not been appropriate (Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen 94), I would not have found the answers published in so many places. As I did not use survey instruments to any great extent, and utilized much data previously judged useful, I had no fear I would interpret my results in an “injudicious” manner (96).

Making sure that a study has reliability is a matter of disagreement. Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen felt surveying groups over short periods of time can best assess reliability. On the other hand, Lyman believes long heterogeneous tests increase
reliability: “A test with high reliability is one that will yield very much the same relative scores for a group of people under differing conditions or situations” (Lyman 22). I believe my study reliable. Anyone studying different women’s organizations, using any number of sampling methods and taking the long view or short can replicate my results.
CHAPTER FOUR:

THE WOMEN’S INSTITUTES IN GREAT BRITAIN AND CANADA

A few years ago, twelve middle-aged ladies with no clothes on set the Women’s Institutes (WI) firmly in the minds of popular culture consumers with their satirical version of the pin-up calendars that use naked women to sell manufactured goods and impossible dreams. The Rylstone calendar and the movie, *Calendar Girls* (Nigel Cole, director) raised over a million dollars for cancer research. In spite of Rylstone’s obvious chutzpah and productiveness, WI members are usually stereotyped as craftswomen and cooks in twin sets taking an inordinate number of tea breaks (Garner 1995; Morgan 1993). Serious information about the WI has surfaced now and then, but the more general attitude toward Institute members is the comedic one shown so very broadly in *The Vicar of Dibley* (1994-1998, BBC), which currently can be seen on many television stations Saturday nights (TV Comedy Resources). The humorous doddering elderly woman who serves chocolate cake with ketchup alongside Marmite scones is a crone whose WI membership provides most of her character. Fellow villagers endure her idiotic cuisine with raised eyebrows and clever remarks. On the show and in Internet chat rooms the general public ignores the idea there have been actual WI contributions to village life, such as getting bus service for those unable to drive. Members usually accept this domestic stereotype with good humor—and even play it up. The website for Beighton WI, for example, announces they are “a small cog in the wheel” of the Derbyshire Federation and serve “a good cuppa.” In this, Beighton is an example of the non-threatening façade mentioned in Chapter One.

*Jam and Jerusalem*, a 1977 history of the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, gave the other side of the story. The book jacket reported the WI “started the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign,” had markets with “a turnover of 1,250,000 pounds [sterling] a year,” would be the sixth largest union in Britain if it were so organized, had its own adult education college, raised 182,000 pounds in the Freedom from Hunger

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1 Liz Smith (born 1925) appeared in the first series as WI member Letitia Cropley and is seen on-line at http://www.tvheaven.ca/dibley.htm.
Campaign, and was “BRITAIN’S BIGGEST AND MOST POWERFUL WOMEN’S ORGANISATION” [Capitals in original] (Morgan 82).

I discovered the Women’s Institute through a British WI pamphlet at the village market in St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, in 1978, a serendipitous start for my academic research. It led to a general examination of women’s groups in Cambridgeshire, to a consciousness of volunteer work in my own life, and to the belief that women’s groups are important institutions of learning. This dissertation is not straightforward and linear, and the data this chapter is not presented in simple chronological fashion. It begins with a brief reminder of what rural British and Canadian women’s lives were like at the end of the 1800s and in the early 1900s that is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of women’s status in the Victorian Era. It is meant to provide a useful background (Morgan 1993, 15) for Americans and others who have not explored relationships between Canada and England or are not attuned to the British interplay of nationality, culture, power, class, race, and gender.

The chapter continues with an examination of the founding and growth of the WI, describes themes common to volunteer associations, and provides an abbreviated comparison of Institutes in Canada and the United Kingdom (UK). The objective data were provided by theses and other publications of Rosemary Margaret Morgan [Maggie Andrews], Gwen Garner, Cheryl Macdonald, Kathleen Oliver and other researchers. The subjective data came from three Ontario interviews in 1999, and from my on-going humorously adversarial relationship with British friends who keep my thinking on the WI fresh.

British and Canadian Women’s Lives in the Victorian Era

It is only after reminding ourselves what working class and rural women’s lives were like at the end of the 1800s and in the early 1900s, that the enormous achievements of the WI and other volunteer organizations can be seen in proper perspective. The British countryside was changing rapidly, but a rigid class system was still firmly in place. Village life was “bleak and hard” (Jenkins 1953, 2), and days were “unspeakably dull” (4). Across the sea, in Canada’s rural areas, “isolation was the norm” (Garner 1995, 14). In both countries, farm women faced monotony, overwork, exhaustion, devaluation
of their efforts by farm men, and the animus of city women (Halpern 49-60). England was still virtually all-white and Anglican. Canada was multicultural, but European in outlook. The culture of farming was still powerful, but urbanization and industrialization were eroding rural populations. Ontario had 786,000 rural residents in 1931 and 695,000 in 1941 (Halpern 39). Manufactured goods from America, Canada, and elsewhere were widely available in England, making homegrown products seem: “. . . little thought was given to the villages and those who lived there” (Jenkins 1953, 2).

Suffragists were a source of collective amusement for British, Canadian and American audiences, even when they were imprisoned or force-fed. Suffrage meetings in London (UK) drew female “ropemakers, waste-rubber cleaners, biscuit-packers” and others in “unknown trades” from the East End (Mackenzie 1975, 207), but the audience went to learn about feeding and clothing their families more than about getting their vote. Many women shorted themselves on food so men and children could eat (Daphne [pseudonym], personal letter; Olsen 1994, 192). Countless British families relied on charity in hard times. The church and pub provided the staple entertainment in the British countryside, and women were expected to know their place (Jenkins 1953). British authoritarianism—“church, manor-house, and apathy”—provided obstacles for development of women’s secular groups (13).

Advertisements sporadically urged British girls to move to North America (Jackel 1982, xiii, 68), claiming there were too many women in England and not enough in Canada. Those women who went in search of a better life were often married off, just like emigrant women in Virginia had been, two hundred years earlier—“with little regard for their human status and dignity” (Clinton 3). Still, there were fewer stringent rules restricting working-class women and men could do, so Canadian opportunities were plentiful (Jackel 1982, 68). Lackluster lodgings, communications difficulties, inadequate medical facilities, undeveloped school districts, and bad roads were also plentiful (222-223).

Industrialization and urbanization robbed rural communities of viable workers, but also provided jobs and access to machines that eased the load of the general public. Industrialization and urbanization increased free time for middle-class matrons, relaxed
some of society’s rules, helped improve education, and emphasized improved health and childcare. There was suddenly wide opportunity and rationale for unpaid work (Oliver 16). In Europe, Finland’s Agricultural Women’s Organization was founded before 1880; the Irishwomen’s Suffrage Federation by 1913, and the German Federation of Women’s Clubs had more than a million members by 1914 (Olsen 1994, 196). Voluntarism just exploded (Garner 1995, 105). Neve Scarborough (1953) wrote, “An uncommon seed suddenly broke through country soil” (341).

Women’s Institutes: Foundations, Personalities, and Growth

Foundations

The Women’s Institute was part of the yield from that uncommon seed. The WI flourished in spite of considerable barriers, which included 1800s travel. In North America, rural women who were possible new members found joining to be problematic: ... the nearest village was often more than a hard day’s wagon ride away ... farm women, who came into town less often than men, felt particularly awkward about town ways; many would glance anxiously at the latest fashions sported by town women, painfully aware of the perceived deficiency of their patched and faded dresses. Farm men had a number of places to socialize when in town, such as the saloon and the livery stable. Farm women had no such sanctuary; most felt uncomfortable in these male-dominated spaces and felt unwelcomed there. (Goldberg 1997, 32)

Thoughts of and action in collective volunteering grew back and forth across the border between the United States and Canada like rhizomes. Philosophically, the WI organization was rooted in the Grange’s and Farmers’ Institutes’ Progressive Era ideas. This was fitting, since the founding members of the Grange had borrowed ideas and activities from fraternal lodges, churches, literary and debate clubs, and political organizations. Hoping to bring together isolated farm families, it [the Grange] strengthened farmers’ sense of community by binding neighbors together with secret rituals borrowed from the Masons. The Grange’s meetings, picnics, and other gatherings helped fill the need for social interaction among farmers while its emphasis on education
provided them with a variety of reading materials and a broader outlook on life. 
(Goldberg 1997, 39)

Spiritually and emotionally, members were rooted in Mary Stewart’s Collect, which has been widely adopted by other groups. (In Fort Walton Beach, Florida, for example, it is called The Ladies of Essence Prayer.) The WI membership’s concern for moral life and their assumptions about Christianity are not only shown in the Collect, but also in their theme song, Jerusalem (seen below), and in Canada’s national anthem (Grenville 1991-1992 program booklet, n.p.).

“The Clubwoman’s Collect: A Prayer for Daily Use”

Keep us, O God, from pettiness;
Let us be large in thought,
In word, in deed.
Let us be done with fault-finding
and leave off self-seeking
May we put away all pretenses and meet each face to face,
Without self-pity and without prejudice.
May we never be hasty in judgement
and always be generous.
And may we strive to touch and to know
the great, common human heart of us all.
Let us take time for all things;
Make us to grow calm, serene, and gentle.
Teach us to put into action our better impulses, straightforward and unafraid.
Grant that we may realize it is the little things that create
differences, that in the big things of life, we are one.
And, O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind.

Mary Stewart—Longmont, Colorado
1904
Women’s Institutes are mainly focused on improving conditions for rural women, though some institutes are now urban (Davis and Scott 10-11). Perhaps their major activity is learning about better rural health and putting new medical and sanitation ideas into practice, a blend of the theoretical and the practical. Members, however, will do any kind of work “. . . that has for its objects the uplifting of the home or the betterment of conditions surrounding community life” (Jenkins 1953, 7), and they are determined to remain true to the idealistic principles of independence from organized religion, “squirearchy” and political parties (Garner 1995, 21).

Over a century has passed, but the WI and other rural women’s organizations like it are still true to those original ideas. One such like-minded group is the Woman’s National Farm and Garden Association. Their specific aims are listed below, providing details that flesh out the general goal of the WI: “the uplifting of the home or the betterment of conditions surrounding community life” (Jenkins 1953, 7).

Woman’s National Farm and Garden Association intends
(1) To stimulate an interest in and love for country life;
(2) To cooperate with Federal and State agencies for the improvement of rural conditions;
(3) To assist the woman on the farm and the woman in the city to realize they are inter-dependent and need to better understand their mutual and individual problems;
(4) To help women, through scholarships and expert advice, to the best training in agriculture, horticulture and the related professions, and to develop opportunities for women so trained;
(5) To study the problems involved in direct marketing and to encourage the establishment of standards;
(6) To furnish its members all possible opportunities for the marketing of farm and garden products, including some types of handiwork, and to set forces in motion which will bring producer and consumer together;
(7) To offer opportunities for the exchange of members’ ideas through the official magazine, and by forming branches in different parts of the country;
(8) To study and further the intelligent use of our natural resources; and
(9) To cooperate with international groups of women whose interests coincide with theirs. (Scarborough 1953, 329-332)

This list emphasizes the importance of collaboration, regard for the environment (translated into regard for all rural life), ethical behavior, fiscal concerns, communication, history, and education in several guises. The data below highlights actions that resulted after rural women realized the paramount nature of those concerns.

*Historical Figures: Personalities in the Early WI*

Adelaide Hoodless [Canada]; Gertrude, Lady Denman [England and Australia]; and Madge Robertson Watt [Canada, Wales, and England] were three of the earliest WI leaders. Without their initiative and actions, the WI would have been a shadow of itself, and might never have existed at all. The myth of WI genesis puts forward Hoodless as “. . . an ordinary rural housewife whose youngest child died as a result of her own ignorance of food hygiene” (Morgan 1993, 71), but a higher socioeconomic status made her different from European immigrants and city-bred rural women in Canada who were just learning to keep house (MacDonald 11-18). In spite of their differences, she and other founding members of the WI determined to work toward preventing other accidental deaths (Scarborough 1953, 1). Hoodless, who had lost a young son when he drank unpasteurized milk in the late nineteenth century, became the symbol of those early efforts to advance rural health knowledge and skills (Scarborough 1953, 1). A mature, well-educated, and affluent member of society, she was one of the “hundred women and one man” [Erland Lee] who intended to “work as a complement to the Farmers’ Institutes,” organizing “a department of Domestic Economy, to improve physical, intellectual, and cultural conditions in the home, and to raise the standard of homemaking” (Jenkins 1953, 2).

She was a link between the YWCA, the WI, the International Congress of Women, The National Council of Women and the domestic science movement (MacDonald 11-18, 109, 149); addressed the male-dominated British Poultry Conference (105), and was active in the fight to establish the Macdonald Institute (138-145).
Lady Denman (wife of the Governor-General of Australia), was determined to make the WI strong enough to withstand “outside influences,” and was instrumental in creating a democratic structure for the federation, including a secret ballot and written nominations. She served the NFWI for thirty years (Garner 1995, 17), and balanced out the influence of more conservative residents. “The democratic principle (one member-one vote) horrified one Lady of the Manor. When she discovered she would not automatically be elected president declared she ‘had no intention of allowing such a radical movement in their village’” (Morgan 1993, 37, 48).

Lady Denman also provided a London residence to serve as permanent WI headquarters in the UK. The new headquarters provided a central place for committee meetings, switchboards and secretaries, completion and storage of necessary paperwork, storage of exhibition stands and wardrobes for drama festivals (Garner 1995), and classrooms. WI members “socialized, studied, practiced their traditional skills and learned new ones, the most useful of which was how to organize, express their opinions and make them heard” (21).

Madge Robertson Watt was largely responsible for the rise of the Women’s Institutes in the United Kingdom. She had moved to England after being widowed, so her young sons could have a better education. Her basically English values had been shaped by Canadian life and WI practices, and she had been an enthusiastic worker for the Metchosin WI in British Columbia in the early 1900s (MacDonald 165). With a “genius for making people listen,” Watt became a role model for rural women in England, disseminating ideas and techniques from Canada to prospective British members. This carrying of innovation is a common pattern for immigrants and fosters growth in the new communities (Garrigan 1996, 7; Schneemeyer 1985, 28, 70). Watt was even able to interest Queen Mary in the organization, and the Sandringham WI was established “with the queen as president” (MacDonald 165).

_Growth of the Early WI_

Canadian societal models were useful when English citizens in the political, economic and cultural arenas looked Sir Robert Grieg theorized about women’s education in the political forum while Madge Robertson Watt was sharing her concrete
experiences through private [nonformal] educational channels. Grieg has been quoted as saying, “Perhaps the most profitable outlet for the expenditure of energy and public money in the improvement of agriculture will be found in widening the mental horizon of the farmer’s wife, and especially the wife of the labourer, small-holder, and working farmer” (Jenkins 1953, 5).

Because of efforts by Madge Watt and Bobby Grieg, because of shorter distances, and because of or in spite of participation by the royals and other elite women, “the English and Welsh movement [. . .came] farther in fifteen months than the Canadian movement in its first five years” (Jenkins 1953, 15).

Wales had an institute by 1915. By 1916, the UK had fourteen, and a year later, it had approximately 140 (Scarborough 1953, 341). Institute members in Canada soldiered on without aristocratic intervention, combating vast distances and bad roads that slowed interaction between farms and villages. In British Columbia, “housewife ideology” positioned the home as the center of society, “. . . and the housewife was the one most responsible for its health. The nation was seen as an extension of the home and the housewife’s role was the same as in the home but on a larger scale” (Dennison ii). A self-effacing attitude and “emphasis on domesticity within the Movement in some respects help it to be perceived as an acceptable leisure pursuit” (Morgan 1993, 27).

The success of the early WI is apparent, not only from tracing the thread of development that followed Watt’s UK efforts, but also from a perusal of general membership numbers elsewhere. Ontario (birthplace of the WI at Stoney Brook) had 888 institutes and 30,000 members in 1914. Alberta was organized in 1908; British Columbia and Manitoba by 1909; and Quebec, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan by 1911. Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia Institutes were founded in 1913 (Scarborough 1953, 221). The Victoria Institute [Australia] was founded in Macedon in February of 1926, and had eight individual institutes by 1928 (214). Institutes in Newfoundland and Labrador developed from Jubilee Guilds that had been built on the ashes of service leagues organized in the early thirties to meet the challenges of the depression and the aftermath of a disastrous tidal wave. The Guilds incorporated social, educational, and
service features and urged the use of local resources (Scarborough 1953, 234-235). Since 1953, every Canadian province has had the WI or a similar organization.

The Lesotho Women’s Institute website says it has been concerned with agriculture, food, nutrition, gender and children’s issues, community development, voter education, democracy, environmental education, “family therapy/counseling,” reproductive health and reproductive rights, sanitation and general health HIV and AIDS education and prevention, cooperatives and income generation, human rights and legal issues, business and vocational skills, and creation of jobs. Members train trainers, maintain a presence on the Internet, and reflect the same concerns as earlier members.

Women’s Institutes in Asia were based on traditional all-female organizations that had been in place long before Europeans arrived, just as the Newfoundland Institutes were built on the foundations left by the Jubilee Guilds. In the India of the early 1900s, Saroj Nalini, the wife of a government employee, founded a unique version of the WI. She encouraged the blending of Muslim, Hindu, and European cultures and the taking advantage of the historical Mahila Samitis. Asian Women’s Institutes flowered, though the raj was still uneasily in place. In Ceylon, the Lanka Mahila Samiti was established to help others found women’s associations on a village level. Their major thrusts were “educational, sanitary, social and economic progress” and disseminating information about that progress. They intended to establish a central federation, but also diversity. They also proposed to

\[ \ldots \] appoint Provincial Committees whose special duties shall be the promotion of the following aims and objects of Mahila Samiti: (a) Social intercourse irrespective of caste and creed, (b) Agricultural pursuits, (c) Homecraft and mothercraft, (d) Cottage industries, (e) Co-operative enterprise and mutual help, (f) Thrift, (g) Social hygiene, (h) Interest in local institutions, such as hospitals and welfare centres (250-251).

Establishing central federations is a salient characteristic of women’s volunteer organizations. Federation conferences were an important method of disseminating knowledge, a sign of growing awareness and power, and a forum in which members exchanged ideas and enjoyed each other’s company. Urban women had held such
meetings as early as the 1890s. Rural women lagged behind, for all the reasons stated earlier—little disposable income, long days normally filled with labor-intensive work, inadequate or inconvenient transportation, bad roads, less access to schooling in their early years, and less than progressive attitudes in the general community. By 1929, however, there were enough organized rural women to make feasible an International Conference of Rural Women’s Organizations. There were twenty-three countries represented at the rural women’s conference.

Visitors slipped in and listened, enthralled, while a new and unfamiliar map of the world was unfolded. The story zigzagged over the globe from Australia to Poland, from Canada to Czechoslovakia, from the Baltic to India. Mrs. Fairfax, of Queensland, spoke of the vast distances that caused her to drive 6,000 miles to visit fifty-four branches of the Country Women’s Association of Queensland, of the loneliness and lack of help and comfort which were driving people from the country to the cities. She told of members driving 90 or 100 miles to a meeting, a statement which the Norwegian delegate could cap with stories of old ladies of seventy or over, who would row across a fjord to seek the companionship of an Institute meeting. [Emphasis added.] (Scarborough 1953, 12)

At the 1930 Annual General Meeting in Blackpool, there were 3,000 in attendance. A surprised male reporter said, “. . . they are punctual, systematic, rigorously obedient to the rules of debate . . . they could teach many a male congress that thinks it knows all about running an affair like this’’ (22).

Many clubwomen’s projects that were identified, initiated, and brought to fruition, were co-opted by men after they were shown to be viable. One past president of the Alberta WI exclaimed, “Organized farm women did a lot of things that should have been done by someone else . . .” (in Rasmussen et al., 144). The pattern of co-optation was not limited to Alberta (Irwin 118), and the pattern leaves researchers wondering if rural organizations are private or governmental.

In the early 1940s, there was an acute manpower shortage in Great Britain, so women between the ages of twenty and thirty were conscripted (Calder 40-41). WI
members who felt strongly about supporting the war effort sometimes continued quietly with the WI, but many went into the Land Army, the armed services, or the armaments industry. Members worked as firewatchers, Red Cross members, ambulance drivers, and ARP wardens. Through it all, they struggled to remain non-sectarian, partly out of respect for Quaker members. The women left in the countryside, Institute members or not, were usually older. Caring for city evacuees became one of their major tasks. Seventeen hundred Women’s Institutes in England and Wales ultimately sent reports of the evacuation effort to their headquarters.

Between World War I and World War II, WI resolutions concerned “equality of opportunity for [British] women to serve in public life as jurors and magistrates” (38), for women police and probation officers, dangers of child abuse and pornography, adequate nourishment, dangers of marine pollution from ships, cruelty to animals, and destruction of wildflowers. Between 1939 and 1945 (during World War II), resolutions were fewer, because there were fewer meetings, but the WI continued to “emphasize their belief in the equality of the sexes, with a resolution of blunt brevity: that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work” (Garner 1995, 39).

During those same war years, WI members and other British women, bred rabbits to feed their family and friends, cured their skins, and made fur coats for Russia. They sent food parcels for the crews of minesweepers, for prisoners of war, ran canteens for the troops, [and] opened their homes to servicemen and women far from their own families. (Garner 1995, 29)

Some NFWI members were wardens and drivers. Among those still at home, WI members reclaimed produce from abandoned houses and members’ gardens, sometimes using portable canning vans sent from America. The five members of the tiny Hawkinge WI in East Kent, for example, made and canned 784 pounds of jam (Garner 1995).

The government asked NFWI to draw up an evacuation plan for urban mothers and children during World War II, and they did so. While some of the placements were successful (Garner 1995; Calder 41), there were many problems. “Social mismatching was inherent in the scheme” (Calder 40). Hundreds of children came to villages but some didn’t know how to take care of themselves, had seldom had a bath, had never used a
toothbrush, were ill-nourished, and didn’t know how to use the toilet. On the other hand, many city children and their mothers expected shops, cinemas, labour-saving gadgets and indoor plumbing (Garner 1995, 31). Later, WI reports claimed that too many children had lice, wet the bed, or sported skin diseases (Calder 42). Members of the WI sewed, cooked, knitted, mended and improvised, but “the peril of the city dweller receded from sight as the anguish of the householders in many a safe Conservative rural stronghold loomed hugely” (42).

Farm women usually have less access to education, haberdashers, doctors, markets, churches and friends than urban women do, even today. Many “just housewives” in the twentieth century still have numbingly routine lives that lack stimulation, but their drudgery is somewhat lighter than it would have been earlier (Chamberlain 70). Earlier homemakers with “active brains and time on their hands did not set out to change the world overnight but, recognizing that the world could do with change, they chipped away at it bit by bit” (Garner 1995, 21). Skills learned at the Women’s Institute, skills learned in the factories and on the land, and skills acquired on the French Front helped bring about general social change (Garner 1995; Halpern 261, Mackenzie x). After the bombs stopped falling, home economics, co-operative selling of surplus crops, encouragement of local industries, and providing places for local groups’ activities asserted themselves as paramount concerns (Garner 1995). At Federation and National meetings, the debate concerned women serving on juries, wages in agricultural work, education for adults, “protection for birds, food hygiene and the humane slaughter of animals” (21, 98).

NFWI resolutions between 1969 and 1975 included adoption reform, tax credits to mothers, family planning, pollution, threats to village post offices, and better pay and conditions for policemen (in Whitchurch, Somerset). From 1975 to 1977, the WI called for more education about the dangers of underage drinking, simplification of the tax system and social security laws, dangers of inadequate frozen food labels, and problems associated with persons discharged from hospitals for the mentally ill. In the late 1900s, “Recognizing greater equality between husband and wife, [the] Starcross WI in Devon
asked that married women should be able to seek provision in their occupational pensions for their husbands should they predecease them” (46).

Rosemary Margaret Morgan [Maggie Andrews] delineated the changing of WI attitude in the twentieth century:

from post-suffrage ruralism in the 1920s, through the inclusion of political combination in the thirties, to a radical shift version of social welfare capitalism in the war period. In the 1950s there appears to be a shift regressively to a domestic and apolitical version of the N.F.W.I. which is briefly challenged in the nineteen seventies. The Movement always operates firmly within an identification and perception of its membership as included within any rethinking of changing definitions of the people.

(66)

In all WI resolutions, Canadian or British, community life is key. Knowing the importance of the Women’s Institutes to community infrastructure, a 1960s developer in Surrey approached British federation members when he was completing a new housing estate. He offered to pay the costs of a WI building “‘to help create a community’” (90). Like Ray Oldenburg, author of A Great Good Place, this British developer knew distinctive buildings and space enable open communication and emotional growth.

When [British] redistricting interfered with WI space, members met the challenges of redrawn county lines, and they faced up to the necessary new regulations inherent in Britain’s membership in the new European Union (Garner 1995). “Faint hearts may have thought that all the changing rules and regulations would make it impossible for them to continue, or would rob them of that special humanity which makes them unique, but they flourish[ed]” (60).

The “adopted aunties” idea seems to be what attracted Russian-born Victoria Gay to the Dorstone WI. She’s the only twenty-something member of that group:

I didn’t expect to join the WI when I came here but it’s been a good opportunity to get together with a group of women, to become part of the community and listen to interesting speakers. In Cheltenham, where moved from, I didn’t feel any sense of community. (Davis and Scott 10)
In the mid-1990s, the WI population was down in Ontario, partly as a result of the continuing depopulation of farms and rural communities. Irma Bennett (personal communication, Ontario 1999) said that the Burritt’s Rapids Institute, which used to be about three miles up the road from her house, met in people’s homes, but they had closed down now. She belonged to the Kemptville Institute, which met at the Legion Ladies’ Lounge. Kemptville, which was founded in 1915, never met in people’s homes. Perhaps Kemptville is still active because they don’t have to depend on there being enough women to serve as hostesses.

All three women from the Kemptville area I interviewed in 1999 spoke sadly about how few young members their three separate institutes had. The WI is not alone in their search for younger members or in their being stereotyped. Organized Jewish women in California have also been stereotyped by class and age—“little old ladies with pink and purple hair” (Caplane 1996).

Eileen Woolnough, in the British fen country, said she used to think, “They’re all over sixty, going in there.” Then they had a recruitment campaign and several in my age group joined . . . [however] I think we must keep the older members. We have got to be so careful. If you get a lot of younger people, the older ones will leave and vice versa. Most of the older people have been in the WI for years and years and they are invaluable to ask different things.

(Chamberlain 1977, 154)

Exemplary 20th Century WI Members

If the core of an educational system is the ideal person (Cummings 1999, 425), then the core of the WI is the ideal member. This ideal is shown in vision statements and on lists of aims and goals. Such a member identifies problems in her own life or in her community, plans a way to alleviate those problems, and evaluates her efforts after dealing with the problems. She participates in the management of the resultant situation, after reconceptualizing it. She works individually or collaboratively to carry out her plan. She is part of community folklore wherever villages have Institutes. The ideal WI member has a rightful place in history next to temperance workers, suffragists, union organizers, and the “new woman” of the 1920s (Mackenzie x; Rasmussen, et al., 88-89).
These models of the ideal woman are part of the most radical educational reform in the world since 1742—women's growing literacy and access to schooling. “In times of rapid ideological, political and economic change, new thinking about education may emerge and potentially lead to educational reform” (Cummings 1999, 425).

WI members are not a simple and malleable audience, in spite of their stereotype. At early conventions and other meetings, they “dozed, talked and knitted through topics that didn’t interest them” (Morgan 1993, 32). Convention-goers would not always arrive energized and eager to gather skills and ideas to take back home. That knitting, dozing and talking indicated that members may have been more eager to get away from their children for a few hours than to collect lesson plans (Scarborough 1953, 12).

In Mary Chamberlain’s 1977 exploration of the WI in the fen country, one particularly insightful member paraphrased the ideas of betterment and uplifting (Jenkins 1953, 7), implied a knowledge of political action (Garner 1995, 21), acknowledged the stereotype of the traditional stodgy WI membership, and spelled out their challenges:

We aim to put things right—I’ve heard us called “do-gooders” and other things but I think there is a lot of good done with the resolutions that are passed. It has got a bad image or rather, a wrong image. We get the back end of a lot of jokes. But I think we do a lot of good. A lot of the modern young housewives think, “Oh, we won’t go there because all they do is make jam and talk about recipes and we’re not like that.” Nowadays life is geared to convenience foods and they don’t bother. There’s more to it than that. (154)

The three women I interviewed in the Kemptville, Ontario area in 1999 were examples of living “there’s more to it than that.” All three spoke with some satisfaction about their ability to get the necessary official reports finished and submitted on time. Irma seemed to feel completion of the necessary reports had become second nature: “. . . at first it was very regimental, and you had [. . .] to be able to give the report in French and then they passed it on to the district and then they passed it on to the area and then they passed it on to the province. Seemed like we were third rate in importance . . .” (personal communication, Ontario 1999).
Each of these complex and assertive members joined the WI after moving into the Kemptville area. Oxford-on-Rideau, Oxford Mills, Kemptville, and several other communities are close to each other, close to a major highway between Ottawa and the United States, and close to the Rideau River (which was the source of industrial power in the area). Each of the three had heard the WI was where you make friends. Faith had been told to find the local Women’s Institute representative when she got to her new place. She kept searching until she found a contact, going first to a village market, then to the newspaper. Margaret decided she would get involved after she arrived in the Kemptville area as a new bride, and Irma was encouraged to join after she married the son of a WI member. Irma said:

... I had moved to an area where I didn't know anybody... other than church... I joined to get to know the different people. Now I know a lot of women throughout the province. I was dealt [?] life membership... quite a while ago. I've been about 40 years. I used to take the first two babies to meetings. They met at night, so that was handy... Oh, it would be ‘55 when we were married. We came back here and didn't know anybody. It [WI] helped a lot. (Ontario 1999)

Margaret McIntosh was 93, legally blind, widowed, and living in an assisted care facility. Faith Nelms was in her 70s, living on a farm with her husband, making plans for a visit to Scotland, and still active as a provincial officer in FWIO. Margaret and Faith both sported WI ribbons that proclaimed their service to the local, provincial and Canadian WI. They were dressed as though for a convention, carefully coiffed and shod. Irma Bennett had just come in from working outside, was in her 60s, living on a farm and involved in the day-to-day tasks. Muddy Wellingtons just inside the door and a view of the nearby river left no doubt this was a working farm, and working farmer. She seemed pleased to take a break, but also seemed determined to not spend too much time on this visit. Each was Caucasian, protestant, and steadfast WI supporters. Each was proud of her public speaking experience, her ability to navigate the bureaucratic paperwork, and her service as officer and convention participant. Faith had family in Scotland; Margaret was Irish. Irma did not mention ethnicity. Faith and Irma both indicated they had archives of some sort “in the basement.” Irma said she had “all the Tweedsmuir
Histories,” and Faith retrieved and shared maps and duplicate WI booklets. Nora Whaley, a non-member, indicated a number of times that a particular WI poem or activity Faith mentioned had been used by her church group in a neighboring Kemptville area.

Faith and Margaret spoke several times about how they had never thought they would do any kind of public speaking or organizing. Irma spoke more about the many friends and relationships she gained with her involvement. She said she had a difficult time seeing how all the WI activities uplifted the home when she first started, but she stuck with it as a member and board member.

Of the three Canadian women, only Margaret McIntosh had heard of Denman College, though nearby McDonald Institute at Guelph was familiar to all of them. Each spoke of the need for new members. “We're not getting as many young people as we'd like. The daughter-in-laws and daughter never have joined” (Irma Bennett, Ontario 1999).

Marion McNabb and Lois Neabel, of the Basswood Women’s Institute in Manitoba attempted to chart the convoluted relationships between the individual person from a village Institute and her community, her other organizations, her province, nation, and world. “The member is the centre and all the circles. Through her membership she gains friendships, support, personal growth or development, self esteem, satisfaction, and knowledge” (McNabb & Neabel 2007, 1).

Common Themes

The Manitoba chart (Figure 1 hereafter) mentions education and the exchange of useful information, reflecting the same idea Margaret McIntosh wanted to emphasize. In the organization, the member is center stage. In the realm of activities, education is central. Because this is so, education is the first of the common themes to be discussed.

Education, Change and Reconceptualization

A typical meeting offers something for almost everyone --a talk or demonstration, a competition or exhibition, a roll call, then a class and some kind of entertainment (Jenkins1953; Morgan 1993). Cooking, sewing, decorating, childcare, and food preservation are usual topics. Each institute offers nonformal education (for acquisition of skill in flower-arranging, cooking, childcare, gardening, etc.), links to formal institutions
of learning through scholarships given to college students, and opportunities for informal education through discussion groups and lectures.

Figure 1: Manitoba Members and the WI: A Diagram Prepared for “From Roots to Rooftop” in the Manitoba Women’s Institute Educational Program

Irima Bennett highlighted the same themes. The Kemptville WI was involved in various literacy initiatives in the 1960s and the 1980s, and collaborated with a church group to offer a quilting course (a new interest for some members) in the 1990s. The quilting class was able to meet in the church basement because church members were involved. For some lessons, three or four members went to a central location to take a
course, then they came back and taught others. Bennett said, “Once I went and took a

dessert course, and I took the quilting and came back” (Interview, Ontario, 1999).

Denman College is a wholly-owned school of nonformal education not far from

the universities in Oxford. Denman College is a beautiful Oxfordshire country house, a

social focus, and a vibrant adult education centre (Morgan 1993). The Carnegie Trust

helped establish the college, and the Department of Education promised some help after

the college was operational. Denman is a completely independent “unsubsidized adult

education establishment . . . supported by nearly half a million countrywomen of
differing interests, ages and backgrounds . . .” (Parris 1).

The college could only come into existence after the trappings of the RAF (which

had occupied the building during the war) were removed. One hundred acres of land and
two cottages went with the main house, which was named for Lady Denman (Garner
1995, 63). Each separate Federation equipped a room with curtains, bedspreads, etc.

Some of the more affluent members provided large single items, in spite of the fact that
rationing was still on. Courses were begun in 1948 after long licensing battles with red

tape (Parris 1).

The Denman campus brings together women from the entire WI spectrum. All

members are eligible for matriculation. The Chairman’s Column of Home and Garden

for April 1998 included thoughts on this institution:

I know I’m very lucky that I manage to go to Denman College quite often,

usually to attend committees or tutor courses. But I still find myself trying
to decide just what it is that makes Denman so special. It’s not only the

variety of things that you can learn, though they cover an enormous range

of interests. It’s more the atmosphere or the ambience . . . There’s the

buzz of conversation in the dining room, the burst of laughter from the

lecture room, and the companionship of a drink in the bar. They are all

part of Denman life . . .. (Meadmore 2)

New recruit Diane Newlands spotted plenty of opportunities to learn new skills:

“I like the look of the courses at Denman. Having its own college really gives

the WI an edge over other clubs”” (11).
More than 4,000 women attend Denman every year, and another 3,000 do the Tuesday and Thursday afternoon courses, which cover “painting, photography, lace-making, cookery, philosophy, local government, the theatre, flower arrangement, languages, immigration and emigration, as well as WI training courses for Presidents, officers and committee members” (1). Denman patterned itself after colleges from nearby Oxford, and uses an academic program drawn up by the NFWI education sub-committee. Materials and aims are standardized, but there are no diplomas and degrees. The classes range from practical to intellectual and artistic. Several courses run at the same time, giving students opportunities for “an interesting exchange of ideas at breaks and mealtimes” (Garner 1995, 67). The first students who went to Denman worked hard; “they only had four or five hard-won days away from home or family” (67).

Every federation (FWIO, BCWI, NFWI, etc.) raises money to support itself, contributes to neighborhood libraries and schools, and provides money to girls and women who would not otherwise be able to participate in educational initiatives (Halpern 271). In spite of their achievements, they have sometimes been reticent about pressing for their own economic and intellectual opportunity. In England, for example, WI members at the 1943 conference had to be reminded that they had been able to take over men’s jobs during two world wars and had looked after their homes and families at the same time. Only then, did they come to grips with the fact that “they wanted to continue to open new doors, and still looked to the WI to put opportunities within their reach. Many people felt that the lack of adult education was a void the WI could do much to fill” (Parris 1).

Lack of funds has been a continuing problem, but new classrooms, leaking roofs, and a new kitchen building (74) have been built or fixed. The courses have been booked solid since the college’s opening (87). Institutes send organizers and other members to central locations to pick up standardized materials and information for a lesson to be shared with the general membership. The latter are specifically geared to members who will take their knowledge back to their villages.
Denman College celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1998 and is open every day except Christmas holidays. It encourages visitors, charges tuition, has student-led policy, was incorporated in 1991, and assist its students in gaining credence in non-WI arenas. Forward policy is now to achieve recognition of competence; recognition that work done within the WI, to the standards it has imposed upon itself, has a currency outside the WI. Since accreditation is needed for outside work, forms of assessment have to be devised and new criteria applied. The college has worked with accrediting bodies such as the Royal Society of Arts, the Open University and the National Extension College. From the beginning it has been possible to gain WI certificates. Now there are more and more clearly defined objectives to be attained. (Garner 1995, 79)

The range of classes available reflects the composition of the groups that interact here. It’s not surprising that part of that interaction would also reflect the composition of a sister organization, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. One of the long-standing discussions at Denman concerned having a bar at the college. That argument continued for eighteen years before the residential license was obtained in 1966 (Parris 20).

Denman is unique, an aberration of sorts: a college completely for people without degrees and completely non-degree-granting. Yet it continues to offer educational opportunities to new generations WI members. The needs of the WI tomorrow likely will be much like the needs of the WI yesterday, because well-educated women with professional careers may need as much training to keep house as the girls who were unexpectedly thrust into marriage on the frontier. “Schools . . . tend to place girls in academic subjects, who will be expected to go on into universities but may never be taught home management (even though most of them will at some stage or another be faced with housekeeping and bringing up a family) and those whose academic training will be limited but who may be taught some domestic science . . .” (26).

In Canada, WI members were vital to the 1903 founding of MacDonald Institute at Guelph’s Ontario Agricultural College (Halpern 161-162, 265), though they do not actually own the school. They are, of course, part owners of Denman College, in spite of the fact they are in Canada instead of Oxfordshire. Associated with the university,
MacDonald Institute not only educated young women, but also specifically trained many to become teachers. The thrust of “Mack” was, therefore, formal [schooling]. There were many opportunities for informal and nonformal learning, as the [female] students were expected to take care of their own housekeeping and food service. They also were expected to wait on the male university students nearby.

Canadian and American women may have reconceptualized womanhood differently because there were no women’s colleges in Western Canada “. . . and there were few opportunities for women to pursue higher education” (Oliver 2). Reconceptualizing is akin to the refocusing required to understand Rowe’s rings-of-Saturn analogy. Refocusing is necessary to accommodate differing sizes and kinds of data. For Rowe, the rings (made up of motes of dust and ice) explained sexism as being made up of individual rude behaviors and belittling comments. Applying the same metaphor Rowe did, readers can see the bake sales, style shows, lunches, lessons, and scholarships for other women are motes of community–building behavior.

Adult education is informed by the mythology, physical plant, certification, and professional networks of nearby universities and colleges, as well as the constraints and dreams of participants. Professional trainers, program planners, Human Resource Development specialists, teachers, evaluators, and recruiters facilitate learning in venues separate from formal schools, but there is a seemingly general consensus that formal education is *real* education.

One example of this implied valuing of formal education occurred in Ontario in 1934. WI members were proud when “‘a qualified Home Economist,’ became the first woman superintendent of the provincial WI” (268). From the 1930s onward, superintendents were all university graduates in Home Economics. The post-WW II focus on “authority” and professionalism aided in the sidelining of perfectly adequate speakers and administrators. (See Thompson and Scheid, Chapter Two). Ethel Chapman, a frequent contributor to WI publications, noted that up-to-date institutes entertained “educational, religious, social service, and mental health professionals whose formal education and training produced an unchallenged expertise” (267). Canadianization (Oliver 54), Americanization, literacy, English-as-a-Second-Language, Lamaze, and
parenting classes are often conducted nonformally. Assertiveness and self-defense training for women are often nonformal education. Paradoxically, people who eagerly participate in nonformal education and don’t want to go back to college volunteer untold hours to provide funding for the formal schooling of others.

In Ontario, the Agricultural College in Guelph joined forces with the Women’s Institutes to found The Macdonald Institute in 1903. Both Denman and Macdonald received logistical support from the community and financial support from WI. Denman is many years younger and was meant to train homemakers and volunteers. Denman patterned many of its courses after those of nearby colleges in Oxfordshire, and even started negotiating with credentialing authorities to establish for-credit courses in the late 1900s. Mack was meant to “train teachers in domestic science in affiliation” (Oliver 58).

Home economics had the tradition and the knowledge, but male social scientists were the people who were suddenly deemed the expert professionals. It is impossible to assess the effect that loss of voice and proper role of the ladylike home economist had on the publicizing of the supposedly new and different field. Since human relations depend on dialogue and education rests on communication, Ethel Chapman’s 1967 assessment of the family studies situation is particularly insightful and poignant: “’There are educationists who would relegate it [home economics] to technical schools or limit it to food science, taking away the humanities concerned with human thought and human relations’” (Halpern 1997, 269).

The Value of History and Vision of the Future

Saroj Nalini was the embodiment of this two-edged WI theme. She had a vision of India’s future as a country in which prejudice was eradicated, but valued its history and culture, calling for Muslim and Hindu women to work together, in spite of purdah. So doing, she behaved in the unprejudiced manner called for in the Collect. She encouraged women of her country to refrain from small-minded actions and comments, such as demeaning or mistreating widows. She urged them to abstain from envy and self-centeredness, and to behave in an unbiased manner. She had no patience with women who did not encourage others to educate themselves and their children, and she fought to eliminate problems caused by ignorance or caste (Dutt 88-120). She traveled to Japan,
returned home with information on their schools, and castigated those who did not recognize the possibilities of the Japanese education model. Nalini founded the Indian Women’s Institute Movement in 1913 and served a term as head of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). Her early death was a crippling blow to the Indian WIs (Mahila Samitis) and to ACWW.

It has largely been the WI, not historians, who have recognized the rich history of farm women. While the WI’s reverence for the past is best known through its Tweedsmuir Histories—written and pictorial chronicles of towns in which WI branches thrived—it has also over the years documented, studied, celebrated, and commemorated the lives of farm women. (Halpern 42-43).

Historians generally “. . . have branded the WI as a trite, traditional social club that was politically unaware or apathetic,” Halpern says (8), and Morgan notes that all history is constantly being rewritten (10). The concerns of the present shape today’s research (14). “[A]n oral history is open to interpretation and contestation” (16), and “women must speak from where they are positioned” (23). It is, therefore, no surprise that The Women’s Institutes, like all viable organizations, have constantly reinvented themselves, necessitating a “constant re-writing of their history from 1925 to 1990” (10). It spans many of the “traditional divides and groups of feminists” (11). “It must therefore be understood that these versions of WI history are not authoritative but a part of a complex and contradictory whole” (64). The contradictory whole includes a public image of “tweed and twin sets” and sometimes hidden foundation of feminist thought (9).

Outsiders and members alike have written about the Women’s Institutes, making it as well known in the rest of the world as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in the United States. Members’ writings may be in “the unappealing genre of the politically correct autobiography” (Mankiller and Wallis 1993, n.p.), but they are still useful because they provide subjective detail. Gwen Garner announces “. . . the WI is a British institution, as much a part of the countryside as green fields and cow parsley” (9). Academics (often non-members), such as Margaret Rosemary Morgan (1993), provide facts and theory to augment the members’ subjective writing. Morgan explored the WI’s first forty-five years “. . . to the emergence of the second wave of overt feminism”; “. . .
the National Federation of Women’s Institutes [NFWI] is the largest Women’s organisation in the post suffrage period,” and “The Women’s Institute Movement was exclusively rural in its membership” (6).

Activities that can be ascribed to environmental feminists, social feminists, and maternal feminists overlap. For example, the idea of the whole world as an extended tidy home for all of us has given rise to “green” and pacifist resolutions.

Glemsford WI in Suffolk brought forward a motion urging HM government to persuade other countries party to the Antarctic Treaty that Antarctica be declared a wilderness park, with military activity and the extraction of oil and minerals forbidden. This resolution was passed and pursued relentlessly in conjunction with Greenpeace and the Worldwide Fund for Nature. (Garner 1995, 47)

As the thirty-year treaty concerning Antarctica was coming to an end, NFWI, Greenpeace, and others stepped up their efforts, enlisted the support of the United States, and eventually were instrumental in getting an Environmental Protocol signed in Madrid in October 1991. Though Antarctica does not yet have World Park status, the Environment Protocol will be in effect for fifty years. In the meantime, every Institute in the Welsh Federation undertook the “maintenance or restoration of a local water feature” (49, 103). The NFWI has also considered compulsory DNA testing, a review of the Homicide Act, the rural economy, and housing.

Farm women were wrenched out of their homes and into military and paramilitary organizations, into industry and farming during wars, then were coerced and goaded back into their kitchens when peace came. When these radical social changes swept through the world in the years between WW I and WW II (Purvis 307), some British women were glad to return to being full-time wives and mothers because they had been gone from home for so long. Others would not give up their new sources of income and freedom. Whether or not they worked out of the home, however, women once again focused more narrowly on their own lives and communities: “good rural housing, women representatives on local authorities, availability of electricity at a cost comparable to that of towns, the provision of water supplies, of village halls, and playing fields” (Garner 1995, 33). NFWI members quietly acted on their continued belief that the cultural lives
of the villages were important—“they were not lacking in vision, confidence in themselves, or faith” (34).

Ethics and Behavior

A long-time Institute member said, in 1977, that chapel women in the fen country didn’t tend to join the WI, nor did “career girl[s] that never wanted to marry or anything.” People who that weren’t religious “need[ed] something else . . .” (Chamberlain 151-155). In spite of problems concerning gender bias, class, nationality, and race (White 231), clubwomen’s motives and activities are so similar that a pattern is easily seen.

Both the Women’s Institutes and the Labour Party both use Jerusalem as an anthem. Ostensibly religious, the anthem includes a call to patriotic action and emphasizes education. Its martial language invigorated those who had been excluded from the public arena:

And did those feet in ancient time/Walk upon England’s mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God/ On England’s pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine/ Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here/ Among these dark satanic mills.
Bring me my bow of burning gold!/ Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O Clouds unfold!/ Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight /Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem/In England’s green and pleasant land!

The determination of WI members to think is indicated in the words, “I will not cease from mental fight,” and in the traditional [and unanswerable] question: “Did Jesus—personally—bring salvation to England?” WI members are not afraid to use their brains, and they do not require easy answers.

“Holy Lamb of God,” “Jerusalem,” and “satanic” tie the WI directly to the morals and ethics associated with Christianity. The Collect urged members to eliminate pettiness, pretense, prejudice, unkindness, self-centeredness, small-mindedness and fright from their lives. Anything divisive, anything “of a party-political or sectarian nature”

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2 The “Modern History Sourcebook” (on-line) gives readers the opportunity to link to a Real Audio Website and hear the song. The lyrics reflect author William Blake’s visionary romanticism (1757-1827). The melody was written by C. H. H. Parry (1848-1918).
(Garner 1995; Morgan 1993) was a forbidden topic of discussion until the 1970s. Members might talk about suffrage (Halpern 169, 174), contraception or pacifism in their homes, but at Institutes they were supposed to be ladylike, neutral and pleasant. “Until the rules were changed it would have been unthinkable for the WI to discuss birth control” (Garner 1995, 98).

Women who wanted or needed to support themselves and their children and had to work outside the home were ranged against those who did not approve of wives and mothers who “neglected” family and domestic responsibilities by taking jobs outside the family—but no one talked about it at the WI! Members forced themselves to keep silent on controversial policies like equal pay for equal work or the separatist tradition (Halpern 261-264). As late as the mid-1950s, Canadian WI members were still struggling with the no-controversial topics rule. Pakenham WI member Frances Downey said, “The ‘unkind word’ is a no-no; no envy shall sour the mind . . .” (Noblitt 18).

*Fundraising and Fiscal Accountability*

Generating funds in the public arena was long felt to be somehow, not nice. Still, fund-raising was a constant necessity for volunteer organizations. Some women felt that making money for the WI was acceptable, but taking personal profit from it wasn’t quite nice. As a result, for years, no one could bear to spend the jam money (Garner 1995, 29). Taking money from a governmental agency had a different flavor.

Production of the Rylstone 1990s calendar, however, demonstrated members’ knowledge of how to attract media attention, how to poke fun at themselves, how much acceptability has changed in the last hundred years, how to manipulate the double standard, and how to acknowledge the value of firm WI Victorian roots. Though most fund-raising initiatives are not as innovative or successful as was Rylstone’s, there are now many women who have “no inhibitions about working to supplement the family budget [or the WI budget]. It’s not only ‘nice’ to earn money, it’s enormously satisfying” (56).

Individuals and institutes both benefit from those nice and enormously satisfying earnings. WI-sponsored markets have a reputation for providing quality “homemade bread, preserves, cakes, pastries and savoury dishes, game, poultry, cream, cheeses, fruit,
plants and flowers” (53) and rejecting substandard woollens, lace, embroidery or other handicrafts (54).

The Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) received some government funding until 1990 (Halpern 281), and only WI budgets and accounting ledgers from 1897 forward could explain the paradox of how the National Federation of Women’s Institutes (NFWI) is said to have been self-governing “since 1919,” when it received some government funding until the late 1900s (Morgan 1993, 43). The WI was awarded a grant in 1917, but, at the same time, the General Secretary was encouraging country residents to support themselves with communal WI vegetable gardens and markets. Such gardens and markets cost the government nothing.

Attitudes about what is ladylike have changed. An aspect of this thought found its way into the WI process in 1921, when some Canadian [WI] members went so far as to offer a resolution that urged members not to degenerate into simple money-makers (Halpern 159). They felt the original educational purpose of the WI was lagging behind. When village shops close and bus routes are terminated, WI markets often fill the gap, sometimes becoming criminals along the way. Though “hundreds of markets nationwide had been selling preserves for sixty years” (Garner 1995, 56), 1980 homemakers found their work suddenly illegal because the WI had not registered its premises according to new government regulations. It took action by the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State, and the House of Lords to exact the Royal assent necessary to exempt “. . . WI market cooks from having to register their kitchens with the local authority” (57).

The reconciliation of business mores and ladylike behavior takes into account a dogged determination to manipulate public situations to WI advantage. WI Books, for example, was formed in 1977 as a separate company (Garner 1995). It made a £1,000,000 profit during the first ten years of its operation. Such good results have done much to assuage a long-standing rural inferiority complex (30). Monda Halpern has pointed out that Institutes help support “an endless number of causes” (Halpern 271).

**Collaboration among Members and Groups**

103
Boundaries between women’s groups are porous. In the Mahila Samitis, Muslim and Hindu women worked together because of the WI environment. Canadian and British women collaborated in their WI activities. Barriers between American, Canadian and British women’s organizations blurred through similar aims and ideology. Many club members belonged to more than one group, providing links in organizational networks. Sources of funding are shared and ill defined, and there are many different names for like groups (associations, councils, institutes, etc.). Sister organizations in the United States that are mirrors of the WI have been called home bureaus, women’s clubs, extension clubs, councils, guilds, and farm and garden associations.

Women who are members of more than one organization are links between those organizations. In fact, “... linking up with other clubs is the best way of sharing local resources ... We couldn’t run some of our other activities like line dances, without their support. It’s also a way of increasing our membership. Two of today’s visitors have come from the local bowling club” (Parviz, in Northolt 11).

The following quotation from *Fenwomen* encapsulates several common WI themes:

We have people who come and talk to us and show us how to do things and it can be very interesting. You can learn things you never thought you could do. You might take up an interest you had no idea existed ... And of course, the WI does a lot in the community. We gave a wheelchair last year to the village ... Anybody in the village ... can borrow it free of charge. (In Chamberlain 155) Learning, finding new interests, serving the group and community, and collaborating to achieve mutual ends are paramount in club life. Here, the fact that the speaker emphasizes *the group* gave the wheelchair, not one single ideal woman, shows a consciousness of collective action’s value. Adell Cook called that kind of group consciousness—“[a] psychological attachment and recognition of shared values and interests with a social or political group” (Halpern 3).

*Working for Improved Health*

WI members have long believed “a nation cannot rise above the level of its homes; therefore we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest possible level” (Garner 1995, 7), so home sanitation, “a better understanding of
economics and hygienic value of foods and fuels,” scientific childcare, and higher general standard of health were among the highest priorities. That quest for good individual and community health—including said adequate sanitation—is one of the most characteristic activities for Institute members and their sisters in other rural organizations. The battle for public toilets for women and sewage treatment facilities has been on-going (Halpern 166). Rural Canadian women were lobbying for ladies restrooms in 1918-19 (Fletcher vii-viii, Manitoba WI 18), and rural American extension club sisters of the WI worked toward getting public toilets for women in small plains towns during the 1930s and 1940s (personal knowledge).

In the late 1900s, British WI members took on the task of measuring and evaluating public toilets. One member carefully couched her serious comment in humorous terms: “Some people might say we should have better things to do, but this is a fairly important issue for women carrying heavy shopping bags, larger women and especially for women with young children,” said Hazel Gillingham, chairman of the Wiltshire Federation of WIs. “I was in one at the weekend which was beautifully clean and bright but there were three inches between the edge of the door and the bowl. I had to hook my leg over the top of the loo just to close the door.” (O’Neill 1997)

One phenomenon in England mirrored the changing times. In the past, . . . serving psychiatric hospitals was one unique and difficult initiative. There were [once] sixty-three special Women’s Institutes that accepted mentally ill patients as normal members of the group. Most of the special institutes were closed as new drugs came on the market and hospital policies changed. People with mental illnesses spent so much less time in treatment that they didn’t have time to get involved with the WI (Garner 1995, 117-120).

Traditional women’s questions and rural concerns have been at the top of the list of resolutions every year (Garner 1995, 85). Day-care centres, clean water, waste disposal, help for the mentally handicapped, health care and better transportation are examples of topics the WI has discussed. In 1994, the list of resolutions included laws on obscenity, donation of organs for transplant, and legal aid. Many topics discussed by Women’s Institute members have also been considered by women in Non-Governmental
Organizations (NGOs, or WINGOs) of other countries. Examples include calling for an end to nuclear testing, seeking more educational opportunities for women, pointing out the need for child welfare, asking protection of the environment, and even assertiveness training (Garner 1995).

After WW II, from 1945 to 1969, British resolutions reflected the mood of the country. Clean water and adequate sewage schemes were still a priority, but the NFWI pledged support to the United Nations (Garner 1995), continued to cooperate with the ACWW, opposed violence in film and on television, set up special Institutes for the mentally ill and handicapped in several locations, supported the practice of fostering children, and pushed for buses to alleviate the stresses caused by cutbacks in the railway system. In the on-going battle for women’s access to clean and convenient toilets, they “vigorously opposed” retention of turnstiles for women’s public lavatories: “no pregnant woman who has had to struggle through a turnstile would welcome their return” (Garner 1995, 41).

From 1981 to 1988, resolutions concerned child abuse, AIDS education, and drug abuse were. From 1988 to 1994, they supported hospice care, studies of osteoporosis, education in the dangers of abusing paracetamol, the legal status of artificially produced embryos, and “a long-term programme of technical and financial assistance to increase the agricultural self-sufficiency of Third World countries” (46). They lobbied against use of chlorofluorocarbons, deforestation, and toxic waste disposal were priorities.

The rewards of education obtained at Denman College and MacDonald Institute are increased self-esteem (i.e., self-efficacy, empowerment, voice), greater safety of the community (healthier mothers and children, fewer diseases spread through unpasteurized milk, more traffic signals, etc.), the construction of new knowledge, changes in attitude, improved job opportunities, acquisition of new skills or improvement of those already mastered, a widened circle of personal relationships, and opportunities to mentor younger or needful learners. One member said, “‘You can stretch yourself as far as you want to go’” (Garner 1995, 172).

The Double Standard
Through the years, WI actions and resolutions have confronted “the boundaries of the socially constructed role for women in a number of ways, politically, economically and in cultural terms” (Oliver 11, Halpern 270-274). Particularly

. . .in the Victorian Era, much time was devoted to discussing what constituted woman’s proper sphere or role in Canadian society . . . women were seldom asked what they thought their sphere should be, men were frequent speakers on the subject . . . Women were thus defined in terms of their relationships with men and the role of mother was considered to be their ultimate calling” (Oliver 12-13).

“Rural social convention . . . privileged sons as profoundly as property law did husbands” (31). WI members generally accepted the constraints of patriarchal rules and worked alongside their husbands and sons (Halpern 44-51), but they did not think about gender roles in the same way as men. Former village institute president, Elizabeth Thurston said, “I think also that many men are a bit selfish—they like to see the wife there in the house when they walk in the door . . .” (Chamberlain 134).

Husbands were not always happy when their wives set out to achieve “an improvement in themselves, to learn something about the world, to open their minds to subjects they had never had the opportunity to consider before” (Garner 1995, 16). Husbands did not appreciate the “explosion of mental awakening” (16). Yorkshire husbands in the 1920s “refused to let their wives join what they described as ‘that secret society’” (Morgan 1993, 28). “Volunteer womanpower pioneered many of the community services now provided by the state (Rasmussen, et al., 123). In many cases, men appropriated community-building efforts that were successful (Halpern 114).

In Australia, Victoria WI members encountered the double standard when they sent money to Tonga women for roof replacement. “The roofs . . . were made of dried grass which rotted in the rain. The rain was putting out the cooking stoves . . .” (Garner 1995, 107). Tongan husbands would not help their wives because fixing the roof was not man’s work in Tongan culture.

In 1913, when 150 women went to the Alberta Legislature about their voting rights, the Premier refused to let them in. He said, “Did you ladies wash up your
luncheon dishes before you came down here to ask me for the vote? If you haven’t you’d better go home because you’re not going to get any votes from me” (qtd in Oliver 23).

As long as members presented a façade that proclaimed they were just dithering around, their business meetings and other activities were largely “. . . perceived as an acceptable leisure pursuit” (Morgan 1993, 27).

**Democracy and Patriotism**

Democracy and patriotism were apparent in songs and readings WI members used. Members demonstrated their patriotism in ways that suited the times. Like other villagers, members traditionally challenged the hegemony of those higher up the socioeconomic scale—but ministers, priests, physicians, shopkeepers and pub owners turned cold when female villagers challenged the hegemony of patriarchy. The men had been the elite of the village and did not want women to learn too much. The Women’s Institutes gave female villagers too much power.

During World War II, many Women’s National Farm and Garden Association and WI members were part of the 800,000 Women’s Land Army. “The phrase *worlds apart* usually denotes cultural differences rather than actual physical space, the worlds of farm and town represented a cultural divide that ethnic ties could not erase” (Goldberg 1997, 32), but these women worked as rat catchers, milked cows, did general farm work, cut down trees and worked in sawmills. Few citizens worried about the amount of power they had, as physical space and other boundaries separating urban from farm women were eroded. Everybody learned to work together to benefit the war effort. Though many of the barriers went backup after the war, over the years, women from different areas, ethnicities, and religions have been able to work together (Goldberg 1997, 63; White 40, 212-231). Their teamwork has been to our general benefit that and weakened various kinds of exclusionary attitudes and tactics.

British political and religious hierarchies put women at the bottom, but acknowledge the queen as symbolic head of the government. This seems paradoxical to outsiders, but it works. Queen Elizabeth II is “an extraordinary ordinary member” of the Sandringham WI, which is founded on democratic principles. She attended the opening of the new home Economics Centre at Denman College in 1979. Queen Mary was the
first WI president at Sandringham. The Queen Mother was a long-time WI president. Other members of the family belonged to various Institutes (Garner 1995).

With or without royal participation, matters are raised at meetings on the local level, then killed or regularized and forwarded to federation meetings as resolutions at the Annual General Meeting. All federation resolutions are examined and researched in minute detail before being submitted for discussion. [The bringing forward of the nude calendar resolution at the Annual General Meeting in Calendar Girls was an anomaly.]

Early policy statements articulated WI objectives of helping women “acquire sound and approved practices for greater home efficiency,” “discover, stimulate and train leadership,” “develop a more abundant life in our rural communities and a deeper appreciation of the things near at hand,” and “develop better, happier and more useful citizens” (240-241). Policies and activities are coordinated by superordinate entities, such as the Federation of Women’s Institutes of Canada (FWIC) and the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, in the United Kingdom (NFWI). These federations act as clearinghouses and monitor nationwide programs of planning and instruction. Anthems and prayers hint at more theoretical issues, such as the establishment and maintenance of friendships.

*Friendship, Humor and Fun*

The nude calendar from Rylstone and jokes about tea breaks are only two examples of Women’s Institute humor. Long-time WI member, Margaret McIntosh (age 93), spoke disparagingly of her mental efforts during her interview: “I think some of my answers were dumb” (Ontario 1999). Her wry devaluation of her contributions to the conversation is a good example of WI humor.

Irma Bennett laughingly described the attitude of the general community toward the WI, “Well . . .other people thought of was that we poured tea and quilts” (personal communication, Ontario 1999). Bennett also said the Kemptville WI leaves the Legion hall as they found it. A hostess takes care of the trash for the ten to twelve women who regularly attend the meetings. Another person brings the coffeemaker and sets it up: “That’s one of the officerships! Coffeemaker-President, Vice-President and Coffee Person!”
Women have used humor and self-deprecation to deflect criticism. Answering a question about the religious make-up of her village Institute, Faith Nelms fended off any possibility of implied criticism of her religion, her Institute, and her friends’ attitudes, saying, “I’m the odd man out; I’m a Christian Science reader” (Ontario 1999).

The people I interviewed were eager to discuss their involvement with all-women groups and more than willing to share the joke of various situations. The good humor and laughter disappeared only when someone got the idea that the questioner didn’t know the value of her organization or when about a detractor that need to be put in his place. No one thought the comments of the 1913 Alberta Premier were funny. Belittling the group of organized women who appeared before the legislature in 1913, seeking the vote (Oliver 23), he told them to “Go home and wash dishes.”

There is a universal dichotomy in laughter about women’s organized groups. Members laugh in them. Outsiders laugh at them. Two examples are the comments of my own grown son, who regularly calls the American Association of University Women “Mom’s Women’s Supremacy Group,” and the label one husband put on his wife’s girls-night-out meetings. He calls it her “Hormoaning Group” (Wall 1997), but the wife and her friends think of their girls’ night out as “that precious time when we come together for consciousness raising and intellectual enhancement” (13).

Girls’ nights out, clubs, conventions, workshops, and Women’s Institutes provide a safe haven for all kinds of humor, from slapstick to quietly ironic. This safe haven includes a place to make fun of insider topics, and the need for mental excitement (Oliver 13-14) has often been cited as a reason for joining a group like the WI. Davis and Scott (11) gently note that the members of the 74-year-old Northolt WI are “. . . retired, professional women who are looking for new interests and a lively social circle,” but those same members dismiss “. . . talk of a breakdown in community spirit” as an urban myth” (11). If there were no breakdown in community spirit, they would have a lively social circle.

The attitudes of onlookers notwithstanding, organized women laugh, make friends, build alliances, sustain relationships, and generally have a good time at their meetings and conventions. The Women’s Institutes, like women-run French salons
during the Enlightenment, are “… gatherings to engage in intellectual as well as frivolous conversation” (Knox 3).

All three of the WI members I interviewed in Canada stressed friendships and the fun they have had, reflecting two of the primary motivations for becoming involved with an organized women’s group. Being alone in a strange community and wanting to make new friends is epidemic. The sense of self, of place, and of belonging is basic. It features prominently in Maslow’s motivational theory. One happy WI member confided, “I think the real reason we’re so successful is that we’re lucky enough to have the most wonderfully enthusiastic and friendly members—it’s really as simple as that” (Davis & Scott 11).

Efficiency and Modernism

Efficiency in the twenty-first century involves computers and other electronic gadgets; efficiency in the nineteenth century involved prototypical vacuum cleaners and iceboxes. Over the years, institute members have struggled to be efficient and “modern,” whatever modernity meant in their time.

The rural women of Alberta were the white hope of the progressive movement in that province. The Women’s Institute and United Farm Women were not afraid to tackle social problems and their reading courses and discussions showed serious purpose. The women of the cities were more likely to be entangled in social affairs and in danger of wasting their time in matters of constitution and procedure . . . but there was real stuff in the countrywomen. (McClung, in Rasmussen et al. 138)

As a term, “modernism,” changes with the times, just like “efficiency.” Until the late 1900s, the WI required members to come from villages and farms, but modernism and efficiency required barriers to come down (Cook, in Halpern 3). In the 1900s, the Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) was accused of “conservatively turning inward to community, home, and family, though it actually adopted an expended, international world view” (Halpern 271).

Some members wondered if an international focus would distract attention from local problems. The Ontario WI sent a tractor to rural Greek widows, furnished training
equipment for facilities in Ceylon, provided sewing machines to Korean widows, and sponsored children overseas who needed help, in spite of those misgivings. Superintendent Anna Lewis insisted members were obligated as mothers to “exert an influence in the world community” (Halpern 273).

That ubiquitous geographical and cultural divide between British rural and urban women had largely disappeared during the war years, reasserted itself after the armistice, then began eroding again in the twentieth century. The reality of British country living in that period of time included numbers of outsiders moving into villages, while neighborhood shops, transport services, and medical care moved out. The WI benchmark had always been geography. Now the WI can be seen as the benchmark of village living. “The WI is often the last thing left in the [British] village to draw its inhabitants together and maintain any sense of community” (Garner 1995, 50).

Voice

Early organized women might have wished for “complete educational and occupational equality” (Oliver 22), but to say so would have been radical. Having much more modest goals—or at least appearing to have much more modest goals than complete equality—served them well. Confrontations often led to results that were less than hoped for (Oliver 23). Men still decided which women would be listened to, and where. Men’s decisions deprived wives and daughters of the chance to articulate their ideas in the public sector. Women also sometimes stifled themselves. Disruptive topics were forbidden at Women’s Institute meetings, and unladylike topics were forbidden in public.

Lack of voice may be the one of the reasons home economics did not receive the same status as family studies at the Macdonald Institute in the 1960s. Suspicious of [professional] social science practitioners, the WI “never approached the topical study of the family as a field of cutting-edge (male) social science—instead, it examined it in the context of the group’s beloved [female] home economics” (266).

In 1951, a Wilton Grove [Ontario] WI member voiced her opinions on the confusing world community and modern strife that encroached on her life, taking for discussion the topics of “The Many Phases of Human Rights,” “An Indian I Have
Known or Read About,” and “The Status of Indians in Canada” (273). In spite of being “virtually all white,” they sang “We Shall Overcome,” and condemned racial prejudice. In 1968, when the same village Institute “expressed a sensitivity to issues of race,” the effort was seen by some to be “somewhat offensive and politically naïve” (Halpern, note 21, 273).

**Personal Effort and Service to the Community**

One [British] long-time fenland member in the mid-1900s summed up the upbeat attitude inherent in the clubwoman’s philosophy.

I had a few years when I didn’t seem to do anything, and all of a sudden I thought, “What am I doing? I’m just sitting here, I’m not going anywhere, I’m not doing anything.” So I joined the Women’s Institute and then became president of that for three years. Then I went into management of the village hall, and then of course, the Parish Council . . . (qtd. in Chamberlain 134-235)

This woman exemplifies not only the self-confident belief that she could do something constructive, but also another characteristic of the volunteer—the crossing of barriers between groups (border-crossings). Her membership in the WI, in hall management, and on the Parish Council links the private sphere and public arena. It is common for women who are members of one organization to be members of others, establishing personal networks that translate into complex systems of organizations. Irma Bennett belonged to the Burritt’s Rapids and Kemptville Women’s Institutes, 4-H, Girl Guides, and church groups (Ontario 1999).

Despite the necessary compartmentalization and growing bureaucracy of the mid-twentieth century, 20th century Institutes were still organizing community social events, providing . . . playground equipment for schools; recognizing the births of babies with a gift . . .; sending cards, flowers or fruit to the sick and shut in; assisting victims of . . . misfortune; contributing to the building of halls, hospitals and community centres; taking an active interest in Children’s Shelters and Homes for the Aged; promoting and assisting libraries; getting the people of the district to come to chest X-ray surveys; [and] sponsoring baby clinics . . . (Halpern 271)
This traditional domestic agenda is mirrored in an international involvement. The venerable idea of a nation centered in its homes and a home centered in the housewife (Dennison ii) comes down through time to buttress support of eye clinics in India, AIDS education and food production in South Africa, a UNICEF health and education clinic for young mothers in Brazil, and clean water in Greece (Garner 1995). “It is generally recognized that the quickest and most cost-effective way of improving life in the world’s rural areas is the direct funding of women-based projects [. . .] building on whatever are the traditional values of family life in a particular area” (113).

As noted above, in the first years of Margaret McIntosh’s residency in the Kemptville area, she was aware of dissention between families in the neighborhood. Margaret “just got on with it” (interview), ignoring the possible stumbling blocks and urging the women to collaborate in supporting military personnel and Red Cross efforts. When she looked back at the invitation she issued to her “humble little log house,” she seemed amazed at her own temerity. It took courage for a young wife and newcomer to ask older women to put aside their differences and work together. McIntosh’s attitude reflects Elizabeth Adell Cook’s description of group orientation —“[. . .] members [feel they] should work together for change rather than working separately as individuals for their own achievements” (Halpern 3).

NFWI markets are the result of long hours of hard work in the garden and home. The usual thrifty homemakers and several particular populations are impacted by the results of this labor. Some markets deliver hampers to people with special needs or to friends of members. Some package their supplies to fit single-person households. Widows and others living alone search for these. Markets sometimes become “meeting places for young mums whose babies grow up under the benevolent eyes of adopted aunties whose interest may compensate for the lack of nearby relatives” (Garner 1995, 55).

Individual actions (holding bake sales, making and raffling quilts and other crafts, hosting balls, and holding picnics and concerts for which tickets were requit) saved Denman College when it was threatened by new government fire regulations in 1980 (Garner 1995, 76). A farmer wanted to buy Denman land above the going rate,
promising to maintain the boundary walls and the woodlands. Denman fell into the classification that caused many small hotels to close. Some members wanted to use a professional fundraiser to meet the challenges, but others voted to raise the necessary funds themselves and retain Denman as it then existed. Not all members liked the way the vote went, after it was taken they were galvanized into action. “When changes have to be made, people will fight hard for their ideas and point of view, but once a decision has been democratically arrived at they will normally go along with the majority” (127).

Canadian and British Institutes: A Brief Comparison

Canadian (FWIC) and British (NFWI) Institutes have the same pattern of action—they identify community and personal problems, plan a course of action to solve those problems, carry out and evaluate the plan, then reconceptualize and start all over again. They are alike because both need young members to replace those lost to normal attrition. They both give scholarships and bursaries to a variety of recipients. They have a joint concept of the ideal member, and both rely on flawed human counterparts of that ideal. Members in both federations are unpaid. Receiving no money for their work, they are, nevertheless, rewarded by improved self-esteem, richer social lives, and more resilient communities (Garner 1995). Said another way, members in both federations gain “...friendships, support, personal growth or development, self esteem, satisfaction and knowledge” (McNabb and Neabel 2).

Canadian and British Institutes are alike in their reliance on the individual village member. Individual members are the building blocks upon which the organization is founded. Just as shown in the Basswood women’s diagram, the local member is central. There are, however, some major differences between the FWIC and NFWI. The first difference is the participation of the aristocracy. In England, participation of the royals reflects the tradition of the Queen as head of government and church. With no royal family on the North American continent, WI leadership and dynamics are different there.

A second major difference between Institutes in Great Britain and Institutes in Canada involves geographical space. Travelers going from St. Ives (Cornwall), through Canterbury, then up through the fen country, past Hadrian’s Wall and out the northern tip
of Scotland would cover only the distance Edmonton (Alberta) to Dawson’s Creek (British Columbia).

Another major difference involves physical plants that symbolize Institutes’ connection with learning. The WI in England has Denman College, sitting on its own land. The WI in Canada, particularly Ontario, supports the Macdonald Institute on a traditional college campus in Guelph.

Conclusions from Chapter Four

The Women’s Institutes were a logical place to start an examination of volunteer women’s learning initiatives because they have a firm sense of themselves as a learning organization, and articulate it. They are institutes, not clubs. Members do not see socializing as their major reason for existence. They affect and are affected by formal, nonformal, and informal education. Indeed, they seldom stray from their basic purpose—to educate themselves and other members of society in order to have healthier families and stronger communities.

They are staples of village life in both fact and fiction. Their name is instantly recognized by citizens of Australia, Canada, the UK and much of the rest of the world. Even the United States is becoming aware of Institute efforts, thanks to recent movies and books. Its members were part of the passionate many that did great things for themselves and others—without getting paid for it. Individually determined and sometimes religiously fervent, they took advantage of new economic opportunities and political freedom. They learned to read, and spread literacy in a spectacular manner. They consumed newly-available printed matter indiscriminately. They documented country life down through time in their Tweedsmuir Histories. Their publications revealed the vision of the membership and the determination of the leadership. Their lobbying efforts and activities helped improve their neighborhoods and provinces. They effaced barriers between women in cities and countryside.

Their produce markets are an important source of individual and collective income and are a resource for villagers who search for viable options to take the place of neighborhood shops that have disappeared from the modern landscape. WI emphases on agriculture, horticulture, literacy, and standards for food products have improved country
life. Their magazine and other publications allow members to exchange ideas and keep in touch with institutes in different parts of the world.

The three general purposes of voluntarism of (intellectual growth, recreation, and community-building) are readily apparent in WI actions. This is an important organization in the field of adult education.
CHAPTER FIVE:
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

This chapter continues the examination of all-female volunteer groups, but switches the focus from Canada and the UK to the USA, from rural to urban women, and from housewives to college graduates. Because the American Association of University Women (AAUW) was originated by middle-class white American protestant women with access to higher education, AAUW experience is adequately represented in standard histories of women’s organizations and feminism. For the purposes of this dissertation, a unique and separate nest of background information is not required for readers. The founding, structure, and governance of the Association are outlined at the beginning of the chapter. A discussion of common themes, comments on some personal involvement in the Association, and a superficial comparison of the Women's Institutes and AAUW follow. The chapter is not homogeneous, and features sections of differing sizes.

Founding, Structure, and Growth

AAUW is another of the many women’s organizations serving an adult educational role that grew out of women’s expanded participation and influence in formal education (Rachal 9). Its ideal member might be described as what Wildavsky (1992) called “. . . a person committed to certain modes of problem-solving” (382).

For many members of AAUW, however, problem-solving often takes a back seat to the social purpose of the organization. These members feel that education and service to the community are good, but sharing food and friendship is more important (personal knowledge). At one study group in Fort Walton Beach (Florida), the president introduced the topic of obtaining a mini-grant from the state. An elderly retired naval officer and nurse heard her and asked loudly, “Why is she talking business? We came to eat!” (personal knowledge).

Not all older AAUW members have narrowed their focus to exclude research and lobbying initiatives. Many of them retain a siege mentality, recalling battles for suffrage or the Equal Rights Amendment. One determined member, for example, brought forward a resolution in support of the previously defeated ERA every year at the Florida State
Convention until her recent death. The continued existence of such active members and
the number of opportunities for participation in Association programs belie the
contention that older people are “traditionally less likely to participate in adult education”
(Rachal 4).

AAUW unites “graduates of regionally accredited educational institutions in order
to promote equity, education, intellectual growth, individual worth, and the development
of opportunities for women and girls” (Fort Walton Beach [FWB], Florida Yearbook
2000-2001, n.p.), and was formed from the merger of three separate groups of female
college graduates (Ely 24, Levine 6-14).

The first of these groups, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), was
established in 1882 by 65 women (Ely 23). The second, the Western Association of
Collegiate Alumnae (WACA), was formed in 1883 in Chicago. The third group, the
Southern Association of College Women (SACW), was founded in Knoxville,
Tennessee, in 1903 (Ely 24, Levine 8). SACW and ACA were “most friendly and
cooperative in their relations,” in spite of remaining separate for two decades (Levine
24). ACA and WACA merged in 1889; SACW was included later. The new AAUW name
became official in 1921 (Ely 13).

AAUW is comprised of the Association, the Educational Foundation (EF), and
the Legal Advocacy Fund (LAF). The Educational Foundation gives grants of varying
kinds to foreign and domestic scholars. The Legal Advocacy Fund was established in
1981, to aid women seeking legal redress for alleged sexual harassment. Two other major
funds were established to support specific populations. The Eleanor Roosevelt Fund was
established in 1988 to support public school girls and their teachers in the study of
science and mathematics. The Coretta Scott King Fund was established in 1969 to
support minority women scholars. AAUW has had permanent United Nations observer
status since 1946, and its members automatically belong to the International Federation
of University Women (formed in 1919). Susan Levine reports that about fifty years ago,

More than half [of self-selected AAUW members] reported full- or part-
time paid employment, mostly in the traditionally female professions of
teaching, social work, and health care. AAUW members were well-

119
educated, with one-third holding at least one advanced degree. They also
joined AAUW for the long run; 37 percent of the members had belonged
to AAUW for more than ten years. The median income of AAUW
families was $6,750 per year, indicating a solid middle-class membership
base. (85)

In spite of a possible financial edge over some other volunteer organizations,
AAUW members do almost all the work (answering hotline questions, serving on the
board, and lobbying, etc.). There are few paid positions (Levine 7). There is a definite
hierarchical structure, and certain decision-making powers are reserved to every level of
the management chain (Ely and Chappell 25), so the organization is not flat. For ease of
operation, added member input, and adherence to democratic principles, the Association
has divided the country into regions. Each region is made up of several states. Each state
has individual status within the region and holds a yearly convention. The states are
further divided into individual branches.

Regular branch members pay local (branch), state, and Association dues.
Branches meet nine times per year to conduct business, but combine business meetings
with other activities of their choice. Members-at-Large pay only Association dues. Dual
members pay local, state, and Association dues, plus whatever other local and state dues
are required. Many dual members reside in northern states during the warmer months and
Florida in the winter. Friends-of-the-Branch members pay only local dues. Student
affiliates pay half as much as regular members and are not voting members. Upon
completion of a two-year degree, student affiliates are eligible for full membership.

The Association holds a national convention every other year. (In alternate years,
regional conventions are held.) At these conventions, officers are elected, new AAUW
publications are discussed, friendships are renewed, and policy changes are voted on.
AAUW conventions and other efforts to provide learning and social events for members
and the larger community are often mirrored by those of other American organizations.
BPW (Business and Professional Women), NACWC (National Association of Colored
Women’s Clubs), ABWA (Associated Business Women of America), NFNW (National

120
Federation of Negro Women), and the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) are some of these groups.

One of the most striking examples of this duplicated effort is a recurring one. When war is declared, barriers between women’s organizations come down. They all support the military members, though they may disagree with the war itself (Clarke n.p.). In the past, members of women's groups raised money for the war effort, packed boxes for soldiers overseas, nursed the sick and wounded, worked on the assembly line, and kept farms going. Ignoring philosophical differences, they downplayed domestic problems. After the war, however, AAUW and the rest of the volunteer force returned home to focus on economic, political, and cultural problems. For AAUW, problems included the lack of a centrally-located headquarters building (Ely 24, Levine 12-14). The Association occupied its first building in 1919.

AAUW and its sister organizations reflect the shifting strata of American society. Policies change as the global economy and civil rights laws change behavior. One example of a policy change involved membership. When Mary Ely and Eve Chappell wrote about American women's groups as adult education initiatives in 1938, AAUW had no policy of including minorities. Current policy states, “In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class” (FWB Yearbook, various years).

This constant shifting of membership rules and other policies is common in voluntarism. Other commonalities include emphases on improved health (mental and physical), better schools (at all levels), greater access to modern technology, wider opportunities for underrepresented groups in traditionally white male occupations, and continuing education for the membership. The general themes first examined below partake of the three purposes of voluntarism mentioned earlier (education, service, and political activism) and of changes in culture and economics. Selected subordinate themes are also teased out and highlighted further on.

Common Themes

*Education*
Every AAUW member has completed or is involved in a program of higher (formal) education. They all help raise money to support the educational efforts of others through their dues and fund-raising events. They continue their own learning endeavors—linking formal, nonformal and informal initiatives.

Informal education is an important product of State, Regional and Association conventions. Members in attendance become familiar with problems and accomplishments of other members and branches, polish their knowledge of rules for running a meeting, and hone their public speaking skills. They also participate in nonformal learning, through collaborative discussions structured by Association curricula, through listening to speeches given by experts in various subjects, and through attending panel discussions.

One exemplary AAUW conference was held in 1974 in Washington, DC, and featured addresses by several professional women. Carol I. Polowy, an attorney and Legal Head of the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL), Congresswoman Patsy Mink, and M. Elizabeth Tidball of George Washington University (56) were among those leaders. All three emphasized the power of cooperative effort. Polowy said, “. . . women’s groups will have to prod and push and publicize those agencies which show lack of concern [about discrimination]” (20). [Emphasis added. PJM]

Mink called on Association members and other individuals in the audience to participate in the battle for women’s equal opportunity. She commented, “At all levels of our educational system, all kinds of insidious ways perpetuate the notion of the inferior female” (13). She also said, “If women can’t comprehend the fact that we are all in this together, and that everybody is chipping away at this business of discrimination in whatever way possible, then we’re never going to make it!” (11)

Tidball, too, acknowledged the power of collective action when she noted that “. . . a critical mass of adult women role models for graduate students somewhat ex cathedra and in absentia, outside established university procedures . . .” (58) had already been helpful to female graduate students. Tidball believed women in the community at large could be bound to clerks, faculty, and scholars (61) through women’s studies programs. She offered several ways that groups of women or individuals might work to develop
systems and countercultures; they could “. . . join the enemy camp or emulate the male,” operate on the periphery to build a separate identity, or “. . . work with other groups, to form coalitions” (61).

Other speakers included Linda S. Hartsock, who was then Director of Program for AAUW, Martha Kent, and Bernice Sandler (later said to be the Mother of Title IX). Hartsock said “. . . the informal or second-order systems in her [the graduate student’s] everyday life will determine whether or not she makes it through the maze of graduate education” (62), implying she felt the Association could provide a safety net of educational and emotional support. Martha Kent spoke about mutual goal-setting (42), and Bernice Sandler implied that AAUW and other women’s groups should focus on elimination of barriers to equal admissions. Sandler called for continual monitoring of any efforts that were supposedly aimed at equity in the admissions process of formal schooling (31).

Each of these women had had the benefit of formal schooling, and was addressing an audience that had had the benefit of formal schooling. They spoke about women who were seeking further formal schooling. But they used nonformal educational channels to get their message across. There were no continuing education or higher education credits awarded for attendance at the convention’s lectures.

There is no college credit associated with participation in branch meetings of AAUW either. In Fort Walton Beach and/or Niceville-Valparaiso (Florida), branches usually feature a speaker, a meal or light refreshments, and the conducting of business. The subjects covered by the speakers reflect the interests of the particular branch’s members and the availability of persons prepared to address a group for little or no compensation. Said another way, this group is typical. Sociology, economics, demographics and politics affect it and its members in an idiosyncratic manner (Rachal 4). Volusia County (Florida), for example, has many members who are retirees. One of its popular discussion topics is women’s health problems after menopause. Tallahassee (Leon County, Florida) is, in many instances, more stereotypically intellectual. It has branch activities, which are informed by graduates, students, and instructors of nearby Florida State University (FSU), Tallahassee Community College (TCC), Keizer
[Business] College, Lively Technical Center, and Barry University. Tallahassee members are often at the heart of AAUW’s most intense lobbying efforts, because state legislators are in the state capital. Tallahassee’s AAUW was founded in 1923, nearly half a century before FWB’s, which had no colleges in the area until much later.

AAUW is, in addition to conventions and branch meetings, involved in knowledge-building through its outsourced reports. The Association funds research by professional scholars. This research is then edited, printed, publicized, and disseminated through AAUW channels. Local branches receive one copy of each new report and are asked to share the information with members and the media. Members buy further copies for themselves or neighborhood libraries. When the 1992 report, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, explained how formal K-12 educational settings hampered the achievement of female students in various ways, many professional educators re-evaluated their teaching methods. Other twentieth-century reports have dealt with sexual harassment in the schools, girls’ involvement with computers and other technology, multicultural awareness, and problems of women returning to education in mid-life.

The first of the nineteenth-century reports that can be attributed to AAUW was accomplished in the first years of ACA operation, before the merger. Members inspected sanitary conditions in the District of Columbia schools and presented their findings to congress—educating both themselves and elected officials (Levine 11-12). Another report appeared in 1885 and disproved the Victorian Era contention that women’s reproductive health would be harmed by the rigors of higher education. Health, schools and the political process combined to make this report part of the service portion of the Association, as well as part of the educational section. The ACA also established a Committee on Educational Legislation in 1898 (combining political activism and education), and lobbied for equity in the US Civil Service in the early 1900s wherein classifications and compensation were rigged along gender lines. The earliest members of AAUW operated in a more hands-on manner than current members do.

Each AAUW program combines education, activism, and service. Each mirrors Kasworm and Londener’s three broad categories: “Subject-oriented adult learning (knowledge acquisition is primary); consumer-oriented adult learning (learner needs are
primary); and emancipatory or empowering adult learning (transforming learner perspectives through critical reflection)” (235).

Today’s AAUW programs, through which individual members or branches enlighten themselves and others include: *Signposts: A Guide to Creating Gender-fair Schools* (gender bias and discrimination issues); *Tech Check* (computer use and access to technology for female students at all educational levels); *Transitions Conferences* (support for older women, returning to school after raising their children, etc.); *Woman-to-Woman Community Dialogues* (self-esteem and diversity meetings); *Math, Science, and Technology Programs for Girls* (reflecting the focus of the Eleanor Roosevelt Fund—support for teachers, students and mentors); *Adelante!* (multicultural awareness and action); *Sister-to-Sister Summits* (intellectual awareness and emotional empowerment meetings for school girls and their mentors); *Education and Equity: Choices for a Changing World* (strategies for dealing with the challenges of the new century).

Each of these programs fit the three categories Mary Ely proposed in the 1937 examination of adult education and women’s groups she co-authored with Eve Chappell. She noted, “Three kinds of endeavor . . . immediately suggest themselves: improving education itself; multiplying opportunities to obtain education; and applying the intelligence developed through education to the conduct of human affairs” (25).

Ely and Chappell divided groups into “Man’s World” and “Woman’s World” (which Ely said was “arbitrary and artificial” [9]). Chappell wrote about the General Federation of Women’s Clubs as part of the “Woman’s World” and emphasized service instead of intellectual empowerment. Ely wrote about AAUW in “Man’s World” (xi). Her chapters were “Women Have Minds of Their Own” and “Women Use Their Minds.”

AAUW’s reports on health and sanitation, gender bias, and multiculturalism seem meant, as Ely said, to improve education itself. AAUW scholarships and grants support educational opportunity. AAUW educational workshops teach girls and women how to deal with technology, economics, and gender bias. Dividing programs into three kinds of endeavor is arbitrary, but convenient.

The most characteristic direct learning activity in most AAUW branches may be the discussion of books. Fort Walton Beach had two book groups for several years, one
nonformal and one informal. The Great Books curriculum ordered the reading and
discussion of one group; the other was more informal. The Great Books Group met in
homes or in restaurants, but dissolved some years ago. The informal group has proved
more long-lived and still meets at various restaurants once a month. This group does not
read Euripides, Shakespeare, and other classic literature. The books are almost always
newly-published novels, though older works sometimes are championed by an individual
and put on the reading list. Book groups generate an immense allegiance, which Slezak
noted in 1993 and again in 1995. Members of book groups are generally loyal to each
other, to the group, and to authors or particular books and themes. Carol Huber (In Slezak
1993, 3) said, “My book group saved my life.” Paula Zurowski’s book group was started
“... as a place for us to explore women’s issues through our reading of women’s writing.
It was a haven where we could explore our feelings and attitudes toward the changing
roles of women and men without having to apologize, placate, or yield to a man” (26).

The depth of this kind of loyalty was shown in FWB when the Great Books
Group dissolved. Finding the learning community gone, one member dropped out of
AAUW completely and attended the more convenient ABWA meetings instead. Her
loyalty was not to the Association, it was to the learning experience. She used her free
night to go square dancing (personal knowledge).

FWB also had a Great Decisions discussion group that met for years at local
restaurants and a gourmet group. Members who were indifferent to topics covered by the
rigorous Great Decisions (nonformal) curriculum dropped out or did not join in the first
place. Chester I. Barnard’s comments on informal associations embedding themselves in
formal educations might be applied to the study groups that embed themselves in the
Association. Writing in 1938, he said it might not make a difference whether an objective
like insight into political decisions, classical literature, or current novels was ever
achieved or not; “... the discussion [framework] is essential to conversation which is
socially desirable yet the participants may be and frequently are rather indifferent to the
subject itself” (97).

Social Life
The two FWB bridge groups (morning and evening) have been successful for years, illustrating the social purpose of the group. Some members are staying with AAUW just to retain their eligibility (personal communication, Okaloosa County 1996). “AAUW, of course, had always functioned partly as a professional organization, providing recognition for women, and partly as a social center for intellectual stimulation and public service” (Levine 33, 143).

One AAUW member in FWB proves Levine’s words true on a continuing basis, partly through words and partly through actions. She echoed the sentiments of other clubwomen (who said their organization saved her lives): “I was stuck in the house with two little kids and didn’t know anybody” (personal communication 1990). Though she is now a branch past-president and has held other offices, she never forgets those initial years, in which she was quietly happy to just participate in adult activities with other women. A member who lost her husband suddenly and received good support from AAUW, she has become one upon whom other recently widowed persons can depend.

Another characteristic of club life is an involvement with food. Branches use local restaurants as meeting places, with churches or members’ homes as alternate sites. Some of the branches go to the same restaurant every month; others alternate, learning about new foods and menus. FWB’s gourmet group was built almost entirely on the “we came to eat” principle, though members did learn about cultures and calories in a distinctive manner. Husbands were included, and members still speak of the good food and the fun they had in a nostalgic tone. The continuation of this group was hampered by the branch’s not owning a building in which to hold the dinners, which were too unwieldy for private homes, and it was dissolved.

The list of meetings for branch meetings shows a reliance on restaurants and catering. There have been fewer pot luck dinners held in members’ homes and churches as time passed. One reason for this is the aging of the membership and subsequent downsizing of living quarters. Another consideration is the burgeoning number of restaurants. Retirees and members spend their money in different ways than they did when their children were young or when they were working full-time. FWB meets, almost always, in restaurants on Saturday morning. Valparaiso/Niceville, a few miles
north, meets in nearby restaurants or at Okaloosa-Walton College. The latter group is more likely to have meetings during the week or in the evening. This difference originally reflected the demographics of the group. FWB had a preponderance of teachers, who were not available during the week at lunch time and who were often supervising school extra-curricular activities or grading papers at night.

The social purpose of organized groups and the embedding of smaller groups in larger, more formal ones, are both shown by the Women of Color Caucus. This group also has a strongly activist purpose as well, lobbying for nomination of minority women in positions of authority within the larger group. The barriers between activist, social, and intellectual aspects of this caucus are arbitrary, just as those between the man’s world and women’s world Ely and Chappell proposed. The caucus provides a voice for previously-excluded groups.

Activism and Service

A District of Columbia tour guide glibly announced that a building we were passing was home to a lobbying group—it was the headquarters of AAUW (personal communication 2001). In spite of his attitude, however, the Association’s service to the community (local, state, nation and world) is not limited to exerting influence on business and political leaders. It serves its own members (who may or may not be business or political leaders) as well. This personal service is often deemed educational, and not counted as political activism. For the purposes of this discussion, participation of any kind is activist. The more a member participates in hands-on activities of the group, the more she moves along the continuum from observer status to administrator status.

The most basic [activist] decision is whether to belong or not belong—pay one’s dues or not. Potential members regulate their participation by walking away from AAUW recruiters or staying to listen. Assessing personal time, inclination and finances, members next decide on their level of involvement. Some participants simply write a check to the Association and become Members-at-Large (MALs). This option is exercised by women who have demanding jobs with long hours and mandated travel, want to take advantage of the travel and insurance group rates, appreciate Association publications, wish to receive Association publications, or wish to list AAUW on their
résumés to establish their bona fides (personal knowledge). MALs are not involved at local, state, or committee level. They have no energy or time for luncheons, book discussion groups, or even once-a-year conventions. They may also have young children and/or hope to hide their membership from disapproving colleagues or family members by avoiding the branch meetings (personal knowledge). Their level of direct participation is negligible.

Friends of the Branch belong only to the local group, do not have degrees and do not see any higher education in their future, may be very active in fund-raising and other committee work, and are often extremely valuable to local branches. FWB Friends’ dues are $12.00, which cover the printing and mailing costs of the local newsletter. They are not responsible for state or Association dues. Friends share the outlook of other AAUW members, have friends in the branch, and do not have voting privileges. Some branches do not offer this adjunct status.

If AAUW were examined as a truly participatory organization, using Mansell and Rankin’s 1983 criteria, its individual members or integrated groups of members would have to be responsible for a complete job. In business, this completion might mean a group of workers would follow an automobile down the assembly line from blueprints and framework to hubcaps and polish. In AAUW, gathering, sorting, and selling books to fund local scholarships might be viewed as a complete job. Such efforts could, however, also be viewed as fragmented effort, because few branches individually could fund an international scholar’s grant for study in the US. MALs or members deferring to the attitude that Association (national) opinions and activities are paramount, might see local fundraising as a fragmented effort. With the centrist mindset, an individual member might even deem small branch awards to local scholars to be meaningless. Members committed to local-level achievements, however, might see support of scholars at the grassroots as the major reason for AAUW’s existence. FWB gives small monetary awards to K-12 winners in Okaloosa and Walton County Science Fair each year, have given at least one scholarship to a female graduate of Okaloosa-Walton Community College every year except one, a continuing education scholarship if funds are available,
and other scholarships as money has been available. These small amounts are valuable to the recipients and strengthen the infrastructure of local communities.

There is always a tension between members who have a local focus and members with national or international focus. Every member has an opinion about where the money will do the most good. Another source of tension arises from the pull between members who prefer to participate in the global economy through international scholars and members who think American WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) populations, minority students and math or science teachers should receive our support. Discussions about how much locally-generated money should be forwarded to Association headquarters are often rancorous, but there is no continual battle. Disagreements are settled by the vote. Members who consistently disagree with AAUW policies and practices may switch their allegiance to BPW, ABWA, a sorority or local garden club—or to square dancing, as the book group dropout above did.

Recruitment and retention of members are necessary to organizational viability. Potential members are recruited through social, intellectual, or activist links—teachers inviting former students, sorority sisters inviting other sorority members, Republican women inviting new neighbors, etc. At every level, differences in the socio-economic status of members are downplayed by policy, because AAUW is a democratic organization. Still, more affluent members make for more affluent branches, and branches receive status by raising certain amounts of money. Branches are also given agreed-upon status by increasing their membership or implementing the greatest number of AAUW policies in local communities, etc. (personal knowledge). Deshler and Hagan noted, “Participatory is an old idea with a new name. Cooperative extension agents in North America advocated its use in the first part of this [the twentieth] century” and say, “Participatory research . . . begins with learners or participants who engage in their own inquiry for the sake of empowerment” (153).

The comments of Deshler and Hagen both echo Ewart (below), and illustrate the way that identical volunteer efforts can be described as educational, activist, or social. For example, putting AAUW research reports into area libraries that would not otherwise have had them is both education and activism. Ewart said, “No principle is more central
to the adult education literature than the importance of people’s participation in the
design and implementation of their own learning experiences . . . Instead of being viewed
as objects of studies or the beneficiaries of a developmental process, the people became
the subjects of study and the initiators of change” (94).

The activities of AAUW and other area organizations might also be seen as
educational or service-oriented. When Hostile Hallways was published in 1993, FWB
and the Niceville/Valparaiso branch joined BPW, NOW, and several other organizations
to discuss the report amongst themselves, then with school administrators who indicated
an interest, and formed the Coalition on Sexual Harassment (COSH). Some members
saw this cooperation as akin to support of military efforts in wartime (personal
knowledge). COSH provided panel discussions for teachers and students in various
neighborhood schools to disseminate the new Okaloosa County policy for reporting
sexual harassment, to publicize topics in Hostile Hallways, and to revisit concepts
explored in Shortchanging Girls. . .

Voice

Various AAUW reports reveal member commitment to voice, which is a staple of
feminist discussions, consciousness-raising groups, and learning. Members make their
voices heard by serving as board members, serving on nominating committees, and
participating in discussions of branch business during monthly meetings. At local, state,
and national levels, candidates for office can be nominated from the floor, by voice. After
being accepted as a viable candidate, some members wage high profile campaigns to get
their message out to the general membership. They use their voice to gain the
opportunity to use their voice on a higher level.

The Individual Member Survey is another important voice—one source of data
for the officers and administration in the national headquarters. Members prioritize their
personal concerns and goals for the Association (Title IX, women and technology, LAF,
etc.), and identify new problems for consideration. Their voice—in this case formulated
as survey input--goes straight to Association headquarters in Washington. Branch
surveys have been used to indicate group consensus.
The research reports funded by AAUW and completed by other academics provide another voice of the organization. This voice is heard through data that is printed, publicized, and disseminated through AAUW channels. In a sense, the copy of each new AAUW report that comes to individual branches brings the Association voice from national headquarters to the grassroots. Board and branch members, buying further copies for themselves or neighborhood libraries and sending out media releases for their immediate area, bring the AAUW voice to their communities.

Not until the middle of the twentieth century had AAUW actively sought members from groups not well represented in the organization—young people, the disabled, minorities, college students, and men. When the organization became more diverse, however, many more points of view had to be entertained. The Women of Color Caucus provided an organized voice within the larger organization. At a national convention, held in Orlando, the caucus implicitly excluded most AAUW members, running counter to AAUW public policy. The comments against traditional members ran strong. A black woman deliberately turned her back on a white woman on the next chair, shutting her out of the discussion and relegating her to bystander status. The next day the same black woman spoke from the stage about creating “comfort zones” which would make members of her branch feel comfortable. Like all of us, she changed her personal voice according to the audience. In a group of only minority women, she shunned people who were not “Women of Color.” The next day, in a mixed group on stage, she joined arms with Caucasians and sang “We Are Family” (personal knowledge).

The caucus stimulated the intellect of both those in the charmed circle and those excluded, thereby fulfilling the knowledge-building purpose of voluntarism. It was a political organization with an organization, thereby fulfilling the activist purpose of voluntarism. If John Rachal is correct in believing that “fostering of social tolerance and interdependence” is a major social responsibility of adult education (6), however, the caucus does not appear to have been fulfilling its social responsibility to the larger group.

Vision

Each individual has a vision for the future. Most of these visions concern making the world better for our children and grandchildren. Organizations also have visions.
AAUW’s vision concerns public life without gender bias and sexual harassment. Members work to make this vision a reality according to their personal priorities. They facilitate equality efforts through scholarships. One local scholarship winner in the 1990s was the Okaloosa County First-Year Teacher of the Year. On another occasion, a mature woman spoke to the branch about her joy at receiving a continuing education scholarship. She was already involved in an undergraduate program, but had exhausted her funds. The family had always agreed they would provide money for their daughter to attend college. The daughter had just graduated from high school. Since the family money was earmarked for the daughter, the mother would have had to drop out. This scholarship (a) eased the strain on a family’s finances, (b) allowed two women to work toward economic independence and intellectual empowerment, (c) highlighted the AAUW commitment to higher education and to women, and (d) allowed members to hear, first-hand, about a mother’s vision for the future. AAUW’s institutional vision for the future was congruent with the scholarship winner’s.

My ideal AAUW would involve strong links between older members and younger members. As president, I hoped for younger members who would call on and otherwise support older members. I also hoped more experienced members would take student affiliates under their wing. The closest the branch came to fulfillment of my vision was when student affiliates stepped in to plan monthly programs after the Program Vice President quit in the middle of her tenure. When a permanent replacement was found, the collaboration was over (personal knowledge). Other members did not envision cross-generational relationships as important.

Another part of my vision for AAUW was a strengthening of communication between neighboring branches. Small annual regional leadership workshops, called “clusters,” promoted this kind of communication, enabling the mutual interaction and tolerance of which Rachal spoke (6). The Tallahassee, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville/Valparaiso, and Pensacola branches made up the northwest Florida cluster. The idea of the clusters was congruent with my vision of the Association. According to an unpublished working paper, clusters were meant to (1) increase grassroots involvement, (2) increase visibility and opportunities to meet local needs by forming community-
cluster partnership, (3) strengthen branches through a mutual support system, (4) identify and develop leaders, (5) use time, money and members creatively and effectively, (6) encourage geographic cohesiveness, (7) promote diversity within the state, and (8) provide a cost-effective state management structure.

The clusters were effective recruiting tools. Prospective members could drive the necessary few miles and pay to help cover costs of lunch and printing for a cluster. Few prospects, however, were so dedicated to becoming members they would drive to a state convention hundreds of miles away. Clusters enabled prospective members to meet state board members and ordinary people from other branches. In spite of these meaningful aims, changes in the economy and in the philosophy of the state leadership brought the clusters to a close in the late 1990s at a state convention after extensive debate and a public vote. The vote left neighboring branches the right to cooperate with “other groups and organizations to promote common interests, if such is in accord with the policies and bylaws of the State and the Association” (unpublished 1994 working paper), but issued no mandate for them to do so.

Whatever their activities, AAUW members want the organization to be remembered. A regard for history is, paradoxically, part of the vision for the future. One previous president of the FWB branch wrote:

The major fundraising events of the 1976-77 year were the Gourmet Tasting Fair and Auction held on December 4th and the Annual Book Sale on April 23rd. The Legal Advisory component of AAUW supported the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The dues for the branch at this time were $17.00, State division dues are $2.00, and branch dues are $5.50. The study groups at this time were bridge, couples bridge, gourmet, literary, multi-interest, and music. The new and returning members equaled 34.

In 1991-92, a little over twenty years later, there were 78 members at the time the yearbook was printed. Yearly dues had been raised to $43.00. Great Decisions and Planet Awareness study groups had been added. The list of featured speakers that year showed an interest in the military, in books, and in multiculturalism. Speakers were Major Rhonda Cornum (a returned POW), Woody Skinner (author), Rear Admiral Louise
C. Wilmot (Vice Chief of Naval Education and Training at NAS Pensacola), Sue Straughn (WEAR anchorwoman), T. Patterson Maney (an Okaloosa County judge), and Ray Oldenburg (author of The Great Good Place). The major fundraising events were a doll show, a bake sale, and a used book sale. Six members went to the state convention; the branch “adopted” a highway and held a Tasting Fair in November. December’s program was a fashion show. The two minor histories were sent to the archives at the state level. Every branch president is urged to provide such a yearly record. The central state archives in Tallahassee are overflowing (personal communication, Orlando 1994).

Personal Experience and AAUW

AAUW members provide support to each other in times of stress. After one member’s husband died, and before she was even back from the funeral home, where she had been making the arrangements for the memorial service, two other members of AAUW had been to her house and left food and messages of condolence (personal experience 2005). She was not alone in this experience. Desiree [pseudonym], another widow, originally liked the elderly members for their wisdom, but came to know them for their compassion. After her husband’s heart attack, she became much more aware of the social aspects of the group. Desiree said some of her most precious recollections of the Association were of the phone calls, visits, and emotional support she received from other members who had also lost their husbands. “People called who had never spoken to me before,” she said (personal communication).

AAUW was not Desiree’s only volunteer organization. She had also belonged to a local African-American group. “I worked with them for several years, but it seemed like the same people always took care of the business. There just aren’t enough worker bees. I didn’t leave the organization. The organization sort of left us” (personal communication). When asked about ways to improve AAUW, she suggested, “More people, maybe. Like Friends of the Branch. There are a lot of groups that have the same problems. You get burnt out.”

The year Desiree was the editor of the branch newsletter, writing and disseminating it were her responsibilities. The newsletter’s construction required a combination of nonformal training and formal schooling. She was proud of being the
editor, but “it was work . . . Who would ever have thought that I would be doing *The Brevities*?”

Bonnie Jean [pseudonym] is another AAUW member who reported belonging to multiple organizations, including AAUW branches and the Tallahassee Society of Association Executives. She spends about three hours a month on the Association, and dropped out of other organizations years ago because of high dues and lack of interesting programs. She dislikes the way AAUW dues are going up and the intermittent lack of organization—meetings that don’t start on time and tasks that are not completed—but does like group interaction and working on collaborative projects. She believes she has been instrumental in persuading a few new members to join, estimates the oldest Tallahassee member as “in her nineties,” and says about fifteen members attend general meetings. There are few younger women in the branch, she says, but the membership numbers have remained stable since she joined.

She was recruited through social contact. She had belonged to AAUW in another state, so when a friend in Tallahassee asked her to join, she was eager to do so. A likely prospect—she was new to the community and looking for ways to network. She has achieved some of her goals, and still has some of the same desires she had when she joined the group. She hopes AAUW will be most known for its efforts in equity and education for women and girls. In spite of her noting a political and educational component to her vision, the social purpose keeps her involved with the two organizations she named. “I continue to participate in both groups because I have relationships with specific people. If those people were to leave, I would also consider leaving.”

When I joined AAUW, I was also new to the area. I was invited to at least three meetings before I went. Like Jill Ker Conway, I felt guilty when I wrote a check for myself instead of my children or house. I had doubts about the worth of membership. Like Faith Nelms in the previous chapter, I found many new friends. Like Betty Jerman, I was amazed to hear about the things that husbands said to their wives. I found my problems were different in degree, not in type. And, like other AAUW members, my pattern of involvement escalated.
The first AAUW meeting I attended was a classic networking session in a community church. Officers gave short prepared speeches; members offered homemade cookies and coffee. A number of elderly women briskly worked the room, sporting badges that showed they were in college during World War I. Dr. Fannie Fern Davis, who was in her fiftieth year as an AAUW member at that time, was among these women. After meeting her, I went from being curious about an organization the librarian belonged to, to feeling I could face my problems. If she and her colleagues had endured the prejudices and barriers of the male educational establishment when they were young, I could deal with modern-day Florida.

I found the luncheon conversations fast-paced and full of information--almost like consciousness-raising groups, and it was liberating to use the vocabulary that went with my education. I soon joined the evening book group. A former branch president told me I would have to update my wardrobe when I was elected president, but I felt at home. I had found a space. No one told me I had parked my car in the wrong place.

My membership in the Association gave me something that I had not had before—the chance to point out, find humor in, and sometimes acknowledge lack of malice in the foibles of men. On military bases, in church, in school, and on the farm, men ran the show. There was no laughing at the minister, God, or the general. Suddenly, however, I was part of a group in which the attitudes of husbands, fathers, and other men were fair game. One member told how her newly-retired husband with time on his hands alphabetized her spices in the kitchen and presented her with an agenda for yearly, monthly and daily cleaning.

AAUW offered me a chance to see my husband’s behavior as part of a general paternalistic pattern. Like Betty Jerman, I found attitudes of husbands, fathers and other men were a “firm thread” (162) in discussions and humor of clubwomen. Women in extension clubs I had visited as a child or women’s organizations I was part of as an adult might have laughed at the actions of their husbands and fathers, but they didn’t laugh at them in front of the kids. They preserved the authoritarian aspect of men. Jerman articulated my experience: “At coffeebreaks, conferences, and during railway station
pauses for connections off the main track, I have heard maddening stories of male arrogance or thoughtlessness” (162).

My learning activities associated with AAUW have had John Rachal’s fluid boundaries (4). I taught classical literature in the university setting, but also read classical literature and discussed it in our AAUW book group, linking formal and nonformal education. I read reports from AAUW because the Educational Foundation sponsored their production. I reviewed Roberts’ Rules of Order so I could adequately participate in general and board meetings. I received specific information about lobbying in Florida, running for office, organizing AAUW-specific conventions and events, and mentoring at leadership conferences and state conventions. I taught workshops, served on panels, created teaching materials, wrote the newsletter, set up and monitored a website, and read new AAUW publications. I recruited over thirty people at one time or another, in one capacity or another, of one race or another. Our first black FWB branch president was one of my former students and a former student affiliate.

AAUW provided opportunities to mentor younger women and college students, to add to my knowledge of recent and classic literature at the book group discussions, to physically explore the state of Florida and the Southeastern United States, to become acquainted with other volunteer organizations in the panhandle (NOW, Destin Women’s Club, BPW, etc.), and to build a network of acquaintances and friends that have enriched the last fifteen years of my life.

I served the Fort Walton Beach branch as president, secretary, diversity chair, newsletter editor, and program vice-president at various times. I represented the branch and the cluster on the state board. I attended clusters and led several workshops, attended several state conventions, and led workshops in visioning and writing of history at two of those conventions. I served as diversity chair and newsletter editor for several years.

Comparing the Women’s Institutes and AAUW

AAUW and the WI differ in their requirement for educational credentials. AAUW has attempted to attract younger members by accepting student affiliates for the past few years, and they recently voted to accept graduates of accredited two-year colleges as voting members. A degree or matriculation in an institution of higher learning
is required for the various kinds of membership. The WI also struggles to recruit underrepresented populations, including young women and urban dwellers. The WI does not require its members to have higher education experience.

AAUW has accepted male members for a number of years. Erland Lee, who helped found the WI, seems to have been its solitary male member. Both the AAUW and the WI lobby governmental agencies, but the WI is not seen as comprised of lobbyists, as the AAUW often is (personal knowledge).

Members of the early AAUW and the WI both faced gender-specific restrictions, such as those in the “cult of true womanhood” (Butler 2). Members of the WI seem to have been among those whose public values were at odds with “this rigorous standard” (2) and who “ignored the cult’s dicta, intent on actively salvaging as much of their own culture as possible within the context of an even stronger white Protestant America” (2). Rural women, blue-color workers, and minority women would have been lumped in with the WI by members of AAUW who might have felt that “single definition of the female experience” was valid. On the other hand, women who were AAUW members were college graduates, which indicates they had rejected some, if not all, of the cult’s tenets.

The WI focuses on homes, rural neighborhoods, and leadership development of citizens (Scarborough 1953, 240-241). Home and Country regularly emphasizes cooking, sewing, and other homemaking activities, though it also covers political and economic issues. AAUW, on the other hand, is concerned more with bettering traditional [formal] schooling more than neighborhoods. No member of the Association mentioned upgrading housewifely skills as a major focus. Both organizations foster individual intellectual growth. Each organization has study groups of various kinds. Each organization is divided into small local units. Each organization has been called both conservative and radical. Each belongs to an international group (Levine 6, 24, 39), AAUW to IFUW (formed in 1919) and the WI to ACCW (formed in 1933). IFUW was formed a decade earlier than ACCW. The gap in time may mirror class differences (with college graduates having the edge over farm wives who had little opportunity or time for schooling), may be due to North American pragmatism, or may simply reflect the conditions of the roads.
in the various locations. Both are agencies of extension education—“learning which takes place outside the traditional institutions of the school and college” (Brickman 667).

Both organizations have involved an educated elite, such as Deshler and Hagan (153) spoke about, but the numbers are very different. Only a few of the early WI leaders were involved with higher education, whereas every member of AAUW has a degree. Some village Institutes were nominally headed by royalty, but no AAUW branches had the Queen Mother as a member. AAUW elitism came partly about through “the process of information gathering and analysis by researchers [that] leads to learning and skill building (creation of knowledge) on the part of an educated elite, who control the dissemination of findings on behalf of organizations they choose to benefit” (153).

Both organizations originally used protestant prayers, though they were ostensibly secular organizations. FWB replaced the religious invocation with inspirational readings from a variety of sources about ten years ago. The WI has not changed its rituals. Religious differences are usually quashed. One Catholic president told the board she would not work actively for abortion, in spite of the fact that AAUW has a pro-choice stance. “If we just have to do that,” she said, “I will resign. There is enough that we can agree on” (board communication, board meeting).

Conclusions from Chapter Five

This chapter examined ways AAUW is concerned with the improvement of formal and nonformal education for women and girls. Formal education is enriched in several ways. College and university students from the United States and elsewhere receive direct support through grants and scholarships. Instructors and students who are in litigation about problematic gender issues, including sexual harassment, receive direct monetary help for lawyers and court costs through the Legal Advocacy Fund. FWB and other branches award cash to students at various levels for academic achievement. High school and middle school science fair winners receive such awards. Members often make provision for AAUW in their wills.

Nonformally, AAUW reaches members and the general public through funding printing, and disseminating research reports. Great Books and Great Decisions reading lists and study guides are easily as demanding as formal education courses, but no
diplomas are earned in these discussion groups. They are, therefore, nonformal educational initiatives.

Informal education within AAUW involves learning vocabulary and behaviors that are common to business meetings, conventions, and lobbying efforts. Informal and nonformal education obtained are blended in Transitions Conferences, Woman-to-Woman Community Dialogues, and Sister-to-Sister Summits that use AAUW sources

Personal experience, interviews, informal conversations, AAUW working papers, books that focus on the Association, media reports, and press releases prove the value of the AAUW experience for members, students, and the community. Comparing and contrasting the WI and AAUW proved to be an effective way of highlighting the unique qualities of each organization, yet illustrated commonalities. The following chapter will show again how study, social and activist components are blended in volunteer organizations, and how barriers between formal, informal, and nonformal education are penetrated.
CHAPTER SIX:
WOMEN OF COLOR AND CLUB LIFE
IN THE UNITED STATES

Actress and comedienne Whoopi Goldberg (1997) wrote, “You couldn’t always trust the history books. They told a diluted truth, a truth by committee . . . They didn’t always get the story right, especially when it came to our nonwhite history” (272).

Chapter Six concerns historical stereotyping (Davis 30-70; Smith & Wilson1999, ix; White 88). I intended to write about as much data as possible because “so much has been missing” (Smith & Wilson xviii). College president Vera King Farris said, “Sometimes it is difficult to determine accurately whether the motivation of a specific group’s action is racist, sexist, or some other ‘___ist’” (qtd. in Walton 114).

Eleanor Holmes Norton said, “Some subjects are so complex, so unyielding of facile insight that it will not do to think about them in the ordinary way. Thus, the new crop of literature concerning women . . . has inspired me much, but less than the great black poet, Gwendolyn Brooks, who writes for me and about me” (353).

I explored general information, detailed some specific accomplishments of organized black women, and highlighted traditional African-American organizations and newer groups. I got subjective information from friends and relatives from North Carolina and Nebraska, but I “relied heavily on reading passages from various texts . . . as Gloria Watkins said she did (1984, 111). In my case, the various texts included Watkins’ own writing.

Though there is a growing body of academic work concerning women of color that mediates Euro-Americans hegemony as research norm (Allen, Jacobson & Lomotey 1995), volunteer efforts are still largely undocumented (Smith & Wilson 1999). What Whoopi Goldberg calls “truth by committee” should be revised to include the days of enforced illiteracy, (Gere 1997, Turner 1993), the alternative ways Black people acquired knowledge (Mitchell, Bush and Bush 140), and information retained through the oral tradition.

Many Black men joined whites in the assumption that African-American women had low expectations and would not fantasize about getting a high school diploma or
attending institutions of higher education. Black women’s extension clubs were seen as proper, because all women were tied into domestic science and childcare. The image of organized Black women studying to become better nannies and cooks was good—their learning how to run a more scientific and professional household was not. Baptist men did not like the idea of women organizing and handling their own affairs. With good reason, one women’s group after another turned from simple sewing and cooking lessons to lobbying for temperance, suffrage and other special interests (Murolo 1997).

The associations and federations of Africanadians and African-Americans exhibit the same organizational development and coalescence that appeared in other groups. Details may make groups of African-Americans seem exceptional at first glance, but women’s groups are more similar than different.

Exemplary African-American Leaders in Women’s Voluntarism

The mutually supportive ideas that people of color had inadequate intellectual ability and lacked drive were proved erroneous time after time. Biddy Mason, an ex-slave was a remarkable pioneer. Mason worked as a nurse and bought several houses in California, then used her money to help struggling Black churches, the impoverished, and families that had been wiped out by a flood. Mason died in 1891 (Reiter 213). The first American woman lawyer (of any color) was probably Mary Ann Shadd (Weisenfeld 39; Lerner 1984, 323). Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delany were professionals whose lives were affected by the great migration to the north, the Harlem Renaissance, the push for equal rights, and by formal education. A home economics teacher and a dentist, both Delanys lived to be more than a hundred years old, and influenced several generations of Harlem residents (Hearth xi-xiii).

Fannie Barrier Williams, a leading advocate for the rights of black people and women at the turn of the twentieth century, observed that clubs were only one of “many means for the social uplift of a race [. . .] Among colored women the club is the effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent [. . .]” (in Lerner 1984, 575).

Afro-American women have been left to grope their way unassisted toward a realization of . . . standards of family and social life that are badges of race respectability . . . Certain it is that colored women have been the least known, and the most ill-favored class of women in this country. Thirty-five years ago they
were unsocialized, unclassed, and unrecognized as either maids or matrons. They were simply women whose character and personality excited no interest. If within thirty-five years they have become sufficiently important to be studied apart from the general race problems and have come to be recognized as an integral part of the general womanhood of American civilization, that fact is a gratifying evidence of real progress. (Williams 575)

Other clubwomen and community activists such as Ida B. Wells Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Nannie Rice Burroughs, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Mary Church Terrell provided a wide range of leadership models for rank and file women.

*Lucy Craft Laney: “God didn’t use any different dirt to make me than the first lady of the land”*

A progressive educator and activist, Lucy Craft Laney (1854-1933) was one of ten children born to free black parents (on-line ency, 3-20-03, p.2). Her father (David) bought his freedom twenty years before Lucy was born. She could read and write before she was five, attended missionary high school in Macon, graduated from teacher training at Atlanta University in 1873, and bridled when she found that women couldn’t take classics courses at Atlanta U. (She could translate from Caesar’s Commentaries before she was a teenager). She was involved the early YWCA and YMCA, the Niagara Movement, the National Association of Colored Women, the local NAACP chapter (founded 1918), and started the first kindergarten and nurses training for African-American women in Augusta. She believed in the holistic approach to education, and has been called The Mother of the Children of the People. She founded Haines Institute in Augusta in 1883, using the basement of the Presbyterian Church, and became Haines’ principal. At first, Haines “disseminated rudimentary education,” then grew into a junior college (Williams-Way 1998). By 1912, Haines had 900 students and 34 teachers. Serving as a cultural center for the whole neighborhood, Haines linked formal education and nonformal education through its mentors and other volunteers. Laney’s efforts show again what African-American women have been able to achieve, in spite of a dearth of public funding and lack of support from members of the larger community. Reflecting
both Laney’s holistic approach and an adherence to principles of formal education, Haines Normal and Industrial Institute “attempted to meet the needs of and enhance students from varied backgrounds” (Williams-Way 1998, OCLC 2-21-02).

When Laney’s portrait was hung in the Georgia State Capitol, it was the first time an African-American woman had been so honored.

*Ida B. Wells Barnett: “Always the personal element”*

Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862-1931) was born in Mississippi, the oldest of eight children. When her parents died, she undertook the support and care of her younger siblings. She was a teacher, a journalist, an editor and co-owner of a newspaper. She used that paper to fight lynching, becoming a real thorn in the side of those who supported such violence. While she was attending a convention in New York, she was warned not to return to Memphis because her life might be forfeit. She went to England instead, speaking there against racial prejudice and violence. Back in the United States later, she lived in Chicago, continued her public speaking, and published a record of racially-motivated lynchings in America. When the all-Negro, all-male Tourgee club wanted to hold a Ladies’ Day, but could not get women to attend, Wells filled the house. Asked to “assure them that no man would invade the sacred precincts of the clubhouse during any part of the time the ladies were its guests” (Duster 121), she spoke about the club activities of eastern black women. After she explained how they had improved conditions for all black people, described her visit to England, told about British women’s gatherings, and spelled out what their clubs meant to British women (121), she challenged the Chicago audience to do the same kinds of things. By the following September, three hundred of the women in that audience were meeting weekly and helping associated groups raise money to help prosecute a policeman who had killed a black man (122). They were also learning to lobby city, state and national legislatures (355-365). Barnett took a group of black clubwomen with her to participate in the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. When she was told that black women had to march at the end of the parade, she refused. She waited until the parade was in motion, then stepped off the curb and into place with the appropriate unit as it passed. One of the
founding members of the NAACP, Barnett gave up her career and resigned from club work after the birth of her second son (249-251).

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune

“The true worth of a race must be measured by the character of its womanhood”

South Carolinian Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the school for Negro girls that grew into Bethune-Cookman College years later, was born free in 1875 and died in 1955. The fourteenth child of the seventeen born to former slaves Samuel and Patsy McLeod, she worked in the cotton fields with her family before attending mission schools and seminaries on scholarship. Her parents were determined that their first free child should get an education. Stories about her not becoming a missionary to Africa vary. Some say that after graduating from Moody Bible Institute, she decided Africans in the United States needed help as much as Africans still living in their native countries. Others say that she was turned down for a position overseas. Either way, Africa’s loss was America’s gain—she ultimately was advisor to four presidents. Thanks to her early training, she was no stranger to physical labor and turned her considerable energy to the task of enabling Black women and men for the rest of her life. Aside from starting her modest school for little girls with some packing crates and $1.50 on land that had been a dump [a tip], she served as president of the NACW, founded the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), was a major player in American club life over all, and worked as a member of Roosevelt’s informal “black cabinet.” She was a consultant to the U.S. Secretary of War when he selected the first female officer candidates, and “consultant on interracial affairs and understanding” at the charter conference of the United Nations. She received the Haitian Medal of Honor and Merit (their highest award) and the Liberian Commander of the Order of the Star of Africa, and served as an NAACP vice-president. She directed the National Youth Administration’s “Negro Affairs” from 1936 to 1944, and attended many national and international conferences that dealt with race, education, economics, and childcare as voting delegate and advisor. In 1973, she was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame for her efforts in education.

Bethune’s voice can be heard on-line (from the Schomberg Collection) at http://www.nypl.org/research/sc/scl/bethune.html. “I plunged into the job of creating
something from nothing,” she said, “. . . Though I hadn't a penny left, I considered cash money as the smallest part of my resources. I had faith in a living God, faith in myself, and a desire to serve” (Creative Quotations).

Figure 2: Mary McLeod Bethune and a Group of Her Schoolchildren

This photograph (Image Number: N041432) is from the General Collection of the Bureau of Archives and Records Management in the Florida Department of State online, [http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/MaryBethune/](http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/MaryBethune/). It was taken about 1905 and titled “Mary McLeod Bethune with a line of girls from the school,” though boys are clearly seen at the back of the line. There are several possible reasons for this. Bethune (or the archivist) may have been reflecting the Victorian idea of “ladies first,” segregating boys and girls for better class control, making a comment about the importance of the girls, or giving credit to the parents of the first students for their struggles to keep their five little girls in school. The five girls in white may be those first students. In other photographs of the school, tidy young Black women are shown sewing, doing needlework and laundry, cooking, tending animals, and posing for the requisite chorus and art photographs—all safe activities for girls because they did not challenge the patriarchal hierarchies.

*Charlotte Hawkins Brown:*
“I sit in a Jim Crow car, but my mind keeps company with the kings and queens”

Another southerner, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, was born in North Carolina and lived approximately 1870 to 1924. A Wellesley graduate, Brown was an outspoken critic of segregation and other racist policies, telling a reporter, “I am in the fight up to my neck” (Sims 182, 191-193). Her family moved to Boston in 1889 (www.Wellesley.edu). After attending a normal school, she returned to North Carolina to teach in a missionary school. When that school was forced to close down for financial reasons, she struggled to start a farm-life school in Sedelia. She was a protégé of Alice Freeman Palmer, served as president of Wellesley, and founded a school in North Carolina (which she named after Palmer). A fire later destroyed the original wooden edifice, but her Palmer Institute was rebuilt with the greater structural integrity of brick buildings.

Originally, Palmer [Institute] had much in common with Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute; it was an agricultural and manual training facility. But over the course of Brown’s 50-year tenure, the school became an elite school for the sons and daughters of affluent African Americans.” (http://americanhistory.si.edu)

After alumnae discovered the disrepair of their alma mater, funds were raised to make it a North Carolina Historical site (Smith & Wilson 1999, 245-249). It is open to the public at no charge—a fitting legacy to this essayist, teacher, short-story writer, lecturer, and social activist.

_Nannie Rice Burroughs_

“We specialize in the wholly impossible”

Nannie Helen Rice Burroughs (1883-1961) was born in Virginia and had little chance for education or economic advancement early in her life. She and her mother moved to Washington, after her father died. Burroughs was an accomplished writer, studied business and domestic science, received an honorary degree in Kentucky, and was President of the Women’s Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention. Her Women’s District of Columbia Industrial Club offered tuition in basic homemaking skills, prepared affordable lunches for downtown office workers, and provided lodging for black women newcomers to Washington in the early 1900s. Burroughs’ school for young black women utilized a curriculum designed to emphasize practical and
professional skills through “the highest development of Christian womanhood” [and homemaking]. Even as a teenager, she was a gifted public speaker. She addressed a racially-mixed session of the Baptist World Alliance in London in 1905, calling for “social justice and concern for humankind” (Anderson, F. 19).

Burroughs published manuals and a magazine for missionaries, coordinated African-American women’s efforts at missionary work, and was a well-known and widely-traveled speaker for the Baptist missions. “She forged a grand alliance and deep personal friendship with the dynamic Blanche Sydnor White, executive secretary of the Virginia WMU, and together the two women pioneered in inter-racial work” (Anderson 20).

“Blackseek.com” reports that Burroughs’ school was renamed Nannie Burroughs School in 1964, three years after her death at eighty-two. It still blends industrial and classical education. May 10, 1975, was declared Nannie Helen Burroughs Day in the District of Columbia, recognizing her expenditures of work, courage and wisdom on behalf of Black American women. A public thoroughfare bearing her name spans Washington neighborhoods.

**Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin:**

“Too long have we been silent under unjust and unholy charges”

Ruffin was a quintessential Northeasterner. She was born in Boston (1842), a member of the Boston NAACP chapter, founded the [Boston] Women’s Era Club, joined the Boston Zion church her father had founded, graduated from a Boston finishing school, married into one of Boston’s leading African-American families, and died in Boston in 1924. Both she and her husband were involved in reform efforts, recruiting soldiers for service in the Civil War, and volunteering for the Sanitation Commission. She was a supporter of votes for women and belonged to white women’s clubs, providing an important link between wealthy whites and the black elites. Widowed at forty-four and the mother of five, she used her money and position to start the Woman’s Era. For seven years, this magazine encouraged black women to become politically active, promote interracial activities, respect themselves, and uplift demoralized and exploited black people. The Woman’s Era Club was founded in 1893, “‘not necessarily a colored
woman’s club, but a club started and led by colored women” (www.mfh.org 2).

Believing that whatever good it did benefited the race, the New Era Club motto was “Make the World Better.” New Era members raised money for scholarships, held classes in civics and domestic science, encourage reading and literacy, sponsored kindergartens and organized medical clinics. On the social side, “They also put on musicals, literary events, art exhibits” (2).

Like many other African-Americans, Ruffin was convinced that black women’s clubs needed a national organization. The First National Conference of Colored Women met in Boston in 1895, with 100 women from twenty clubs in ten states attending. In that same year, Margaret Murray Washington founded the National Federation of Afro-American Women. This federation covered twelve states and thirty-six clubs (including the New Era Club). In the Washington area, Mary Church Terrell became president of the newly formed National League of Colored Women. After some initial jockeying for position, the National League and the National Federation merged into the National Association of Colored Women. Terrell became the first national president, though she could easily have opted out of an activist lifestyle because of her financial position. There were seven vice-presidents: Ruffin, Fannie Jackson Coppin, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Josephine Silone Yates, Sylvanie Williams, Jennie Chase Williams, and Lucy Thurman. There were 300,000 members from Canada, Liberia, Hayti, and Cuba, and every state was represented (Lerner 1984, 445). “Mrs. Ruffin’s journal became the official organ of the new federation and she continued to be active in club work until her death” (441).

Ruffin’s 1895 presidential address to the first national Conference of Colored Women was much concerned with race, but she also touched on friendship, courage, collaboration, morals, physical health, and temperance:

In the first place we need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other, we need to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends. Next we need to talk over not only those things which are of vital importance to us as women, but also the things that are of especial interest to us as colored women, the training of our
children, openings for our boys and girls, how they can be prepared for occupations and occupations may be found or opened for them, what we especially can do in the moral education of the race with which we are identified, our mental elevation and physical development, the home training it is necessary to give our children in order to prepare them to meet the peculiar conditions in which they shall find themselves, how to make the most of our own, to some extent, limited opportunities, these are some of our peculiar questions to be discussed. Besides these are the general questions of the day, which we cannot afford to be indifferent to: temperance, morality, the higher education, hygienic and domestic questions (In Lerner 1972, 440).

The New Era Club dissolved in 1903, but Ruffin remained active, co-founding the League of Women for Community Service.

Mary Church Terrell:

“I labor under the double handicap of race and sex”

Terrell said, “We proclaim to the world that the women of our race have become partners in the great firm of progress and reform. . . We refer to the fact that this is an association of colored women, because our peculiar status in this country . . . seems to demand that we stand by ourselves” (College.hmco.com).

Like Ruffin, Terrell was a light-skinned black woman who could pass for white when she wanted to do so. She did not have to work, because her father was a millionaire, but elected to teach. She was forced to resign when she married. She was the first president of the National Association of Colored Women and “by the early 1900s was deeply immersed in a host of efforts to improve the lot of African Americans and to combat racial discrimination. Though her club work was important, there was always the threat of political wrangling. Terrell was accused of practicing ‘‘mistrissism’’ (White 1999, 65) and of having moved the location of an NACW convention to exclude Ida B. Wells-Barnett and to control the election of officers. This accusation came from supporters of another light-skinned African-American, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin.

“The conflict was so bitter and so divisive that Ruffin, Wells-Barnett, and Anna J. Cooper stayed away from national meetings for many years” (65). Black men at all
levels of society took advantage of this of pettiness to castigate clubwomen in public and in newspapers; “underneath [the] male attacks on club work and the black woman’s character lay a struggle over the meaning of black masculinity and femininity” (65).

Terrell created *The Delta Oath* in 1914, ten years after Mary Stewart wrote the *Collect*. Many of the sentiments in the oath mirror lines from the *Collect*, but the comments about race, sex, and health make it quite different.

> I will strive to reach the highest educational, moral, and spiritual efficiency which I can possibly attain.
> I will never lower my aims for any temporary benefit which might be gained.
> I will endeavor to preserve my health, for however great one’s mental and moral strength may be, physical weakness prevents the accomplishment of much that otherwise might be done.
> I will close my ears and seal my lips to slanderous gossip.
> I will labor to ennoble the ideals and purify the atmosphere of the home.
> I will always protest against the double standard of morals.
> I will take an active interest in the welfare of my country, using my influence toward the enactment of laws for the protection of the unfortunate and weak, and for the repeal of those depriving human beings of their privileges and rights.
> I will never belittle my race, but encourage all to hold it in honor and esteem.
> I will not shrink from undertaking what seems wise and good because I labor under the double handicap of race and sex but, striving to preserve a calm mind with a courageous spirit, barring bitterness from my heart, I will strive all the more earnestly to reach the goal. (Giddings 1988, 323)

“My aims,” “my health,” “my lips” [voice], “my country,” “my influence,” “my race,” and “my heart” indicate the characteristics Terrell wanted to emphasize. Either she felt strongest about them for herself or she felt that college women should feel them most strongly. “The home” does not assume the importance it has in vision statements for
older women, but this is logical, since this oath was constructed with single college girls in mind. Homemaking was in their future.

Some, perhaps those who are more strongly focused on the race instead of the gender, say that Terrell’s finest hour came during the desegregation fight over public Washington, D.C. lunch counters in the 1980s, when she was elderly. This discounts her lifelong efforts on behalf of women, but is an interesting note, because it illustrates the fluidity of the civil rights milieu and the historiographical process of revision. Terrell was a founding member of the NAACP.

These are, by no means, all of the remarkable Black women involved in volunteer associations. In general, however, they all took strength from religion, volunteer associations and stories from the oral tradition (Lerner 1984). A more contemporary activist, Frances M. Beal, called for Black women in 1969 to “take an active part in bringing about the kind of society where our children, our loved ones, and each citizen can grow up and live as decent human beings, free from the pressures of racism and capitalist exploitation” (In Lerner 1984, 353)

Some women’s groups were born as the result of a backlash against patriarchal rules in supposedly gender-neutral civic organizations (Scott 1991). “From 1890 to 1895, the proliferation of black women’s clubs and other self-help organizations owed their genesis to the peculiar circumstances of black life in . . . the lowest point of black citizenship” (Jones 1999, 20).

Many detractors said that black women only formed clubs because white women had done so and because they were not welcome in white groups, but Floris Loretta Barnett Cash (1986) directly challenged “the notion that black women’s clubs were organized solely because of discrimination and exclusion from white organizations” (iv). Cash said, “The trend toward self-reliance, solidarity, and black pride laid the foundation for the club movement among black women” (iv), and their organizations “. . . provided a variety of charitable and educational services in black communities” (iii). Strangely, Cash saw the founding of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) as the “culmination” of the club movement, in spite of the fact that hundreds of other
First- and second-wave volunteer organizations both followed the developmental pattern outlined earlier in this study. One or two women perceived a need and voluntarily set up a first meeting, expecting modest results from their fledgling group, but getting an unexpectedly rapid expansion and cohesiveness response. Whether they were organized volunteers in sororities and clubs or gathered ad hoc to meet some local need, black women volunteers provided important services for the community. They sent Christmas boxes to black soldiers in wartime, helped found and stock libraries, worked for improved housing, established kindergartens, and helped the poor (Duster 1993, Weisenfeld 1997).

All groups with religious, racial, or ascribed minority status were caught up in the mid-1900s struggle for equal opportunity. Because the second wave of feminism was part of that overall civil rights movement, the media concentrated on racist practices and overt cruelty in the segregated South. Black women’s hundred-year track record of success in community activism was marginalized again.

One of the strongest and most flexible of the black sororities has been Delta Sigma Theta. The Delta Oath was written by Oberlin graduate, Mary Church Terrell (daughter of the South’s first African American millionaire). Terrell addressed cognitive, affective and physical strength in a way that was modern then and still necessary today. Her reverence for tradition and determination to create a better future better are shown in her use of future tense and diction. “Will strive” addresses the yet to come; no “temporary benefit” indicates a determination to work for continued community development, and “that otherwise might be done” reveals a knowledge organized participation is crucial to such improvement.

Though women’s organizations had been around for a hundred years or more, reporters and other writers chose to see the civil rights movement as more concerned with black men and women than with women in general. This tendency to marginalize women’s previous successes and current contributions was part of historiographical processes that are still ongoing (Smith & Wilson 1999, xvi-xx). In the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries, when African-American people formed mixed-gender organizations, men somehow took over the administration. “The roles of women and the roles of men in the anti-lynching movement were often defined by gender. Men like White were usually paid as investigators or lobbyists, while women usually worked as volunteers . . .” (Terborg-Penn 1998, 159). Wells Barnett was passed over when the National Association of Colored People was founded (Duster 1993). In spite of the fact that she and other clubwomen had been active in the fight against lynching, racial discrimination, and general societal ills as individuals and as members of previously-existing organizations, a patriarchal hierarchy for the new NAACP was set in place. A marked woman, Barnett had lost her livelihood and ability to travel freely around the city because she had been so vocal in her condemnation of lynching. Even her newspaper had been destroyed, but black men named another man (Walter White) as the most important opponent of lynching.

The interracial and non-gender-specific groups usually exhibit an assumption of male superiority and acceptance of males in leadership roles. Women’s groups are different, though male superiority is legitimated by practice. In few, if any, instances, is the assumption of male superiority codified in policy. Even Black churches, supposedly the greatest of the community institutions, have been organized into a man-at-the-top hierarchy (Grant 1982). In spite of seeing men in the most powerful positions of authority, African-American girls are socialized in childhood to see women as leaders who hold responsible positions in church and family. Not too long ago, Jacquelyn Grant was forbidden to go into the pulpit of Chicago’s Liberty Baptist Church to put her tape recorder near a convention speaker (as male church members had already done). A man had to place it if she wanted to record the service. “For the most part, Black churchmen have not dealt with the oppression of Black women in either the Black church or the Black community” (144-45). Rev. Peggy Ann Way (a white woman) agrees with Grant on some issues, “. . . The masculine consciousness appears to be the primary ordering principle, rather than any particular polity or political persuasion” (In Doeley 1970, 89). Grant says, “Black theology . . . must speak to the bishops who hide behind the statement, ‘Women don’t want women pastors’” (148). Way says, “I cannot bow down
before a God who will not first let me stand up” (91). Grant and Way are individuals who illustrate philosophical links between racial groups. These superficial details about the governance and theological stance of black and white churches indicate a general subordination of women in religious institutions.

Gloria Watkins [bell hooks] (1999), however, has said that black churches—with patriarchal hierarchies or no—connect spirituality with self-definition and esteem-building in the black community.

Black religious experience as I knew and lived it growing up was a liberation theology. For generations, black churchgoers had used the gospel to re-vision our understandings of black experience, to make radical sense of our history, and to build communities of resistance that enabled us to protest and struggle for freedom. (108)

A common vision for the future and common aims are major links between churches, women’s clubs, and other community organizations. Club members who belong to several of these organizations at once are important links in networking that enriches the community and the nation. Many historical black women leaders belonged to both black and white clubs, and the Extension Service served both black and white populations (though recent lawsuits have alleged those two populations were not served equally). In the previous century, Ida B. Wells Barnett was a bridge between black and white women through her membership in the Illinois Women’s Suffrage Association, the Cook County Federation of Clubwomen, the American Rose Art Club, and the Alpha Suffrage Club for black women [which she founded about 1914] (Duster 1973).

Examples of Florida women who are “cross-over members” include (1) a Ladies of Essence member who is also a Worthy Matron of the Fort Walton Beach Eastern Star, (2) an Elk who is a former member of the Ladies of Essence, and (3) an AAUW member who was also a mentor and teacher of young people at her church and a member of Okaloosa County organizations to support the African-American community (personal communication 2001, 2002). My North Carolina mother-in-law has been a long-time member of the Elks in Elizabeth City, but has belonged to an informal group that helped community members in various ways (personal communication 2003). These twenty-
first century women are continuing the tradition of linking organizations for women to
groups in the larger community. A departing charter member of the California group,
Friends Making a Difference, belonged to “numerous” professional organizations and
served as FMAD secretary for several years. “Her contribution to this organization has
been immeasurable” (FMAD newsletter, n.p.).

There were black women who wanted to work for suffrage, but were deemed too
dark to attend European-American meetings. They were also too dark, too poor, and too
uneducated for organizations of light-skinned solvent Negro matrons. Their participation
was not encouraged. It remained for leaders like Mary McLeod Bethune to put together
volunteer groups of darker women. One of the most hard-working and insightful Negro
American leaders of either sex, Bethune said, “If our people are to fight their way out of
bondage we must arm them with the sword and the shield and the buckler of pride”
(creativequotations.com).

Traditional Organizations

Sororities, interracial and trans-gender associations like the NAACP, church and
lodge auxiliaries, informal card clubs and book discussion groups share members with
women’s clubs. Many upper-class African-American women currently belong to Girl
Friends, Drifters, Northeasterners, Smart Set, or Carats. These groups are less well
known than the National Association of Colored Women or the Deltas, because their
members are fewer in number and because they were founded later. The Links is a large,
powerful social and service organization. It differs from many traditional groups because
the seven women who founded it in 1946 were wealthy. Links chapters meet monthly in
members’ homes or at restaurants and private clubs. Members donate more than one
million volunteer hours a year and have given more than $15 million to a wide range of
charities and programs in the United States and abroad, including the NAACP Legal
Defense Fund and the United Negro College Fund. (Graham 1999). The Jack and Jill
organization is another relatively new organization. It serves upper-class African-
American youngsters who might
otherwise feel like an outsider in a predominately white world, it nevertheless
reflected some of the best and worst characteristics of the privileged class . . .
I [Lawrence Graham] saw moments that were truly inspiring, as well as some that were the most heartbreaking of my childhood. There were good kids and there were mean kids, thoughtful parents and jealous parents. (38)

Though the Carats, Links, and other groups like them do good work, the vast majority of Black clubwomen belong to extension clubs or other, older, organizations. Today’s club members may not even realize how much they are influenced by groups like the Atlanta [Women’s] Neighborhood Union. Founded in 1908, the Union aimed:

1. To unite for the advancement of the people of each section of the city into an organization which shall be a branch of the Neighborhood Union; and to effect similar Neighbor Unions in other cities.

2. To develop a spirit of helpfulness among the neighbors and to co-operate with one another in respective neighborhoods for the best interests of the community, city, and race.

3. To provide playgrounds, clubs, good literature and Neighborhood centers for the moral, physical, and intellectual development of the young.

4. To establish lecture courses, classes, and clubs for adults, for the purpose of encouraging habits of cleanliness and industry, promoting child welfare, and of bringing about culture and efficiency in general home-making.

5. To improve sanitation of homes and streets, and to bring to the attention of the city the need of lights and of other improvements.

6. To abolish slums and houses of immorality, to investigate dance halls, pool rooms, and vaudeville shows, and generally to cooperate with city officials in suppressing vice and crime.

7. To cooperate with the Associated Charities and the Juvenile Court.

8. To make surveys of small communities showing the operation of factors and forces at work therein; and, at intervals, to take a census of the neighborhoods in Atlanta showing the status of each family and individual therein as well as to prepare maps of the sections inhabited by Negroes.

9. To bring about a better understanding between the races.

(Lerner 1994, 501)
The strongest of the traditional organizations may be the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC), which was founded in the 1890s and may have been the inspiration for formation of the Neighborhood Union.

*National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs:*

*“Lifting as We Climb”*

The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC) was the first national organization merging federations of black women’s clubs in the United States. The service, social, and political purposes of voluntarism are apparent throughout the association. Service is the most articulated purpose, appearing in policy statements and in the motto, “Lifting as We Climb.” In practice, the social purpose seems equally strong, but it is difficult to tease out operations that fit in only one category.

This complexity can be seen in the activities of NACW members in Oklahoma’s African-American Reconstruction communities. Members supported rural health clinics and mothers’ clubs, lobbied congress through letter-writing campaigns, bought playground equipment, beautified cemeteries and parks, supported fund drives for hospitals, and “kept alive a continual negotiation of racial issues that reinforced the legal challenges black male leaders pursued through the courts under the direction of the Oklahoma branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Reese 1991, 6).

Major efforts of this group have included the founding of the National Association of Colored Girls and the National Association of Boys’ Clubs (which later merged to form the National Association of Youth Clubs), the Gertrude Johnson Williams Oratorical Contest and other speech contests, paying the mortgage on Frederick Douglass’s home (now a national shrine and part of the National Park Service), awarding the Hallie Q. Brown Scholarship and other scholarships, giving awards for services rendered (Women of Courage and Distinction, etc.), and supporting a clinic in Senegal.

NACWC collaboration with Africare reflects the propensity of individual clubs to join with like-minded organizations overseas to deal with problems too great for one organization to combat, and for Black Americans to feel a pull toward that unknown continent. The first president, Mary Church Terrell, proclaimed to the world “that the
women of our race have become partners in the great firm of progress and reform. . . . We refer to the fact that this is an association of colored women, because of our peculiar status in this country. . . . seems to demand that we stand by ourselves.” (Gondola 2006)

A twentieth-century president, Patricia Fletcher, “noted with pride that its more than 20,000 members in 698 chapters in 32 states are still dedicated to the primary purpose of ‘raising to the highest plane the home life, moral standards and civic life of our race’” (Haywood 2).

*National Council of Negro Women*

The NCNW is a non-profit dedicated to the improvement of African American women’s lives through mentoring young people and women in their career development and leadership skills, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and disseminating information on relevant issues. The organization was founded by Mary McLeod Bethune in 1935 after a divisive meeting at a national NACW convention. “Bethune envisioned NCNW as a grassroots, ‘forceful, inclusive group with roots solidly in the ground . . . to sustain our growth, broaden our vision and to extend our service’ . . . programs are based on the concepts of commitment, unity, self reliance, and community empowerment” (http://www.lincoln.edu/ncnw/_Lincoln University 2004).

This “organization of organizations” is active in thirty-four states, reaches approximately four million women, and “serves as clearing house for the activities of women” (http://www.ncnw.org). They sponsor The Black Family Reunion.

Dorothy Height was a leader of NCNW for approximately fifty years, retiring only in the late 1900s. Height illustrated the propensity of club members to form inter-group alliances through their dual memberships. She had been elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority in 1947, and was involved with the YWCA for many years. She retired from that organization in 1977. A social worker, educator, and advocate for young people and women, “She began forging bonds between women across race and class in her travels and studies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America and reaffirmed her conviction that making international connections to women would only strengthen her movement work” (ncnw.org).
Mixed Organizations

Black women belong to organizations with interracial memberships and to organizations that are segregated racially, but mixed-gender (Sims 190). Women who belong to more than one organization are themselves major links between organizations. Common goals, attitudes, activities, and historical development form other links between organizations. Diversity in volunteer groups enables intellectual and emotional growth on both sides of the color line. One such organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), had African-American members from 1915 on. These women influenced the previously all-white organization through their very different gender, racial and socio-economic experiences. The two racial groups finally were able to agree on enough points to work together for common aims.

Unfortunately, that kind of unanimity was not always achievable. One of the commonalities in Black women’s organizations has been forged by their reaction to negative publicity and individual rude behavior: “Black women even encountered discrimination from white women in the GFWC [General Federation of Women’s Clubs]” (Jones 23). One example of such rude behavior and racial discrimination occurred in 1900, when the dual representative of the [white] New England Federation of Women’s Clubs and the [black] Women’s Era Club, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, was refused privileges at the GFWC convention for the black club and acknowledged for NEFWC voting.

The cross-pollination between interracial groups of male and female persons and black women’s clubs is apparent in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (Sims 54-79) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Kate Claghorn, Florence Kelley, Mary McDowell, Anna Garlin Spencer and Jane Addams were among the founding members of that 1909 group. W.E.B. DuBois, W.I. Thomas, John Dewey, and Charles Zeublin were also co-founders (Deegan 308). Though Ida B. Wells Barnett and other women had been active in fighting against lynching, racial discrimination, and general societal ills as individuals and as members of previously-existing organizations (Duster 321-333), men somehow came to hold the most important positions in the new one.
NACWC has strong ties to the YWCA, AARP, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and many other volunteer associations. For example, in the late 1800s, Langston, Oklahoma, had memberships available in the Order of the Eastern Star, Daughters of Tabor, Sisters of Ethiopia, several auxiliaries of different kinds, and a literary society with both male and female members. Papers read at these meetings and the philosophies espoused reflected a broad range of ways to elevate the race. Mrs. S. Joe Brown wrote, in 1925, about how black Order of the Eastern Star members donated their savings to the building of the Masonic temple in Boley, Oklahoma. She tied their efforts to the traditional domestic duties of the mother and wife:

Woman has always been known as a home-builder, although the great world knows little of the deeds of her heroism, her self-denial and her real devotion to suffering humanity. By experience, she knows what it is to be widowed and homeless, therefore she has gladly contributed her part in furnishing and supporting Homes for widows and orphans, and has constantly urged the fraternity to build such where there are none (Brown 193).

The Young Women’s Christian Association

The YW[CA] is a “politically distinct women’s organization that claimed identities for women as women,” but gained organizational autonomy only after negotiating and “cooperating” with the YMCA in the Victorian Era. It came into existence as a manifestation of something which is still very new in the world, that is, the conscious love and appreciation of women for each other . . . It is the glory of the YWCA that we here are the inheritors of nearly seventy-five years of an increasing and deepening Christian fellowship of women who have broken through the age-old barriers . . . (8-9).

The YWCA and the YMCA were affected by gender in their founding and development. Spirituality and collegiality were the vision; dissention and bickering were often the reality. Each was supposed to foster gender solidarity and nurture “the two spheres, masculine culture and feminine culture” in the face of the supposed “breakdown of family life in the face of the modern industrial order.” With the public arena
stereotypically masculine and the private sphere feminine, there were many ways women could be excluded from public activities. Youth culture, flapper, the New Woman, and new ideas about marriage (Vandenberg-Daves 1) were felt to be direct threats. The Young Men’s Christian Association and the Young Women’s Christian Association had real adjustment problems with each other, but they were vehicles through which the community improved itself (Duster 306-307).

Living at the Y, young women could forget or ignore the constraints on their lives for a while (personal knowledge; Weisenfeld 84, 105). Within the residence halls, they formed various smaller clubs and cliques that were safe spaces. The YMCA had programs for women, but those programs were seldom as valuable or as well-funded as those for men. When the women pointed this out, their concerns were downplayed. When they pushed for organizations of their own, they were met with stonewalling and derision (Vandenberg-Daves 12).

The women in Judith Weisenfeld's 1997 study of the New York Black YWCA had the same concerns as the women who started the Neighborhood Union, even though the New Yorkers were living hundreds of miles away from Atlanta and were two or three generations removed. “Weighing the YWCA’s record, it is difficult to understand the enduring presence of African American Women from the late nineteenth century on” (Weisenfeld12).

The “connections between religious belief and black women’s collective action” and the ways young women were mentored in "The Y" indicate a feminist mindset, but activist and church leader Pauli Murray said,

None of these women would have called themselves feminists in the 1930s, but they were strong, independent personalities who, because of their concerted efforts to rise above the limitations of race and sex and to help younger women do the same, shared a sisterhood that foreshadowed the revival of the feminist movement in the 1960s. (2)

Newer Organizations of African-American Women

The time is past when women of color struggled to have their marriages regularized. They go to college, hold jobs, stay home, decide when or if to have children,
and are not legally considered property. There are thousands of middle-class and upper-
class black people, some of whom have written about their individual experiences, their
clubs, and their families. They feel the same constraints as other writers, but also wonder
about outsiders poring over negative aspects of their lives.

There is something very personal about writing about the members of one’s
family when one is a so-called “middle-class” black American. It is like having a
second self which urges one to “polish up” the English, over dramatize the
positive values expressed in the lore, and suppress facts which may reflect
negatively on the family image or contribute to stereotypes of black Americans.
(Morgan 1980, xvii)

The following three vignettes of modern volunteer organizations that were started
by African-American women are, admittedly, polished up dramatizations of positive
activities. In spite of this, they show the enduring qualities of organizational founding
and development.

*Friends Making a Difference: “Unity + Purpose”*

In 1989, Friends Making a Difference Club (FMAD) celebrated its fifth
anniversary. This non-profit California circle was founded on a “desire to do something
innovative that will make a tangible difference to the quality of life as well as the future
of the African-American community” (Newsletter, Summer/Fall 1989). The information
in this section of the chapter comes from Danae [pseudonym], a professional black
woman approximately fifty years old and currently living in Maryland. In September of
2001, at a family gathering in Virginia, she told me about this organization that she
helped found. Her group was proud of the fact that they “did it” on their own and had not
affiliated with any other group. FMAD had twenty-nine members at the end of summer,
1989.

One of their most rewarding activities that year was a Teen Workshop on
Grooming, in which make-up, manners, and dress were discussed. While manners and
dress were not the primary consideration by black women’s extension clubs in the south
or by Atlanta Neighborhood Union women, this workshop answered a felt need in that
particular community. The FMAD anniversary gala on September 30 included a report on
and fund-raising plea for Friends Against Drugs, one of their special projects. They mentored the Nuba Dance Troupe, which featured young African Americans in numbers that blended traditional African and modern dance movements.

FMAD divided their philanthropic efforts into Outreach, Seniors, Youth, Toy Drives and Scholarships (academic, creative and athletic). They donated over $15,000 to special projects in the 1988-1989 fiscal year. The Westside AIDS Case Management team received food vouchers for black people with AIDS. The Nuba Dance Troupe received money to help with the expenses for a trip to Atlanta, Georgia and the Black Arts Festival. The Fremont High School Girls’ Basketball Team received money to help with the costs incurred on a trip to Australia. FMAD helped provide food for the homeless through Richmond Rescue Mission and Project Safety Net (Alameda County), and food for the homeless at Thanksgiving to the Maryann Wright Foundation. They were involved with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters in the East Bay area, and donated money to “Jubilee West” for Pampers, Bart passes, and lunches. The Allenwood School (Richmond) received a donation to help provide food for a special program celebrating black investors. The organization mailed flyers for a Black Public Administrators’ Workshop, co-sponsored the Teen Motivation Workshop, and arranged for Bayview Hunter’s Point Senior Day Care Center to receive some black videos (Newsletter, n.p.).

President, Brenda Tucker, reported that their fifth year had been “pivotal,” because they had learned so much from previous experiences. She said that maturity, strength, and wisdom were required to manifest their purpose and broaden their vision, and told about the “long arduous brainstorming process” endured to select the core concern for the future. After much debate, “youth and prevention” became the narrower focus, with “Friends Against Drugs” a logical slogan. Though Danae had been obviously pleased at the independence of the group, the president of the group alluded to collaboration with other agencies and/or services: “It is FRIENDS’ goal to commit our time, talents, and monies to specific program(s) that embodies our focus . . . FRIENDS is committed to participating in enriching the quality of life as well as the future of the African-American community” (n.p.)
Tucker’s message highlighted several themes that duplicate those found in the goals and aims statements of other African-American women’s groups: collaboration and teamwork, sharing ideas, voice/open communication, participatory management, common problems, hard work, limited resources, and thankfulness. Her message implies a respect for the tradition of volunteering and for the tradition Friends is building for itself: “Our history dictates that we must work together to make a difference. For we are merely an extension of one another” (n.p.)

This relatively new group also continues the tradition of writing and/or using amateur poetry, fiction, and factual reporting. Member, Karen Ricks, brought “My Name is Cocaine” [“author unknown”] to the group: “I’m more valued than diamonds, more treasured than gold/Use me just once and you too will be sold;/I’ll make a school boy forget his books;/I’ll make a beauty queen neglect her looks . . .” As in the poems written by Women’s Institute or other clubs’ members, this poem reinforces gender role stereotyping. The police are “Dick’s” (men), renowned speakers are men, “mamas” can be made into whores, husbands on drugs pimp their wives. Underlying the contrived sentences is the serious purpose—getting rid of drugs.

One of the major rewards of voluntarism is a wide circle of friends. Nafessa Ahmad Bey wrote “Ode to a Friend” in 1985. Her short poem cites “mutual admiration,” a “wish for all that is positive,” “mutual respect,” and a “specialness” that comes from within. Bey says loving friendship is a bond in a poem; the editor of the newsletter shows that bond in a farewell message to a charter member who is departing the area. “Jo belongs to numerous professional organizations and was Friends’ Recording and Corresponding Secretaries for the past two years. Her contribution to this organization has been immeasurable” (n.p.).

Again like other women’s groups, FMAD has a concern for doing things in just the right way. At their first gala on September 15, 1985, the more than five hundred guests provided a profit of $4,000, but did it after a “meaningful, entertaining as well as elegant presentation” at “Grammas . . . nestled on grounds surrounded by greenery, flowers, walkways and flowing decks . . . listening to music by Marvin Holmes” (n.p.). The waiters served “alluring” fruit and hors d’oeuvres arrays.
There is always a social aspect to women’s groups, and some groups say they are solely for amusement and leisure (though closer inspection usually shows the latter assumption to be flawed). Here, the committee for the 5th Annual gala invites members to share in the celebration and the fundraising: “When the lights go down low, we are going to PARTY!!!!!” Black tie is optional.

Two things separate the newsletter of this 1980s group from one that might have been done in the 1880s. First, the public relations committee promises that the mailing list of members’ names will not be sold: “No other organization has been authorized to use the list.” In the earliest years of the clubwomen’s movement, bulk mail had not been invented and mail advertising was unknown. No disclaimer would have been necessary. Second, the newsletter probably would not have featured paid advertisements. The lists of officers and members, acknowledgment of the newsletter editors and businesses that have provided services or monetary contributions, and blank section of one page for “comments” are standard. Earlier newsletters might have included the text from a celebrity’s letter to the group, but television had not been invented, so the production schedule of the Arsenio Hall Show would not have been a consideration, as it was for the Friends. Arsenio’s personal manager wished FMAD the best and congratulated them in their decision to join the “war on drugs,” but said he did not leave Los Angeles because they taped five days a week. It is interesting to remember that Sorosis was founded after female journalists were not allowed at a dinner for another celebrity, Charles Dickens.

Two thousand copies of the newsletter (Volume 1, Number 2) were printed for Summer/Fall 1989, and the cover featured a photograph of the membership—twenty-nine well-dressed, young, smiling or serious African-American women.

Ladies of Essence: “Not like a bridge club”

The off-hand comment of Felicia [pseudonym]—“This is not like a bridge club”—revealed that the Ladies of Essence were on a higher plane than a social club. It also indicated a distinct hierarchy of organizations in her mind (Fort Walton Beach, personal communication, 2000). The Ladies of Essence (LoE) is “the only local female social oriented organization chartered on Eglin AFB” (LoE brochure) and was founded in the mid-1970s by seven women who thought they “could be doing something” (Marian,
pseudonym). Just as other groups have done, they puzzled over what to call themselves, and decided on Ladies of Essence because an essence is “the most important or basic quality of a thing” and is “strong, pure and of a special nature.” “Essence is that which makes something what it is” (Brochure).

The organization currently has male members called “sponsors,” though this was not always so [Francis, pseudonym]. The recipients of their charitable efforts include foundations for heart disease, AIDS, and Sickle Cell Anemia. The Ladies have also given money, fruit baskets, and clothing to needy families and visited convalescent homes in the area during the holidays. They give scholarships to local (Okaloosa County, Florida) high school seniors, and support Chester Pruitt Center sports programs for children and adults. They have sponsored Easter egg hunts and Christmas parties for children.

Their income is generated through the Annual Anniversary Ball, monthly socials, cook-outs, and donation raffles. They seek “hard working and dedicated women both military and civilian who are willing to donate some of their time and effort to worthy community causes” (Brochure). With meetings in members’ homes (the first Sunday of each month), they stand in the long tradition of women’s groups that reach outward from their families to the rest of the world. With their unique chartered status, they are eligible to use military facilities for their fashion shows and balls. Eglin’s Annual Open House and Black History Month activities are enriched by LOE participation.

This group is one of many who use the Mary Stewart Collect, which was quoted in Chapter Four and is mentioned in connection with the Delta Oath above. Here it is called the “Ladies of Essence Prayer,” but it was written in 1904, over half a century before most LoE members were born. The Collect appeared in the 1991-1992 Grenville District WI program, in the program booklets of Knox County extension clubs on various websites, and in the Ladies of Essence recruiting flyer.

While many women join an organization because they are new to an area, Felicia [a pseudonym] had friends, family and memories here (i.e., “Meigs was not ready for integration.”) She talked to me at Joe and Eddie’s in Fort Walton Beach. (“Joe and Eddie’s is history. I grew up with Joe and Eddie’s.”) Felicia was native to this
community, but after working overseas, she realized, “Fort Walton just let things pass them by . . . even the mall is somewhere else” (personal communication).

She said that there wasn’t much to do in Fort Walton Beach “unless you were born and raised here.” She spoke feelingly about the way Americans overseas coalesce into a cohesive group, then turn into disparate elements again when they return to the states. She mourned the passing of that close-knit community, just as she mourned the vital black community that existed in Fort Walton when she was a child. Her return to the United States taught her that both communities were forever changed. She may have been searching for a new space when she joined the Ladies of Essence. No person invited her. She “just went.” She saw an invitation ad in the newspaper and believed she could learn something if she went. She thought, “Oh, I better jump on this!”

Like many other clubwomen, Felicia belongs to more than one organization. Her major focus now is the Elks: “The Lady Elks don’t get the recognition they deserve.” Major events for her Elks group are a Little Miss Elks Contest, a Mother-Daughter Day, and awarding scholarships (usually to female students with financial need). During an Elks election, she nominated herself from the floor: “If there’s something you want, you have to go after it.” Both this comment and “jump on it” indicate the depth of her activist nature.

Felicia said that sometimes people join organizations because they have time on their hands, but after they join, they realize they don’t have all that much time. Her comments are much the same as Edna LaMoore Waldo’s 1939 comments about founding and maintaining community organizations.

Felicia used to keep Ladies of Essence memorabilia, but “probably trashed it,” when she went overseas. Her memories of the Ladies were sporadic, but those memories fleshed out the facts gleaned from printed invitations and conversations with various members over the years. Their emblem is the rose. “The rose is on everything we send out.” She does not know where the charter is, but thinks their “rules” might be found on the base. Parliamentary procedure is used. Members who owed dues or other monies to the group cannot vote. Members given fund-raiser tickets to sell, must sell them to others or buy them themselves. Meetings are the first Sunday of the month at five—and if
members were late, they pay a fine. She concluded her remarks with, “Essence is something rare.”

National Hook-Up of Black Women

The National Hook-Up of Black Women (NHBW) was founded in 1973, in the same decade as the Ladies of Essence and Friends Making a Difference. NHBW currently spreads from New Jersey to Orlando, and Indianapolis to the District of Columbia. The “membership reflects a rich diversity of working Black women” (http://www.nhbwinc.com/page5.html). The national office is in Chicago. Their agenda is to impact public policy and provide a voice for Black women and their families. They intend to be centered on networking for women leaders and to support achievement of personal and professional goals. Projects and achievements listed on the website include New Jersey’s AIDS and sex education efforts, the hooking up of black male juveniles with male leaders, and the support of nursing homes. Illinois is also concerned with AIDS education, but also with prison inmates and business women. Of the two, Illinois seems the most closely connected to the mentoring of leadership potential articulated. Overall, Florida chapters are concerned with the health of women in prison, juvenile justice, support of female ex-inmates of the prison system, unwed mothers and Florida’s Welfare to Work program. Gadsden County, Florida, has a specific “career shadowing program.” This mentoring effort is tied to achievement of personal and/or professional goals. Nashville, Tennessee, has a cross-generational program that supports people of all ages and a program for incarcerated women. Mentoring leadership potential is extended to the women who are currently in jail. Illinois, Florida, and Tennessee all might logically claim that they are encouraging leadership potential in incarcerated women. Joliet, Illinois, helps support a shelter for homeless and/or pregnant women, a food kitchen, health and wellness programs, vision screening and obtaining glasses, literacy programs and educational scholarships, and a subsidy for prescription drugs.

Shirley A. Jones is the president of the Tallahassee Hook-up. Her dissertation (1999) identified and isolated relevant themes found in interviews with NHBW members of the “first rural chapter.” Her preliminary analysis yielded twenty-four general themes, which she narrowed to six: the members having (a) shared agendas and goals, (b) a focus
on education, (c) similar prior experiences, (d) a concern with social issues, (e) benefited from the organization, and (f) participated in the activities, events, and procedures of the organization.

The Hook-up has goals of improved community, organization and members; change and adaptation; empowerment; sisterhood uniting to solve problems; and “giving back” in political, social, and economic spheres. It is impossible to systematize this mix of skills, aims, mentoring and modeling, but it is easy to identify the same common themes seen in earlier chapters.

Common Themes

Themes of friendship, health, improved homes and neighborhoods, modernism and efficiency, education, elitism, voice, history, a vision for the future, democracy, and high moral value are not discrete, but they have been separated arbitrarily for the purposes of discussion.

Friendship

Every club fosters camaraderie, but NACWC does not mention friendship in policy statements. Friendship may be seen as a given, however, particularly because this association was born in a time that black women were still very much under siege. Ruffin included the idea of friendship in her inaugural address: “. . . we need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other, we need to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends.”

Nafessa Ahmad Bey’s “Ode to a Friend” says loving friendship is a particular FMAD (Friends Making a Difference) bond. The editor of the FMAD newsletter bids farewell to a charter member: “[Jo’s] contribution to this organization has been immeasurable” (n.p.). FMAD’s announcement that “when the lights go down low, we are going to party” announces that the social purpose of club life is an important element for the group.

Good Mental and Physical Health

The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs did not specify mental and physical health as goals, but members have participated in various activities that benefited the community. They focused on better drinking water, art, landscaping, and
hygiene. Clubs have been seen as an appealing training ground for the “dissemblance, secrecy, and silence” which were “powerful instruments of resisting dehumanization and multilayered exploitation and oppression” (http://www.hmco.com). Beal’s plea for women’s activism in the black community is a plea for emotional wellbeing and good mental health (353).

*Improvement of Neighborhood and Home Life*

The Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs had thirty-four clubs and 518 members by 1920. Their official insignia was adopted by the national organization: “The badge depicted a woman leading a young girl by the hand up the side of a mountain, and it included the motto ‘Lifting as We Climb’” (Reese 6).

Black clubwomen bought school flags, acquired and planted trees, purchased fences and arranged for them to be built, tested and worried about drinking water for students, obtained and distributed textbooks, and debated teacher certification. Volunteers and professionals at Hull House felt great art, cleanliness and order would enable change in Chicago’s blue-collar neighborhood school population, and that “art education would enable factory workers to tolerate the conditions of labor through an understanding of the historical significance of their work” (Mitchell 30). The Atlanta Neighborhood Union aimed to improve the “culture” and efficiency of the homes in Georgia. Settlement houses like the Union were dedicated to the improvement of homes and the surrounding community. The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs wanted “to raise the standards of the home” and “to improve conditions for family living” (http://www.africanamericans.com). With the end of the Civil War, neighborhood improvement often meant moving to a neighborhood that was an improvement over the former one. Canada, the northern United States, and the western frontier of both countries were targeted areas for immigration.

*Progress, Modernism, and Efficiency*

It should be no surprise hundreds of African-Americans turned away from the south and former masters to found all-black settlements in the hectic years following the War Between the States/Civil War. They determined to carve out their own space (Greene 2002; White 248-49; Weisenfeld 84,105), taking advantage of land runs,
lotteries, and their newly-won freedom to move west and “escape from increasingly stratified racial politics engineered through Jim Crow legislation” (Reese 1-3). By 1900, seven percent of Oklahoma’s population came from the territories where Indian and Black populations often mingled (Katz 3-22, 37-38, 50-52; Reese 3). There were twenty-seven all-black towns in Oklahoma. All boundaries were fluid in frontier settlements. Women were not cut off from public arenas as strictly as in urban areas.

The “wilderness demanded courage and perseverance and it fostered skills and self-reliance . . .” (Smith & Wilson 1999, 19). Settlers who had been plantation slaves would almost certainly have had greatly-developed reservoirs of courage, perseverance and self-reliance on which to draw. Settlers of any race who had been accustomed to urban amenities, the warm weather of the southern states, and/or the support systems of their extended families (35) found the Oklahoma emptiness vast and the weather harsh. “Langston citizens cooperated in working an eighty-acre vegetable garden to feed the town and provide some relief to the new arrivals . . . Families doubled up in tents and makeshift wooden buildings until suitable housing could be found” (Reese 2).

The girls and women on the Oklahoma plains faced natural disasters, bad roads, and racism, but they had a wide geographical arena in which to function. The open plains mirrored the freedom that had come with the end of the Civil War. They “. . . took advantage of this separate space to assert their leadership abilities and weld a network of relationships that commanded respect, improved their circumstances, and increased their opportunities . . . black-town women for a historical moment exercised greater freedom in determining their own destinies” (7).

Feeling that education was the “most obvious safeguard against poverty” (Reese 2), organized Black women lobbied for, raised funds for, helped build and operate the Colored Agricultural and Normal University (CANU). Membership in small groups gave them a sense of belonging and safety. Langston’s club for black women in 1895 aimed “to guide, protect, and support young women in the local area” (1). Their efforts to fund, staff and operate CANU mirror Institute efforts for Denman College and the MacDonald
Institute in Guelph, and PEO efforts on behalf of Missouri’s Cottey College, as well as contributed to “better womanhood” (Reese 3).

Students in the new all-black school formed small study circles and sororities (The Literatae, Philomathean, and Phyllis Wheatly Club, etc.). CANU girls had to clean the toilets and dormitories, get the dining hall ready, serve the meals, and wash the dishes. They also had to sign in and out of the dormitory unless they were on the way to class and could not leave the campus without a chaperone. They were still required to attend mandatory chapel service, Sunday school and church meetings, and sing the morning prayer with the male students. Female students were allowed in mixed company only under faculty supervision after Sunday vespers: “In this environment, school officials molded the image of a wholesome, educated, respectable black womanhood” (Reese 3).

In spite of their college-student status and freedom from most neighborhood constraints, CANU women were expected to be subservient to men. Their lower status reflected the patriarchal hierarchies in the community, just like the status of MacDonald Institute and Denman College students. The Denman students, being mature under educated, but married women from rural England, were often almost giddy at having a few days to focus on themselves instead of their husbands, kitchens and children.

**Education**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* attests to the didactic role of history: the past “taught us.” While alluding to the importance of history as an artifact, the sentence also personifies the past, turning it into an instructor. The NACWC does not specify that education is power, but does aim to “promote the education of women and children” ([http://www.africanamericans.com](http://www.africanamericans.com)).

African American clubwomen called on literacy’s transformative powers in their attempt to change the way they and others of their race were perceived and portrayed by whites. Defining American in terms of behaviors rather than inherent qualities, they challenged racist principles by appropriating the discourse of Americanization for their own purposes. They adapted the rhetoric of female benevolence to include their own

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3 See Chapter Nine for discussion of Cottey College.
efforts to redress the poverty, discrimination, and cruelties that dogged members of their race. They read and wrote texts in which they used the politics of respectability to reconfigure the ideology of womanhood and construct a version of culture that included African American contributions.

Belief in a Chosen Group’s Superiority

Socioeconomic position, personal appearance, and educational attainment are social arbiters (Sims 53). To these, African-Americans add skin color (Walker 1983,136-137). “Simply put, a critical definer of the African American experience has been color. For 350 years Colored, Negro and Black have all been used, legally and colloquially, to describe African Americans, and each is a reference to color” (CampbellJones and CampbellJones 137).

Both Ruffin and Terrell were light-skinned black women; Bethune and Williams were dark. Groups do not refer to skin color in policy statements, but the restrictions are apparent to those who know how to interpret the written documents. NACW objectives deal with the education, economics, morals, religion and rights of women and children, but Mary McLeod Bethune felt called upon to leave that group and form one that would pull its darker-skinned members from a larger arena than “colored” women’s clubs did (www.africanamericans.com).

Cartie Lynwood (in a 1904 Oklahoma Guide) took other black women to task for seeking out acquaintances whose “only virtues were fair skin and long straight hair. Lynwood knew that at least some black women privately held ambivalent attitudes about their racial characteristics. They used hair straighteners and skin lighteners and wore long-sleeved garments and hats in the sun” (Reese 3-4). When (in 1910) an Oklahoma woman’s club in the all-black community of Boley had light skin as a membership requirement, the general populous reacted immediately and forced them to disband (4).

In 1966, one male Harlem resident quipped, “Ain’t nothin’ I want black, but a Cadillac!” (personal knowledge). His remark came more half a century after the Oklahoma women in all-black towns were straightening their hair, and revealed African-Americans still rate each other partly by skin color. Elliot Liebow, a white man in Harlem in 1967, wondered if his race was the reason people talked frankly to him about skin
color. He felt he was completely out of “the spectrum [. . . and was seen as having] no vested interest.” One darker man told him, ‘You know, I’m the darkest one in my family. All my aunts, uncles, everybody is light-skinned and they were all down on me, except my grandmother . . . All the time I was coming up, I kept hoping somebody would have a baby darker than me’” (251).

Aliona Gibson talked about skin color and its power in Nappy: Growing Up Black and Female in America (30-39, 104-117): “It’s amazing the kinds of things women who look like me have been (and are) subjected to . . . I had quite a rude awakening recently when a woman I know told me that I was too black to date one of her sons” (32).

Kathryn L. Morgan (1980) said, “White skin could be a help or a handicap, depending upon the circumstances” (75). She described the Gordon family legends that ameliorated problematic concepts for family members (49). “Well, way back then . . . nobody cared who mixed with whom—but the law. Nobody married. [Some family members . . .] were white by nature, black by law, African and Cherokee by choice” (7).

Skin color has always played an important role in determining one’s popularity, prestige, and mobility within the black elite. It is hard to find an upper-class black American family that has been well-to-do since before the 1950s that has not endured family conversations on the virtues of “good hair, sharp features, and a nice complexion.” These code words for having less Negroid features have been exchanged over time for more politically correct ones, but it is a fact that the black upper class thinks about these things more than most. This is not to say that affluent blacks want to be white, but it certainly suggests that they have seen the benefits accorded to lighter-skinned blacks with “whiter features”—who are hired more often, given better jobs, and perceived as less threatening. (Graham 377)

Women of color are caught in a double bind, and that double bind is made more complex by the idea that lighter skin may carry with it a certain authority. Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, bell hooks [Watson], Angela Davis, Frances M. Beal (in Morgan 1980) and others have spoken on this insidious issue. Ethnic pressures are universal. Black Canadians felt the “. . . tension, the pain and the challenges of racism from a
people who thought little of Blacks and didn’t accord them the dignity that was human to have” (Watson 1995, 35).

The idea of categorizing people according to skin color does not seem congruent with the “let us leave off with fault-finding” and other heady aims, and discussions of skin color are not an easily identifiable theme in mixed-race or white groups. Still the idea of color is implicit in most examinations of relationships for black people. Morgan (1980) provides anecdotes of family members that passed to get jobs and help support the family (xv), and women’s history provides examples of light-skinned club members who passed to get from one speaking engagement to another if accommodations for black people were inadequate. (See Walker 1983, 136-137). Lawrence Graham is a member of the black elite. He says that members of his social set do not talk about passing: The phenomenon of passing is among the least-discussed issues within the community of the black elite. It is a source of great shame and annoyance, even among those people who recognize its necessity and its benefits from an economic perspective. (393)

Voice

Concern with literal and metaphorical voice for women is a strong part of feminist theory. “Many women chose to remain silent . . .” (Sims 189), but learning to speak out in public has been part of feminist practice. Learning to read, write, publish, and speak out in public were critical for women of color in the United States at the end of the Civil War, and have been since. African-American legends and folkloric voice are so strong they balance inadequate theoretical writing that steadily emerges from colleges and universities. In many instances, academic literature is “strangely silent” (Allen, et al, 99). “Most folklorists are white, and they have not discovered the black urban legend tradition” (Turner xiv; 184), so family legends are required. These may serve as an antidote to “the poison of self-hate engendered by racism” (Morgan, K.L. xiii); and, “. . . are truly the best way to learn” (Graham 323). Storytelling is, therefore, perhaps the most successful of the ways to pass on alternative factual and/or cultural information (Turner 120); “. . . folks will rely on their sense of black history to construct motifs consistent with past experience but applicable to the issues at hand” (136).
Tales that contain a family’s own version of history, politics and culture may be strong enough to override information learned in a formal classroom or stereotypes (Smith & Wilson 1999, ix). Professor Kathryn L. Morgan’s mother said, “Storytelling was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me” (1980, xviii). Otey Scruggs says storytelling may be “. . . the most significant aspect of black culture for present purposes . . .” (qtd. in Morgan 1980, 112), and that Morgan’s book on the Gordon family “is personal experience raised to the level of a group experience that speaks to the human condition. The central concern of these stories is the quality of that experience: how people have coped with life in the process of shaping relations with other people” (107).

The oral tradition mixes serious messages with humor (Irvin 94-95), and is informed by body language and eye contact (Hazack 36-46). Laughter rising out of storytelling eases strife among club and family members and helps them let off steam in private so they can keep a low profile in public.

Humor allows us to gain perspective by ridiculing the implicit insanities of patriarchal culture . . . The unsolicited laughter of women spells trouble for those in power . . . When women’s laughter is directed toward authority, it can bring down the house . . . Humor is about risk and privilege . . . has always been about bending or breaking the rules (Barreca 1992 76-77).

Members of women’s groups have enjoyed each other’s stories for well over a hundred years as they worked, studied, raised money, and mentored young people.

Family stories are not “socially neutral.” Academic histories of businesses and communities are supposed to be. One Gordon family story explored the idea that “‘honest’ racism existed in the South and ‘hidden’ racism existed in the North” (Morgan 1980, 64). “In identifying the multiple narratives that script women’s lives, we come to see that women are socially constituted in different and unequal relation to one another” (Hazack 158). “In the twentieth century the signals remained mixed” (Turner 200). The power of storytelling is not limited to the United States. One African-Canadian woman said she drew strength and courage from stories about other women of color: “it is affirming for me as a black woman to know for sure that my roots run deep in the social and economic fabric of Canadian society” (Watson 35).
Stories (Turner 120) have, arguably, been the most resilient and successful mode of passing on factual and/or cultural information. The Bible and the Christian tradition provided some of these tales and parables, but religion was not the only source of such narratives. African-Americans needed more than cultural and historic knowledge in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because of widespread technological, medical, and societal changes (Welleck 1992). Modern wisdom was needed to sit side-by-side with and enrich the oral tradition. Much of that mandatory new knowledge was acquired in volunteer associations.

Folklore and family anecdotes built self-esteem, provided access to knowledge of African-American genealogy, and sometimes allowed grandparents and great-grandparents to pass on information about Africa before slavery and admonitions about behavior. Professor Kathryn Morgan told how the children in her family were told to act while doing business in the white community. They were not to simper, not to linger, not to talk, not to believe and not to act afraid—“no matter how scared you really are” (27).

*Value of History and Vision for the Future*

“The dark past,” “the hope that the present has brought us,” and “the rising sun of our new day begun”—words from *Lift Every Voice and Sing*—clearly reveal African-Americans’ belief in the value of history and hopeful view of the future. There are other quotations and actions that also reveal this vision. Beal’s “Black women must take an active part in bringing about the kind of society where our loved ones, and each citizen can grow up and live as decent human beings, free from the pressures of racism and capitalist exploitation” (in Morgan 1980, 353) and the NACWC’s wish “to promote interracial understanding so that justice may prevail among all people” are akin to the Negro National Anthem ([http://www.africanamericans.com](http://www.africanamericans.com)).

Long-time president of NCNW, Dorothy Height established the Bethune Museum and Archives for Black Women, indicating her regard for her friend and for all black women ([http://www.ncnw.org](http://www.ncnw.org)). The Atlanta Neighborhood Union, founded in 1908, had a vision of the future that included cleaner neighborhoods and more moral communities (as other settlement houses did). They aimed to abolish slums and brothels, suppress vice
and crime, take a census that would show each family and prepare maps of Negro neighborhoods (Lerner 501).

**Collaborative Work and Shared Meals**

Black clubwomen often collected and distributed food and clothing to the needy (http://college.hmco.com). Participation in making, serving, eating, and cleaning up after snacks or full meals shared with others (often the “less fortunate”) is a standard of conduct in the lives of organized women (Anderson, www.rande.org, 2). The Ladies of Essence, for example, have monthly socials and cookouts at members’ homes. Like female parishioners in the rest of Canada and the United States, organized women in all-black communities were the bedrock of the movement to build and equip schools and colleges. Their efforts “played a central role in forging the unity of the black community” (Reese 1). They “… sold pies, box dinners, and sandwiches at picnics, auctions, and public gatherings to supplement the funds their husbands raised to buy the land and equip a school” (2).

Though she did not mention eating together or cleaning up, Ruffin included the idea of collegiality in her inaugural address: “… we need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other, we need to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends.” It is almost certain that her social status afforded her servants—perhaps she hadn’t had the experience of serving others from the kitchen.

**Ethics and High Ideals**

“Black women organized clinics and nurses’ training schools . . . launched mutual aid societies to provide funeral benefits and sustained churches through fund-raising activities” (http://college.hmco.com). The National Association of Colored Women includes “work for the moral, economic, social, and religious welfare of women and children” as objectives (http://www.africanamericans.com). “Advancement of the people, “best interests of the community, city, and race,” and “good literature and Neighborhood centers for the moral, physical, and intellectual development of the young” reveal the determination of the Atlanta Neighborhood Union to improve themselves and their city. Their aims of improving sanitation in homes and streets indicate Union belief
in the cliché, “cleanliness is next to godliness.” In their hope to “suppress” crime and vice in their neighborhoods, they demonstrate a concern for a Puritan morality.

Most of the clubs and other volunteer associations I examined for this dissertation either directly named or alluded to a divine presence in daily life and in associational rituals. James Weldon Johnson wrote the lyrics for *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (“The Negro National Anthem”) about 1899.

*Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring . . . Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us . . . new day begun . . . the chastening rod . . . the blood of the slaughtered . . . God of our weary years, God of our silent tears./Thou Who hast brought us thus far on the way;/Thou Who has by Thy might, led us into the light./Keep us forever in the path, we pray./Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee./Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee./Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand, True to our God . . . .* (cyberhymnal)

*The Double Standard, Gendered Expectations, and Patriarchal Rules*

Dissembling is one of the reasons clubwomen have been able to “come in under the radar” and make such huge contributions to their communities. If they let others take credit for their work, they got help finishing that work. By the same token, if they helped finish a task, but let others take the credit, they were enabled beyond their previous capacity. Allowing another to take credit for one’s work is a painful exercise, but women in patriarchal societies have done it for hundreds of years.

Black women perfected their own culture of dissemblance that enabled them to appear open but actually to preserve their interior lives from whites, and even from Black men and children. Behind a cult of secrecy and within a politics of respectability, this culture of dissemblance was revealed most powerfully in the national women’s club movement . . . . ([http://college.hmco.com](http://college.hmco.com))

As a specific example, members of the Eastern Star in all-black Boley, Oklahoma, dissembled--appearing to bow to the superiority of lodge brothers (who needed money to
finish a temple), shoring up the egos of men who couldn’t complete the task before them, and helping construct an actual edifice. In so doing, they enriched the whole community and provided a “blessing to the Masonic family” (Brown 1925, in Gates and Burton). The women of the community were given credit for having used “their clever methods of raising funds, in buying bonds and helping to devise every possible mean[s] of erecting and paying for Masonic Temples . . .,” and allowed to bask in the reflected glory of the Masons. Temples, clubhouses, and national headquarters buildings of volunteer associations were a base of activities, a place in which to transact business, and a location for conventions.

In another instance, African-American Baptist Ladies’ Aid Societies in Virginia used church suppers to raise money for building improvements. So long as they provided money for the local community, men didn’t see them as a threat “to the solidarity or sovereignty of the church.” When they started to raise money and support Christian missionaries beyond the control of the local church, however, they were seen as “dangerous and divisive” (Anderson, www.rande.org, 2).

The NACWC and the Atlanta Neighborhood Union provide two more examples of implied recognition for masculine superiority. The NACWC “dissembles” by specifying their desire to “promote the education of women and girls” and “protect the rights of women and children” (www.africanamericans.com). In phrasing their aims this way, they do not say they are raising women’s concerns above men’s. To do so would certainly raise a blip on the radar. Likewise, the Atlanta Neighborhood Union avoided mention of patriarchal systems and gender bias in their stated aims, possibly because they wanted to avoid confrontation with both whites and black males.

**Patriotism and Democracy**

The statements below indicate the strong likelihood that most, if not all, organizations for Black Americans view patriotism and civic duty as requiring full integration of the races and involving ethics strongly rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, for example, includes the words “True to our God, true to our native land.” NACW aims to “secure and enforce civil and political
rights for the African American race” . . . (http://www.africanamericans.com . . .), and NCNW pledges
to make a lasting contribution to all that is finest and best in America,
to cherish and enrich her heritage of freedom and progress by working
for the integration of all her people regardless of race, creed or national
origin, into her spiritual, social, cultural, civic and economic life, and thus
aid her to achieve the glorious destiny of true and unfettered destiny [sic].
(http://www.lincoln.edu/ncnw/_Lincoln University 2004)
The Atlanta Neighborhood Union lauded duty in their articulated goals.
Cooperating with city officials and the courts was a civic duty. Bringing about “better
understanding between the races” was a duty they imposed upon themselves. Taking a
census and cooperating with law officers and city administrators could have easily have
brought Union members into conflict with people who wished to be undocumented or
with those who were involved in illegal activities.

Many women I have invited to join volunteer groups have shrugged off the
possibility of their participation. They say, “If I’m going to belong to an organization, I
want to be a good member,” ignoring the facts that just paying their dues and showing up
at a meeting now and again can shore up the flagging spirits of their fellow members.

Hatred of Gossip and Dissention

Lift Every Voice and Sing is featured at meetings of clubs, sororities, schools,
churches, and auxiliaries that have a majority of black members. It is written from the
standpoint of first-person plural: we sing and remember; “May we forever stand.”
Singing, harmony, rejoicing, and listening are all part of an associational life that is
involved with collaboration. Even the tears in this song were “silent” and not disruptive.

The same diction and allusions to harmony are shown in the closing of the 1925
History of the Order of the Eastern Star among Colored People:

"The whole is crowned with lovely music and song rendered from time to time by
some of the most accomplished women of our State who glory in lending their bit
and take pride in being enrolled as members. So let's lift our hats again, to our
worthy women who with the other thousands throughout our Grand Organization
in America send up their voices in praises and cheer as we all go marching onward and upward and altogether lovely." (Brown 199)

The Atlanta Neighborhood Union announced its members’ dislike of confrontation and dissention in its very name. Union members intended to break down barriers between people in different sections of the city, to connect to other neighborhood unions, and to help establish similar unions elsewhere [emphasis added, PJM]. They wanted to be helpful and cooperate with city officials, with Associated Charities and the Juvenile Court. They also wanted to “bring about a better understanding between the races.” Each of the actions would have weakened dissention. The question of gendered voice (Goffman 61-66; Labov 192-193; Wolfram 17, 185-212) in the black community is one that needs much more examination. For example, there is no place in the literature I explored for this paper that alludes to a clubwoman’s version of doing the dozens, a verbal exercise that is practiced with great fervor by small children, gang members, and older members of the community—to greater or lesser degree, and with greater or lesser facility. The person who breaks down in the face of insults to person, economic status or parentage loses the game. Playing the dozens often involves vulgarity, and always involves insults. It is possible that clubwomen are, and have been, too concerned with their respectability to indulge in the necessary earthiness. They may be Christian and unlikely to swear or use vulgar language in public, and the doin’ the dozens is very public. Middle- or upper-class members may feel themselves above doin’ the dozens or may even be ignorant of the activity. The dozens implies confrontation. Since respectability, Christianity, status, and lack of dissention are all part of the clubwoman’s worldview in some way, it stands to reason that there is a place where various linguistic patterns of the African-American community come together. That investigation remains for another time, but should not be forgotten, because voice is so important to transformative learning.

Conclusions for Chapter Six

The leadership and community-building techniques that pioneer Black clubwomen found valuable a hundred years were relevant for their daughters and are now relevant for their grandchildren in both public and private sectors of the twenty-first
century (Allen, et al, 411-412). The mentor/protégée relationship found in club life, for example, has been a critical stimulant to emotional development and intellectual strength of younger members, and can be the same for school children. African American females who work out of the home and those who are full-time caregivers and homemakers face challenges similar to those of housewives and nurses a hundred years ago. The boardroom is the new venue (Beal 342). In corporate America, the racial and gender fortifications of the Victorian Era have metastasized into the glass ceiling (Allen, et al, 418), Unions and equal opportunity legislation have alleviated some occupational barriers, and formal education has all but eradicated illiteracy. Clubs and other volunteer associations (historically relegated to “women’s sphere of influence), should be inspiring educators, facilitators, trainers, and coaches in schools and industries. Consistent, low-cost, and inspirational activities and ideas for management training and formal classrooms are just waiting to be put to use again.

Whether or not they are working outside the home, and whether or not they are mature women or little girls, Black women need Black women as role models. A forty-something former student of mine recently bewailed the lack of black females in her workplace: “Pat, all the people who have helped me are white, why do my own people have to treat me so bad?” (Atlanta 2001). Her sentiments were echoed by a thirty-something colleague in Florida State’s graduate program. The Tallahassee resident said, “There are no African-American women in this department. I have to go to another department to even talk to another black woman, let alone take a class from one” (FSU 2003).

The role models needed are here. We just have to search for them.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE KNOX COUNTY PAPERS

Whereas Chapter Six examined the roots of club life in African-American communities and traced those roots to modern organizations across the nation, Chapter Seven examines small neighborhood histories written by extension club members in Knox County, Nebraska. Their authors spent their “time, energy, and ability” (Thompson 1987, 89) to document stories that were part of the records Gerda Lerner (1972) called threatened. The Knox County Papers provide a contrast to the WI’s Tweedsmuir Histories because they are not time-specific and seem to have been meant as a one-time gathering of knowledge and folklore endangered by death or failing memory. Both extension clubs’ and WI community histories were created at little or no cost to the public and received minuscule attention from public officials.

I included these brief sketches of country life in this dissertation because (1) they were rural women’s original writing that had not previously been analyzed in any serious fashion, (2) they highlighted themes common to women’s groups and farming communities across time and space, (3) they illustrated the self-abnegation common in women’s writing and storytelling, (4) they commented obliquely on the influence of geography in rural life, and (5) they revealed Progressive Era attitudes that were still important in 1963’s Nebraska.

The themes they explored in these histories were echoed in personal memories, comments from late 20th century school children or club members, and correspondence found in the Extension Office of the county courthouse. I also relied on a continuing dialogue with friends and relatives involved in Nebraska club work. In 2002, for example, I talked with Dorothy Porter, one of only two surviving members of a Cleveland Township extension club. She said, “We called it the ‘Happy Hour Club,’ because that’s what it was--a happy hour.” Then she sadly smoothed the tablecloth and changed the subject. Her reactions prove the strength of the emotional ties she formed in her extension club.

The State, the County, and the Women

186
The work of the Knox County extension club members proves the thread of truth in the old joke: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are passing over Nebraska, please set your watches back twenty years.”

In the 1960s, Nebraska wasn’t much different culturally than it had been in pioneer days, and life on the plains has still not changed much. Networks of kinship, church, school and community crucial to the pioneers are still firmly in place, as illustrated in the photograph of the Happy Hour Extension Club later in the chapter. Nebraska is still “at its kernel . . . the place the pioneers first crossed so long ago” (Greene 2002, 117). “The people in the Middle West are a different breed of cat. They don’t live with their heads in the clouds. They are willing to think things are OK. They’ll give you a hand” (2002, 230).

Dorothy Smithberger once called the state “a willful maiden” (Garrigan 1996, 1) and noted its unpredictability, but she also said, “Nebraska smiled her warmth and welcome through the fertility of her prairies” (1).

Knox County sits in the upper right-hand corner of Nebraska, across the river from Yankton. The county’s population clusters are called towns (not villages, as in England). Knox County had 11,457 citizens in 1980, but only 9,374 in 2000. Creighton, with a population of 1,223, was the largest town in 1990. Life in Knox County—as indicated by a falling population—is changing, but it still revolves around the land. Seventy-five percent of the people own their homes. Agribusiness and corporations are gobbling up family farms, but the mythology of the “home place” is still transcendent (Fink 1992,11-57), and many rural residents live in houses their ancestors built or on land their families homesteaded (Creigh 1977). Travel in the thousand square miles of the county still depends on the weather (Creigh 1977; Fink 1992; personal knowledge).

The Knox County clubwomen who did this writing seem to have been among the many plains farmers, artists and writers who feel the residual presence of European immigrants and wonder how to pass along the images and feelings evoked by that presence (Rine 2002, 3). They revealed the county’s general cultural nuances, but omitted information about themselves. Paradoxically, their leaving women out of their writing exposed an aspect of culture they may have wanted to downplay. Businesses, civic
leaders, one-room schools, mythology of settlers and Indians were featured broadly in *The Knox County Papers*, but the noting of women’s participation was miniscule.

Females who were important to the development of Knox County may have been discussed in earlier club histories, because Sarah Charlotte (“Lottie”) Bennett referenced one such in a letter to the Extension Office in 1950. A distant cousin, Lottie was one of those exemplary Nebraska women a Willa Cather protagonist commented on, “I have found Mrs. Cutters all over the world; sometimes founding new religions, sometimes being forcibly fed—easily recognizable, even when superficially tamed” (1954, 131).

The superficially tamed authors of *The Knox County Papers* seem to be of two cohorts—those who, like my grandmother, were born in the late nineteenth century and had their children in the 1920s or before, and those who were approximately my mother’s age and had their children in the 1930s and 1940s. The writers of the individual histories may have been somewhat younger or older, for there is no proof of any writer’s specific age.

Whoever they were, they struggled with the same problems early European settlers did—bad roads, unpredictable weather, distance, lack of disposable income and a dearth of leisure time that confined women to “dull monotony” (Levine, J., 1982; Welsch 1991). Deborah Fink, who studied late-twentieth century Boone County women in Nebraska, commented on their isolation:

> . . . men typically went to town or to visit neighbors without their wives. Men’s farm work was seasonal, but childcare and domestic responsibilities tugged continuously on women, keeping them at home. Some women also dreaded being seen in shabby clothes and worn-out shoes . . . Impoverished women were the most vulnerable . . . women’s loneliness also grew from physical isolation [. . . ] Dirt roads became impassable for long periods in the winter and spring. When women could use the roads, their travel to visit other women or to town was more time consuming and expensive than it would have been had they had shorter distances and better roads to travel. Working-class women were forced to stay home more often than women living on economically stable farms (1992, 55).
Those same bad roads and distance, however, afforded rural women the freedom to ignore many city-generated rules and to escape boredom of housework by taking on liberating outdoor tasks (which were seen as more important to the farming enterprise than housework anyhow). All of us who grew up on the farm knew we had to be home for chores (personal knowledge). When rural women and children visited in town or on neighboring farms, we timed our visits to conform to the milking schedule. Bob Greene (2002) quoted Leona Martens about being a farm child in the 1940s: “‘I was thirteen,’ she said, ‘That’s not little—not when you’re born on the farm’” (192).

Though all housewives “from working class to middle class,” were vulnerable to “the prevailing stereotype of society’s image of what the housewife should be” (Ogden 1986, xii), the code of conventional dress established by urban middle-class women was largely irrelevant to farm women when they were at home (personal knowledge). They to dressed so they could help get the outside work done. My mother and her friends wore overalls, denim or flannel shirts, straw hats and gloves in the autumn cornfields of the 1930s and 1940s. By the late 1950s, most corn picking was done with machines, but in earlier days, clubwomen worked beside their husbands and fathers in the field until mealtime, then returned to the house to prepare the food. At noon or mid-afternoon lunchtime, women stripped off their protective clothing to serve the meals in a ladylike fashion (in a dress). The trousers were a necessity as protection against stubble, but many women, like my grandmother, would never wear pants without a dress over them. She preferred the grueling work of the field or range, but could not bring herself to dress like a man and cross that gender gap.

Other Knox County farm women also dressed as necessary to get the work done, then changed for a visit to town or a club meeting. The logistics of this peripatetic life were sometimes tricky. A Golden Milestone explores how one of my mother’s friends accomplished a necessary change:

...Mrs. Elmer Miles...was helping her husband pick corn by hand. On club day, she begged for the afternoon off so she might attend the meeting. Since the field they were working in was quite a distance from her home, she took her “good” dress and bonnet to the field with her in the morning.
After eating lunch in the field, she donned her club attire and proceeded to drive her team and wagon to the meeting. When the meeting was adjourned, she returned to the field to husk some more corn. Apparently, after having the afternoon to visit with her neighbors, the job did not seem nearly so tiring. (65-66)

Fellowship was an important part of the meetings, (65), but we all practiced a stoical code that required us to see who could go “without complaining longest . . . Country people of both sexes practice it with equal fervency” (Perrin 1998, 27).

The watchword was “Make do or do without,” and housewives practiced the skills of salvage, improvisation, and substitution, making rugs out of scraps of worn-out blankets and dresses, inventing ways of making “apple pie” out of soda crackers, and ‘stretching’ coffee with parched barley or rye” (Welsch 1990,128).

Much of rural women’s day-to-day work in 1962 was as labor-intensive, back-breaking, and dirty as was a hundred years ago. Fieldwork remains more important than housework, and housework more important than any leisure-time pursuit. These women’s taking the time to write history indicates their profound feelings for their past.

Their deep feelings for their heritage notwithstanding, none of them told why she completed this work. None said there was a statewide goal of writing histories, though that may have been true. Many downplayed their personal contribution, saying others would be sending something in. They seemed discomfited by the thought someone might believe they wanted to be singled out. Roger Welsch (2000) found the same attitude in farmers who helped a young widow harvest her crop. When she thanked them, “They accepted expressions of gratitude but, clearly not used to the process, they often didn’t even pause [after completing their share of the work] . . . they were clearly embarrassed by the notion of being thanked for something that needed doing” (52).

Motherhood contributed to the lives of women on the farm, giving them a measure of emotional gratification, a certain amount of power over someone, and the hope they would be taken care of when they were elderly; . . . “motherhood told them they were women” (Fink 1992, 132).
Fink said that Boone County women didn’t compare themselves with other women or generalize about their commonalities. Neither did the Knox County women. They did not see themselves as the focus of their work, while Fink (an academic and an outsider) specifically did focus on women like them. Fink commented she found no sisterhood in Boone County, though there were approximately fifty separate clubs in Boone County between 1931 and 1984. Sixteen of these were viable in 1985 (Schneemeyer 1985, 24-25). Sisterhood, under the guise of “friendship,” is one of the most often cited reasons for women’s joining and staying with an organization. The “Brief History of the Crystal Club, 1936-1950” includes the comment, “Among the members themselves, a friendly feeling has been fostered by the custom of having ‘Secret Pals,’ gifts and cards being exchanged on anniversaries and holidays and kindly acts being performed by the unknown friends” (Piper, correspondence 1950).

Sisterhood worked for Happy Hour Club members. It was operating one day after my mother had come home from having major surgery. Many years later, my mother (Neola) still got tears in her eyes when she remembered the situation. She had anticipated the physical agony of opening the door. She said, “I just moaned. ‘How am I ever going to drag myself to the door?’”

Mother not only did not have to open the door—or anything else. Marie Meikle, a club member and neighbor, let herself in, told Neola to not get up, and said, “I didn’t come to visit. I came to work.” After cleaning the kitchen, cooking the evening meal, sweeping the floors, and making the beds, she bustled out to go fix supper for her own kids (personal communication, 1987). The relationship between these two women was exemplary, not unique.

In the photograph of the Happy Hour Club, my mother (Neola) is in the middle of the back row; Marie is at the far right. Dorothy, the aunt who gave me her copy of The Knox County Papers and set the American sections of this investigation in motion, is in the back row beside Marie. My grandmother is in the middle of the front row, holding a first cousin. The photograph presents two kinship networks. One includes my own grandmother, mother, first cousin, aunt, and third cousin. The second involves two other
women who were sisters-in-law. In Nebraska, many networks based on kinship and common interests are as strong in the 21st century as they were in the 19th.

Figure 3: Happy Hour Extension Club, Cleveland Township, Knox County, Nebraska, mid-1950s

Mary Thompson (who probably took this picture) was the wife of my godfather, a club member, the mother of a Pierce County extension club member, and a member of Creighton’s PEO Sisterhood. Her multiple roles illustrate both kinship and societal networking—a link to her daughters and daughters’ friends as an organizational woman, to all her children through kinship, and to me through church and the PEO. [Note: All persons who appear in this photo gave their permission for use of their image or are deceased.]

A list of Wausa, Nebraska (population 636 in 2000), illustrates the extent the voluntarism that helped Knox County deal with escalating changes. The Boy Scouts were organized about the same time the hitching posts for horses were removed from Main Street. Wausa observed its first “Decoration Day” before World War I, formed an Improvement Club in 1900 and enjoyed a short-lived Women’s Club in 1906. A Red Cross chapter and a Home Guard were organized in 1917. The Wausa Community Club (1914), the Wausa Colt Club (1928), the Masonic Lodge (1901), the Eastern Star, the 4-H, extension groups, the Philomathean Literary Society, a public library association (1902), A Young People’s Library Society (1891), at least one saddle club, and an American Legion Post followed within a few years. A Parent-Teacher Association was
formed in 1916, was replaced by the League of Women Voters, and then reorganized to become a study club in 1924. In its turn, the study club reorganized to form the Federated Woman’s Club in 1927. Their motto was, “It is what we think and what we do that makes us what we are.”

As the League declined, “study” became superordinate. This development showed how priorities were changing. Modernization—improving methods of keeping house—was important in the earliest extension clubs. That focus is still central to extension club life. In 1962, a club named the K-P Homemakers was formed (K for Knoxville and P for Pischelville). Members believe “All the clubs have led Wausa women to more abundant living, mentally, spiritually and physically” (Moran xlii-xlvi).

The Data

My aunt probably received her copy of *The Papers* from a contact in Center, Nebraska, where she grew up, but she does not remember where she got them. The extension club members with whom she and I talked in Creighton did not remember having seen *The Papers* at any time (personal communication, Knox County, 1990). The sheets I received over twenty years ago were legal-sized, but faded and fragile. The primary submissions were probably handwritten, because most correspondence from that era found in the Knox County Extension Office was handwritten.

The copy I received (LeBlance example shown below) had already been typed—and possibly even edited. There may have been more than one typist involved, and the typist may or may not have been an extension club member, a writer of a town history, or a Knox County Courthouse employee. She may have been all three. No one at the courthouse or annex remembered typing the work or knew who might have done it. These histories may or may not have been distributed to all county extension club members. The time lapse and changes in personnel prevented me from finding and interviewing any of the women who did the actual writing. Further information they might have shared is gone. Their loss constitutes a sort of hidden curriculum (Chartock 140, 167-168), implying women’s work and ideas are not important enough to be saved. Such hidden concepts can be revealed by examining women’s written and oral
communication, as others have done (Ehrenreich and English 101-102, 271; C. Pierce 242-258; Showalter 452-479).

Figure 4: Page from Knox County Papers (Moran 1998, lviii-lix)
As with the other collaborative histories examined for this dissertation, some of the Knox County vignettes are very polished; some show a lack of schooling on the part of the writer. Some pieces contain inaccurate material; some seem meticulously factual. They represent what folklorist Roger Welsch called “the typical, the ordinary, the everyday” (xii). Most of the events catalogued in the histories concern the 1800s and early 1900s, though there are some events in the mid-1900s as well. Records of the county were available to the writers, but only two or three seem to have used any reference material. At least twenty-five clubs were involved in the compilation, but little about the Creighton area was included, though Creighton was the largest town in the county. Perhaps jealousy kept information about Creighton out of The Papers. Perhaps Creighton women were invited to write something for The Papers and refused. Perhaps they wrote something and missed the deadline. Perhaps they felt they had contributed enough historical data by providing the information on their clubs in the early 1950s. The Papers’ origination and rationale will never be known for sure. The authors of The Knox County Papers wrote outside the constraints of academia, so I didn’t concern myself with “. . . the classification of the materials before me. It doesn’t matter in this case whether I am dealing with literature, oral history, folklore, local color, gossip, truth or fiction” (Welsch 1990, xvi).

Letters to the county agent and two program booklets (1963 and 1969) provided some information on Creighton. One booklet is from an urban club in Creighton Township; the other comes from the rural Happy Hour Club in Cleveland Township. Archival photographs, A Golden Milestone, these two programs, correspondence found in the courthouse annex, and personal recollections provide information about the concerns and achievements of the Knox County clubwomen who omitted themselves from their writing. Their concerns are virtually indistinguishable from the concerns and achievements of organized women elsewhere. Examining them leads to speculation about expectations for behavior—did women in these clubs feel farm ladies were mandated to be quiet and marginalized? Did they view the histories shown in Figure as subversive?
Would they have been subversive if they had been centered on the women in the area instead of on the towns?

**The Knox County Papers**

Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club Name</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon Off Club</td>
<td>For General Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy Homemakers Club</td>
<td>Crockett School Dist. # 77, The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chit Chat Club</td>
<td>Chit Chat Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads Extension Club</td>
<td>Crossroads Journey--1880-1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfort Progressive Club</td>
<td>Frankfort Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly Circle Club</td>
<td>The Old Norwegian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly Times Club</td>
<td>Friendly Times Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Circle Club</td>
<td>Roller Flour Mill: Early</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bloomfield Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hillcrest Extension Club</td>
<td>Hillcrest Extension Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Activities Club</td>
<td>How Wausa Got Its Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolly Workers</td>
<td>Jolly Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julis, Mrs. Rudolph</td>
<td>Knox County, Nebraska, The Tourist’s Haven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K P Homemakers Club</td>
<td>Pischelville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know Your Neighbor</td>
<td>Know Your Neighbor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morrill, Art</td>
<td>Morrville District 15 and District 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niobrara Valley Extension Club</td>
<td>Niobrara Island State Park</td>
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<td>Northview Extension Club</td>
<td>Northview Project Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Local Ghost Stories</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How Corn Was Discovered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How Corn Was Planted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Piper, Mrs. Bert</td>
<td>The History of Wausa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pischel, Mrs. William</td>
<td>Knoxville Was Once [the] Pischelville Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparta Sister Extension Club</td>
<td>Pioneer and Indian Legends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoney Butte Homemakers</td>
<td>Stoney Butte’s Original History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Bloomfield--Through the Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>West Pischelville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Farmerettes</td>
<td>LeBlance, Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Farmerettes</td>
<td>Mormon Monument, The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viking Homemakers</td>
<td>Viking Homemakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: List of Contributors and Articles in The Knox County Papers**

196
When I put *The Knox County Papers* into a sociology assignment at Florida State University in 1998, I typed the vignettes as individual appendices. The entry from “The Afternoon Off Club” became Appendix A, and so on. These appendices varied in focus, length, and style of the writer, but they reflected common themes. Each revealed the same mindset—a serious one. Unlike many other examinations of writings by and about organized women, there was little humorous material included. The narratives that were meant to be humorous were the kind Roger Welsch (1990) said would make you smile, but not laugh, “. . . and some are serious” (xv).

One anecdote regarding an elderly woman driver and one comment about a long main street were the only overt attempts at jocularity, though there were a few wry comments: “These stories are passed down through the times, and one can only guess at how our land really looked in the 1800s,” etc. The first [probably handwritten] drafts were never found, and *The Papers* were replete with the kinds of “repetitions and detours” Gauthier (1987) said are common to transcription (ix).

*The Knox County Papers* differ from *A Golden Milestone* in several ways. *The Papers* focus on traditional gendered history. *Milestone* focuses on women’s organizations and women’s lives (as shown in the Mrs. Elmer Miles excerpt, etc.). As Fink (1992) said about other work, collections like these are informed by attitudes inherited from authors’ mothers and grandmothers, from the idiosyncratic cultures of the separate towns, from the writers’ formal and nonformal educational experience, and from the time period. Comments meant to legitimate memories about economics, relationships, and geography can be skewed (xviii, xxi). The nostalgic Knox County observation about never knowing “the legend of these odd-shaped petrified bones” (xlix) reveals a romantic thirst for the past akin to Dorothy Smithberger’s.

Like many traditional historians, the writer of the Wausa information did not discuss the achievements of women, individual clubs, businesswomen as shop owners, or women who were farmers in their own right. To get that kind of information, I had to go to sources other than *The Knox County Papers*. The profile immediately below was taken from *A Golden Milestone*, which was written some twenty years after *The Knox County Papers*. 
Papers. Even a superficial analysis of the excerpt reveals common themes that are part of the club life. A discussion of those themes follows the excerpt.

Knox County women have been interested in learning new things for many years. As early as 1918, a group formed the Happy Hollow Club northeast of Bloomfield, Nebraska. They received information on cooking and sewing from the Extension Service in Lincoln. Mr. Reed was the County Agent at that time. This club was organized in the home of Mrs. Will McCartney. Mrs. Dave Hall, who had belonged to project clubs in western Nebraska before coming to Knox County, was the first president. She missed the fellowship of her neighbors, so she suggested they start a club in this area. This club dissolved many years ago and there is no written record of it.

Northview Club, organized in 1935, is the oldest club in the county that is still active. This club was organized at the home of Mrs. Dwight Case, assisted by Mrs. Reuben Lovejoy. By 1939 [after the Great Depression] there were 378 members enrolled in 25 clubs. In 1946, because many women were busy taking their soldier sons’ place in the fields, enrollment dropped to 166 members in 12 clubs. Immediately after the war [WW II] ended, clubs regained members. In 1984, there are 30 [Knox County] clubs and 319 members.

In the early years, many of the women were not allowed to drive, so their husbands took turns running a car pool. In appreciation, the women invited them for lunch. Many of the men complained about the chore, but the women secretly felt their husbands would not have missed the lunch and visiting for anything!

One early club listed monthly dues at five cents. The goal of one group, “Frankfort Progressives,” was to earn money for some needed dishes. To raise these funds, they shocked oats, churned butter, hatched chickens and cooked for threshers . . . Many members have commented that they especially enjoy their Extension club because of the variety of
ages of the members. One commented, “This way we never get older, only better.” In 1961, the Happy Circle club started a small hobby show that evolved into the annual Knox County Christmas Fair. The fair gives members a chance to display and sell homemade crafts. These skills have often been learned at locally developed handicraft lessons held during the year.

Other lessons have also been developed locally. Among the most popular of these are the ethnic cooking lessons, which represent the variety of nationalities residing in Knox County. Wausa has a strong Swedish culture, Verdigre a strong Czech culture, and there are also strong German and some Oriental influences. The Santee Sioux Indians in the northern part of the county have also shared their culture through extension activities. Through these activities, participants can learn more about cultures and nationalities of other people in the county.

Music has not been forgotten. A county chorus has been a popular group. They have enjoyed practicing and performing, and audiences have enjoyed listening. The Our Night Out Club from Wausa organized a kitchen band and said they could even boast of performing publicly!

Members who have attended the state conventions have always enjoyed workshops they attended. They decided more members should have such an opportunity, so a one-day-mini-convention has been held for several years, with a variety of workshops available. Many clubs do not have written records of past activities, only the stories and anecdotes remain. Through the years the number of clubs and activities available has grown, and the lessons have changed to meet the women’s needs. Knox County Extension clubs have truly accepted the challenge to grow by study, observation and participation, at home, in their community, and around the world. (Schneemeyer 1985, 65-66)

Common Themes

Education

199
From the number of times education is mentioned in these vignettes, it’s apparent learning is the obvious first concern of the women who wrote *The Papers* in 1963, with reverence for history a close second. In the 1880s, there were 2,701 Nebraska schools for a population of 452,402. Life might have been bleak. . .[but] the homesteaders found pleasure from simple activities . . .

Anything was a bee [. . . as with] a Friday afternoon spelling bee at the sod-house school when not only the youngsters but also the adults took their turns at the hard words, although it sometimes developed that not all of the grown-ups knew their letters (Creigh 101).

Finding the theme of education and other themes the Nebraska writers had in common with other clubwomen is easy, since they appear in the *Golden Milestone* (Schneemeyer 1985). Skills, knowledge, and transformation are involved in extension work. “Knox County women have been interested in learning new things for many years” (66). Lessons in cooking and sewing for rural women had been ordered from the Extension Service in Lincoln as early as 1918. Lessons in ethnic cooking that were developed locally featured the heritage of the Sioux, Swedes, Czechs, Germans, and Asians. Lessons on technique and recipes provided an easy way to spread knowledge of the people who lived in the local area and of countries from which the Europeans came. Lessons on neighboring Native American tribes, including the Santee Sioux likely revealed differences between various Indian cultures, as well as differences between Indians and European-Americans.

Individual pieces from *The Knox County Papers* reflect this educational theme. People who donated land for school buildings, people who built schools, people who taught school, and people who attended these one-room schools were all discussed—some at length. Education was so important it overrode the convention of women’s using their husband’s names instead of their own. In connection with schools, women and girls were called by their given names. Education was obviously superordinate, since names of midwives and mothers were not given—even in discussions of childbirth. Written and oral lore enriched club life and enhanced the worldview of extension club members. Farm women like my mother were determined to deep abreast of new knowledge that
could make their homemaking and nursing easier and more productive, but they were determined to have fun at the same time. The women of the Happy Hour Club met once a month for lessons and once a month to just socialize (calling themselves the Kensington for the latter meetings).

The writer for the Crossroads Extension Club noted that rural schools were disappearing as the farm families left the land. (In Canada, Carbert made the same comment about decrease in rural populations.) Although the process of closing schools and opening others had been ongoing, this author does not mention the fact. She may have been a young person who recently married someone from Knox County, had gone to school elsewhere, or didn’t know anything about school districts other than “Fairview Hill.” She may have been an older woman who once had known more about the area, but her memories were fading as she aged. She may have been given a specific assignment (i.e., her neighborhood), and did not feel she should stray from her task to generalize about schooling. It is probable she didn’t see Knox County schools as caught in a wave of consolidation, even though, during her lifetime, “Local school districts declined from 27,531 in 1932 to 16,960 in 1973. Between 1930 and 1980 the number of one-room schools nose-dived from 130,000 to less than 1,000” (Tyack & Cuban 1995, 19). One victim was the Fairview Hill School—“sold and removed in 1962.” In another area, District 7 annexed part of District 53 in 1956, making a viable unit. In that local school, there were still sixteen pupils for the 1962-63 school year. The authors who discussed these schools do not mention their own schooling, though many of them were educated in neighborhood schools. The surge of consolidation in the 1950s and 1960s swept both of these school districts away, leaving my younger brother to attend school in Creighton, the first in our family to go to “town school.”

School buildings are important to the entire community, whether urban or rural (Welsch 1990, 162-163). In Knox County, the schoolhouse for District 87 was used for church services from 1896 to 1907. Later, that congregation built the “Old Norwegian Church.” There was a school on the Santee Sioux Indian Reservation. The Bloomfield [city] School District assimilated the Fish-back School.
The K-P Homemakers Club reported that the first teacher of District # 7 was an R. Crossley, hired in 1873, a year after the school building went up. In June 1882, Mr. Clinton was the county superintendent. The teacher was Belle Sosure in 1883-1884. She was paid $19.00 a month to teach fifty-two students between five and twenty-one years of age. Directors, lists of teachers, and lists of pupils’ names are included in *The Knox County Papers*, with each list demonstrating literacy and European culture passing through formal educational channels.

Though there is a good deal of particular information given about Knox County children and their schools, there is nothing said about acquisition of new knowledge on the part of the authors. There is no documentation of nonformal or informal learning, though it was important. My mother, who was raised just a few miles from Knox County, spoke of Chautauqua activities in neighboring Pierce County (i.e., dances and lectures as discussed in Cremin 1988, pp. 434-437). Clubs and other volunteer associations facilitated both acquisition of new knowledge and retention of traditional skills and principles (program 1963, program 1969). That facilitation was ignored by most of the authors in *The Knox County Papers*, continuing a practice of putting women and their organizations in the background.

Conventions provide new knowledge and skills through workshops and discussion groups. Not only have Knox County women attended such conventions, they adapted the challenge of bringing this information back home through offering one-day “mini-conventions.” This is an example of how knowledge is diffused throughout the community and indicates that sharing knowledge is one of the rewards of women’s organizations.

*Value of History and Vision for the Future*

Another characteristic of club life is regard for history. Gerda Lerner and others have spoken about documents disappearing or becoming illegible. The “lost data” of the first and some subsequent clubs provide an example. Just as many other groups, Knox County’s clubwomen often have been more successful in keeping the past alive through the oral tradition and the passing on of techniques used in the past than in preserving the minutes of general meetings and conventions. Several members pointed out the value of
having a multigenerational group in which each cohort enriches the others. Tatting, crocheting, weaving, quilting, and knitting are valued as art now, though they used to be the only source of providing utilitarian clothing or decorative pieces. The twentieth-century globalized economy and machines have made it possible to buy quite inexpensive types of lace, but the techniques of generating beauty are part of the heritage clubwomen struggle to preserve.

Though they tried to make lovely things to pass on to their children and to resist the bleakness in their lives on the prairies, organized women also were involved with the pragmatic efforts to provide for soldiers. In the years before the Cooperative Extension Service was established, homemakers’ study and project clubs were in place and doing valuable work for the community and nation. Many of these clubs were involved with sewing or preparing bandages for soldiers. Just as the writing about Nebraska can be romantic or mundane, so their work products can be impractical or prosaic. Land Grant Colleges (i.e., the University of Nebraska-Lincoln) collaborated with groups of already-organized farmers—female and male—to formalize their groups. Farmers’ Institutes were part of this cooperative effort. Held in the early 1900s, these institutes held two- and three-day meetings annually at various locations around the state. They were concerned with agriculture, nutrition and food preparation (Schneemeyer, 1985, Prologue n.p.).

Knox County Extension Club members have a reverence for history and a common vision for the future. Copies of extension club poems, vision statements, and songs are readily available at the courthouse, even if of the women who wrote The Knox County Papers did not talk about their organizational history or explore ideas about club life in their future. The 1969 program for Young Homemakers, the “town” extension club, spelled out Creighton volunteer vision: “We’re out to make a better world . . . We’re learning new things ev’ry day . . . The youth are our concern/We strive to help them earn/Thru Extension we prepare for tomorrow” (23)

The Knox County Papers’ authors did not say they were writing history, but their general tone indicates they have a high regard for the genre. The lack of written purpose statement in The Papers made it impossible to determine a rationale for their specific choices in focus and authorship. We can only guess, because all authors have
idiosyncratic ideas about what constitutes history. Choosing subjects reveals individual hidden agendas. One woman describes how cattle drovers used to act. The description may be factual, but seems at least partly mythological. She seems pleased to be safe in the middle of the 1900s, away from drovers’ vain posturing and juvenile antics, but doesn’t want readers to forget frontier struggles. She may also have intended to remind us how much latitude those who worked with cattle were allowed, and to insinuate a little humor into this otherwise serious subject.

Cowboys used to drive a herd of about 1,500 cattle, Longhorns from Texas, to the Niobrara River. Here they would rest for two weeks and then they would cross the river to get into Dakota where the cattle were rebought or butchered. While they were waiting those two weeks for the cattle to rest, the cowboys took turns going into town to do a little celebrating. When they got more than their share they would just go wild and pull some stunts such as riding their horses into the saloon. They would also shoot out the lamps. The saloon, being made of logs, had many bullets sunk way into the logs. When the two weeks were up, the cowboys would heard [sic] the cattle across the river. The river was much deeper and narrower so the cattle could float across. There were so many cattle and their horns were wide-spread that they made a loud clicking noise as they bumped each other. Some of the cattle got caught by the current and floated away to quicksand. (lii-liii)

The authors included tenuous connections to well-known people and geographical locations, such as Davie Crockett, the King of Sweden, “English Pups,” the Mormon Trail, the Oregon Trail (“also referred to as the Overland Trail”), Lewis and Clark Lake, Gavins Point Dam, Old Jules (father of Mari Sandoz), and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).

How much did these authors see themselves as connected to each other, to the task of writing history, to other clubwomen, and to the larger world? The answers are implied by construction of The Papers. They must have been determined to not let their version of history go. Any inciting incident remains hidden. There may have been
mentors available to the writers, group discussions of the data, or editors provided by the various clubs. In hindsight, it stands to reason that at least some of the women who wrote this material might be classified as “connected” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule 1986, 100-130), since such connectedness “arises out of the experience of relationships” (183). Writing a history indicates allegiance to a worldview that values connectedness, and “connectedness with others is one of the most complicated human achievements, requiring a high level of development” (178). This would mean that the club members who wrote these papers were highly developed.

**Networking, Friendship and Sisterhood**

The attempt to connect with the past involves networking past, present, and future. Networking links women with other individuals in their communities, with their clubs, with federation members, and with women in other countries. Networks of kinship, religion, nationality and culture bind women in unique ways. The women who wrote *The Knox County Papers* believed relationships were important or they wouldn’t have been in extension clubs. The 1995 Knox County Atlas reveals networks of overlapping memberships that are only hinted at in *The Knox County Papers*. Detailed reporting of schools, churches, and post offices indicates the value of these institutions. Club membership indicates commitment to collaborative learning and work and shown in projects like this. Members would not have thought their writing proved women unimportant. They knew women were vital to stable families, strong churches, and the processes of democracy. Obviously, they also see Knox County as one of the stars in the crown of a progressive Nebraska.

The women who examined Indian life and folklore may have been more attuned to cultural differences than some of the others were. The short quotation below describes the Indian equivalent to concerts of European-Americans’ patriotic songs. “Many a[n] evening one could hear the chanting and beating of the drums as the Indians would hold their pow-wows on the river banks. They would usually last through out the night or until the Indians would collapse in exhaustion. . . .”
Native American cultures have influenced surrounding communities in mysterious ways. It takes little imagination to see a link to the uniquely American high school pep rally.

The names of the various clubs often highlight relationships. For example, circles are traditionally symbolic of unending relationships. Two club names included the word “circle.” Four of the clubs that submitted material for The Knox County Papers included the words “happy,” “jolly,” or “friendly” in their titles. Five titles include the word “extension,” which means “reaching out” [to others]. One group specifically calls for members to make contact by calling itself “Know Your Neighbor,” and a Sparta area club includes “sisters” in its name. These names led me to conclude friendship and happiness were part of what the members wanted from their clubs. Beyond including the names of the various clubs, friendship and sisterhood were not much stressed, probably because the authors were not discussing their own lives. Only one or two put themselves into the larger Knox County picture. The excerpt from Schneemeyer’s work, my personal knowledge of neighborhood cooperation, the determination of my aunt and my friends to help me get this content “right,” and the insightful comments of my mother and of women who completed dissertations or books about organizational life—prove the existence and value of friendship. Friendship will be major theme in Chapter Eight, which springs largely from a history of extension work in Nebraska.

A different kind of friendship was covered by the Stoney Butte member. She said Carl Dietz told her the Ponca Reservation lay across the Knox-Boyd county line and was too small for its population. The Ponca were friendly to settlers, so they “came across the river to trade with the white people, trading some of their clothing or other government issue for chickens or anything to eat.” The Rosebud Sioux, on the other hand, were hungry and had nothing to trade. They “came across the river [from their reservation] and took anything they could eat . . . The Kurkas had seventeen head [of cattle] and lost all of them and everyone lost whatever they might have had” (liii).

Voice

Another common theme of women’s history and feminist theory is voicing and silence (Belenky, et al 1986; Gilligan 1993). Gilligan reminds us that anyone imagining
that women are infantile and dependent in middle age has not taken into account “the activity of their care in nurturing and sustaining family relationships,” so “the problem appears to be one of construction, an issue of judgment rather than truth” (171). She continues, “As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. (173)

Belenky and her colleagues focused on formal education, but their work can be turned to advantage in the examination of nonformal education as well. “None of the women we interviewed wanted a system in which knowledge flowed in only one direction, from teacher to student . . . Many women expressed—some firmly, some shakily—a belief that they possessed latent knowledge” (217).

These academics feel that traditional classrooms and teachers provide negative examples of communication efforts. A woman needs to know, one alumna said, that her own ideas can be “very good” and “thoroughly reliable,” that a theory is “something that somebody thought up, and that’s all a theory is. It’s not this mysterious thing only Einstein could figure out.” (215)

Using the voice to sing in public or to address a meeting is an enriching and empowering action. Extension club members’ participation in public county choruses and singing in groups at individual meetings spread knowledge, broadened cultural awareness, and even fostered patriotism. The lyrics and tunes combined to help women learn the strength of their own voices and the power of collective voice. Audiences may have come to performances of county choruses to hear music that connected them to the old country, but they learned about the new country through “American” music (i.e., jazz, spirituals, Sousa’s marches, and gospel). Music helped forge a sense of community in towns full of diverse immigrants. Whether their knowledge spread through culture more than culture spread through knowledge we will never know. Either way, it was—and is—important to the participants and audience.

Singing, chairing a meeting, lobbying, and addressing conventions are important ways of presenting information to sisters in our organizations and to the nonmembers
alike. Writing and publishing are another. After hearing about my dissertation, one Pierce County extension worker said, “I tried to convince my [own] club members to write of our memories of farm life. As we talked, the stories were many and interesting, but no one would write! They may not have wanted to reveal that much about themselves” (personal letter 2000).

Naming is another type of speaking out. The names of women’s organizations mirror their gendered concerns. Homemaking was the major focus of women in Knox County, so it is no surprise names of many clubs reflect that focus. Being ladylike was also a focus, so diminutives were applied to women’s groups frequently in the early 1900s. The “Lionettes” auxiliary is associated with the [male] Lions Lodge, and the “Victory Farmerettes” partook of the both the war and their occupation to form their name. It is interesting, but sad to observe that lionesses do the bulk of the work, but when clubwomen wanted to be associated with “the” Lions, they chose a term that weakened their stance. The term “Farmerettes” implies that only men are farmers. There is a surfeit of examples of “ettes” in popular culture, one of the latest of which is “dude-ettes” for teenage girls who aspire to being dudes.

The towns of Knox County were named after men or natural landmarks. Both the Knox County town and the Omaha University are named after John A. Creighton. Bloomfield was either named after Bloomfield Dyer, who supposedly owned the site at one time, or after the fields of blooms in the area. Crofton was named for Pierce’s Crofton Court in England; the name followed him. Niobrara was named after the river, which the Omaha and Ponca called “spreading water.” Verdigre got its name the French-named Verdigris Creek (so called because of the copper ore that colored it green). Wausa was named in honor of Gustavus Vasa, a King of Sweden.

It would be difficult to place the women who wrote The Knox County Papers into the “fixed, exhaustive, or universal” categories of Belenky, et al. (1986,15). First, clubwomen bridge gaps between these categories. Second, the communication and learning of the Knox County women takes place in the informal sector, so it is more difficult to pin down than well-documented studies in formal institutions. Third, the facilitating of lessons for each other makes every member a teacher. Networks of learning
are more difficult to map than one-way teaching. Fourth, club activities take place in homes, church basements, and parks.

Most of the women who have written these individual stories are probably “silent,” “received,” “subjectivist,” etc. by turns. As the membership moves into a discussion of skill acquisition exercise, the individual women will have differing responses to the work. These responses will have been conditioned by what they already knew. Subjectivist women, for example, believe truth is absolute only for individuals (69). They distrust “logic, analysis, abstractions and even language itself. They see these methods as alien territory belonging to men” (70). How many more histories we might have had if those women who were “subjectivist” didn’t distrust analysis and language, we will never know. How many of the older women were illiterate and refused to participate because they were embarrassed, we will never know. And, we will never have any proof of why so many of the articles are very short.

Neola Porter (1916-1998) belonged to two Knox County clubs most of her adult life. She acknowledged hearing what Gilligan called “that internal or internalized voice [that] told a woman that it would be ‘selfish’ to bring her voice into relationships,” but believed none of the women in those two clubs was “silenced” (personal communication, 1995). Her opinion was that club members knew what they wanted and trusted their experience as a “reliable guide in thinking about what to do” (Gilligan 1993, ix).

The “Afternoon Off” writer might be considered a “silent woman” because she only gave a list of facts, with no subjective details. She feels connected to her club and her community, or she would not be writing. The only way she connects the county to the outside world is noting the 1891 sheriff was related to David Crocket. On the other hand, a truly silent woman would probably not belong to an organized non-church group in any case. Even a silenced farm wife or daughter might escape to the outside and think through her problems, or even use the animals as an excuse to verbalize her feelings. Though taking care of the livestock or gathering firewood might be arduous, the mental stress that accompanies “silencing” in the house might is absent in the barn or field.

The Friendly Circle Club author indicated a certain connectedness with the community, past and present when she noted the power of Christianity in her community.
She said that Lutherans wanted to raise their children in their “dearly cherished” European faith. Since “[. . . our] basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as we participate in it” (Belenky, et al., 3), her comments might place her in the silent category. If she studied and evaluated the Lutheran religion and spoke about it from her own ideas and values, then she was not a silent woman. If she was just mouthing platitudes, she was a silent woman (Belenky, et al). As Kevin Harris has pointed out, standpoint is crucial.

Received knowers believe all knowledge—including knowledge of themselves—comes from others (Belenky, et al, 48), so they try to live up to the expectations of others instead of working to grow. Extension clubwomen are bombarded with lessons that are meant to enable their challenge to modern life. It stands to reason that some clubwomen are “received knowers” (50-51). My experience and my mother’s comments are congruent with the idea that most clubwomen in Knox County will never be the kind of women who see themselves as stagnant and disadvantaged by changes in technology (50-51).

“There are many historical things of interest in our club’s vicinity. Some of these may be hearsay, but many have definite authorization,” the “Friendly Times Club” author wrote. She was obviously aware of different types of information in a hierarchy of professional jargons like those Keller discusses. She bolstered her outlook by alluding to an unnamed authority. She may have borrowed the information instead of formulating it, or she may have invented the authority to strengthen her comments. Her being named as “received” or “subjective” would rest on out finding out the truth about her writing.

In connection with this idea of voice, it is well to remember the comments of Jenkins’ unknown farmer’s wife. When asked about why she didn’t speak up in a male-dominated British meeting. She said: “. . . if we spoke, you know what we’d get when we got home. The men would make fun of us” (5).

Progress, Modernism and Efficiency

In spite of the outside world’s jokes about Nebraska, there is good evidence these clubwomen felt generally progressive and living in a civilized world. They asked for
lessons on drying, canning, freezing, and cooking produce and meat, possibly knowing the sad story of Adelaide Hoodless’ son. Since extension clubs and Women’s Institutes both belong to the Associated Country Women of the World, it requires no stretch of the imagination to believe that information was widely known by rural women.

Though holding property is a major criterion for personhood, the Knox County authors named only men as business owners and/or farmers. Still, they knew of women who were homesteaders and community leaders. My grandfather’s sister was married by a female cleric. My grandmother’s great-aunt homesteaded a quarter-section of land in Cleveland Township. Dora Rock, for many years the Knox County Superintendent of Schools, drove all over the county to provide academic support for country schoolteachers and to deliver academic materials. Knowing their progressive mindset personally, I remain puzzled about their omitting female individuals who contributed to the growth of the county.

The Crossroads Extension Club concludes, “...an abundance of huge cottonwood trees which must surely have many secret memories of the past eighty-three years as time leads on toward a hopefully prosperous 1963 ... Bloomfield in its seventy-third year finds its residents and patrons proud of its agricultural and industrial resources and its rapid growth, making it known as the ‘busy city.’”

Ease of travel and communication are two benchmarks of progress. The Knox County Papers carefully included ways people kept in touch with each other. Knox County had thirteen post offices by 1876, three with daily mail and the rest delivery three times a week. As the county became more modern, automobiles and roads led to new mail delivery scheduled. Several post offices were closed when the “motorized routes were established. Transportation was important to businesses as well as individuals and mail deliveries.

Newspapers were also evidence of progress. They provided a means of spreading information from national news sources as well as documenting local business activities and society events. The Brunswick Herald and Wausa Enterprise consolidated to become The Enterprise Herald; The Wausa Times existed briefly, and The Weekly Gazette became The Wausa Gazette.
Another of the themes readily apparent in club life is women’s ability to work with, through and around patriarchal systems. In the version of Knox County history shown in The Papers, women were important only if they got born, died, went to school or taught. The traditional message was clear “just men are important enough to be remembered, and only men make history.” The using of the husband’s name instead of the wife’s given name continued to be a widespread practice. A Golden Milestone and the 1995 Atlas of Knox County showed women’s existence still subsumed in their husbands,’ even though thirty years passed between publication of The Papers and the atlas. The practice of women’s being identified only by their husbands’ names reveals patriarchy. Men ran car pools for their wives and neighbor women, then stayed to “visit” and have lunch. (Members had to be chauffeured to meetings, rehearsals and performances of the county chorus.) When Mrs. Elmer Miles took time off from the harvest, she drove a team of horses to the meeting. The author says she “begged” for time off, implying male hegemony and the pressing need for field hands in the fall. Everybody works to bring in the crop.

The rewards of belonging to a club are as varied as the motivations for starting or continuing in one. Reward and motivation form another common theme of club life. When the Happy Circle Club showed off their hobbies and crafts in 1961, they were searching for recognition from their peers, from male and female family members and friends, and from the general public. Husbands who had been jealous of the time and interest squandered on handicrafts basked in reflected glory. Though the members wanted to display talents and ideas generated locally, they also wanted to show lessons from the state offices were not the only source of inspiration. The enterprise also was a source of much-needed income. The hobby show of 1961 has developed into an annual Christmas Fair that involves the whole county.

Indian women also dealt with patriarchal systems. One club member tells about an old Indian woman who lived alone under a huge cotton wood tree for several winters in the 1870s. This solitary existence could mean several things, but the options are not explored. The woman may have been a widow, have been ostracized for mixed blood or
for consorting with white men. She could have been a seer or an outcast. From the clubwoman’s point of view this Indian was an object of wonder, but not derision. Like the little old grandmother who drove her car around Bazile Mills, honking her horn, the Indian woman did not fit within the traditional woman’s role. She was, therefore, somewhat amazing. Though there was a hint of laughter in the remarks about the elderly woman driver, the serious tone of The Papers precludes the kind of counterhegemony contained in humorous remarks I’ve heard at club meetings. “On America’s rural landscape . . . you’ll find that it is precisely the man or woman with the sharpest wit who is the best source for serious advice” (Welsch 1990 xvi-xvii).

By 1962, rural women knew females were integral to the building of a farm, state, nation or county.

Thousands [had] homesteaded their own land . . . Thousands more kept stretching the bounds of a woman’s world, vying for jobs normally filled by men and even entering the professions [and . . .] as partners to their menfolk they performed labor worth more than all of the West’s gold by pressing for schools and churches, law and order. (Reiter 7)

The Frankfort Progressives’ raised funds in traditional housewifely ways (churning butter, hatching chickens, and cooking for gangs of men who went from farm to farm during the harvest), but they also stepped out of their proper sphere to help with the harvesting. Shocking oats was genuinely heavy labor. Going into the fields to earn money for new dishes showed their determination and physical strength, as well as their disregard for societal rules about woman’s place.

**Humor and Having Fun**

The Knox County women who wrote *The Papers* didn’t use humor as one of their rhetorical tools, but personal experience, profiles in *A Golden Milestone* (i.e., the one above), Knox County correspondence and discussions prove having fun is one of the bonuses of club life. I heard a great deal of laughter at meetings while I was waiting for the Happy Hour Club to break for lunch. The lack of humorous stories in *The Knox County Papers* implies a sense of high purpose, a determination to be taken seriously, and the unasked questions: “Can anyone take seriously a person who laughs? How can
someone who is funny possibly say anything serious?” (Welsch 1990 xv). A Golden Milestone (a history of the Nebraska Council of Home Extension Clubs) and the Lincoln Women’s Club web page feature a wider array of ironic comments and humorous anecdotes. According to Lancaster County’s Lincolnites, potential members for their Women’s Club included

(1) the University graduate, (2) the woman of common school education, (3) the self-educated woman, (4) the woman who belongs to other clubs, (5) the non-clubwoman, (6) the woman who does not believe in clubs, (7) the woman who does not wish to join a department, (8) the woman who wants to attend the club meetings but twice a year, (9) the woman who wants to be a member for the name of it, (10) the tired woman, full of domestic responsibilities, who wants to be a sponge, fold her hands, who needs an audience, has learned, and then go home refreshed to her treadmill, (11) the woman without companionship, [and] (12) the young woman and the young-old woman. (NEGenWeb 2003)

The serious, underlying message is clear: “Everyone can benefit from and donate to society through club work,” but that message was delivered with tongue securely in cheek.

**Collaboration**

“Pioneers learned that one can get along with so little. They always helped each other in time of need” (xxvii). The Knox County Papers were a collaborative effort, giving them a postmodernist flavor, but they were not constructed with postmodernism in mind. Still, they have many of the characteristics of postmodern thought. They portray differences between the authors of the separate vignettes. They prove the value of collaborative effort. Their teamwork on this general history of Knox County also provides support for the idea they valued cooperative effort. They belong to “cooperative” extension clubs and to Farmers’ Union Co-operatives. [Emphasis added. PJM]

Outsiders’ ideas about organized women and Native Americans—“Indians will never have anything, because they share with every other Indian, good or bad”—consist of blended folklore, legend, and fact. This lore is congruent with Patricia Turner’s
claim—“all folk groups may accept as fact implausible information that individuals outside that group perceive as utterly specious . . . but to group insiders, the item makes complete sense” (205).

Ironically, Native American ideas and their cooperative way of living have always important to the culture of the county. Our American folklore is replete with stories about Indians who helped whites. The First Thanksgiving is one such story. The regard for the power of Indian culture in Knox County is shown in The Papers. Nearly a quarter of the raw word count concerns Indians. For example, the Northview Project Club presents four pages of Indian ghost stories (xxxviii-xli). Whether Northeastern Nebraskans learned the value of cooperation from the Indians who were there when they [the Europeans] arrived, or just adapted already-cooperative practices to include techniques of the Indians is irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion. It is enough to know they oftentimes shared skills and food. It is enough to know that more stranded Mormons would have died near Niobrara if the Native American population had not brought them food and taught them survival skills.

Including data on some of the cultural practices of Native Americans adds depth to the Knox County history. Though Christianity formed a link between the Indian and immigrant populations, many Indians were true to their traditional values or returned to their traditional beliefs near the time of their death. The article submitted in the name of the K P Homemakers cites one such instance: “The tale goes that such a famous chief should be buried sitting on his horse on a hill, the highest around. As we survey the hill we see a rounded grave-like mound that could definitely be a grave. The mound is filled with holes dug by wild animals proving that this area is softer and makes for easier digging” (xxvii). The author is careful to say “could be.”

Political Activism

Political action is glossed over in The Knox County Papers. They do not even tell about Republicans and Democrats. Perhaps these women were thinking along the same lines as the Women’s Institute members who outlawed gossip and rudeness. Though the awarding of post office jobs, establishment of reservations, and punishment of cowboys who ran their cattle through the streets would have caused economic and political fallout,
that turmoil is ignored. Perhaps the authors did not consider the political aspects of the situations from which their churches, schools, cities, and county sprang as important as the simple fact that they had established and still exist[ed]. They may not have known the economics of establishing federal offices, so ignored costs. They might have not been told about the arguments that went on in closed meetings of men, or, perhaps, they felt that pointing out historical dissention would show the entire county in a poor light.

Belief in the Superiority of One’s Chosen Group

Though European-oriented comments in *The Knox County Papers* reveal a sense of pre-eminence, there is no arguing with the fact that 25% of the verbiage in *The Papers* concerned Native Americans. This is an important Knox County dynamic, which needs further exploration. Here, it is enough to say that some club members felt superior to be European-Americans and some felt that every cultural group had to be part of *The Knox County Papers* if they were to be valid.

One of the clubwomen talked to a Carl Dietz about the Native Americans’ knowledge and use of various kinds of trees and shrubs for medicinal use. Tobacco, in spite of its corrosive properties, has been used as medicine. One of the shrubs the Indians sought was Kinnikinic, which grew in clumps about five feet tall. Indians came to Soldier Creek to gather the reddish green bark in the early 1900s in old wagons with spring seats. They used for Kinnikinic for tobacco. Camped close to the river for two or three weeks, they used the water for cooking as they chopped out the best plants. Women had a specific role in every Native American enterprise.

Some pieces were more sophisticated than others. When one writer said, “Though now recognized as the most prosperous area in Knox County,” her having singled out Wausa as “the most” of anything illustrated her belief in the superiority of that community. Unfortunately, I felt, much of the information she gave also appeared in the 1960 Atlas of Knox County. The atlas’s having been printed two years earlier than *The Knox County Papers* called originality into question. I wondered if she copied her piece for *The Papers* or if she had written both pieces. The phrasing of the two narratives suggested the piece for the atlas was excused and simply expanded to make the county history, or that both pieces had been taken out of a genealogy. The Minnesota editors
who compiled the atlas were no help. They relied heavily on data submitted by county residents, issued a disclaimer about authenticity, named no authors, and cited no sources.

I was caught in a dilemma—either I was wrong about the honesty of the Knox County residents I knew or I was viewing plagiarism, academic larceny. I considered the possibility that the compilation of *The Knox County Papers* was started so far in advance of the 1962 completion date that this piece had just been lying fallow—waiting for the rest of the selections. In this scenario, the author was approached for material to go into the atlas and simply sent along information she had already prepared for the club project. Considering her skill as a writer, it seemed impossible to imagine she was ignorant of plagiarism. Hearing of my chagrin, one Pierce County clubwoman (personal communication, 1998) pointed to mitigating factors: “I understand your disappointment [at finding the copied material], but it is difficult to be a conventional, God-fearing Nebraska housewife and be original, too. You do remember when the answer had to be right, never mind that it was copied word for word?”

That remark nudged me toward further examination of this puzzle. I found myself unable to believe the author had intentionally used someone else’s work. Copyright infringement would cast the author as either ignorant or venal, which did not match my ideas of the area. I preferred to believe she wrote both pieces, and kept searching for evidence to prove it. That evidence came in a letter she had written to Arlene Binger, at the courthouse. In that letter, she talked about her club’s historical information, gathered in the 1950s. That 1950s history of Knox County Extension Clubs documented ten-year members. Postcards and notes that talk about this earlier history are still available at the Courthouse Annex in Center. The writing from the atlas and from various pieces in *The Knox County Papers* were so similar in diction and information, it became obvious she had written all of the pieces in question. “How Wausa Got Its Name” (xvi-xvii) was submitted in the name of the Home Activities Club, “K-P Homemakers Club: Pischelville” (xxiv-xxxiii) and “History of Wausa” (xlii-xlvi) indicate her range of loyalties. She wrote from the standpoint of a historian, a linguist, and a club member. Since she had mentioned religion in her writing, I was pleased to lay this ethical question to rest. I did not to see her as hypocritical.
Ethics and High Ideals

One article says that Wausa is “nestled in the southeast part of Knox County.” It continues

…as you enter this little city a feeling of serenity and Christian love seem to come over you. Three church steeples shining toward the sky make you realize, ‘God’s in his Heaven, all’s well on the earth’” (xvi). The town’s churches were the Tabor Lutheran, Mission Covenant, and Methodist. Golgatha Lutheran Church was close, but rural. The author refers to God again later, in connection with the Swedish heritage of many Wausa citizens, and concludes by saying it is through church leadership “we go forward in Faith and harmony (xvi).

“The History of Wausa” reported that the Swedes came to establish homes, but also to “seek a faith’s pure shrine” (xlii). “The summer of 1893, a ten-week Christianity school was held”[in the Lutheran church] (xliii), using Swedish as the language of instruction. The Methodists had a Sunday School in 1894. The Mission Covenant Church congregation met in the schoolhouse until 1898 before their church was built. The Masons and the Eastern Star both have connections to Christianity. Swedish culture and Christianity were obviously intertwined in Wausa. The Methodist Church often had a smorgasbord supper with Swedish decorations. The sketch concludes, “…many young folks from Wausa churches serve as missionaries overseas, and at home, as nurses, doctors, and teachers. Wherever Wausa people go, they somehow carry the stamp of Wausa—a kind of purity of heart and mind, and integrity of purpose, and an abiding faith in God and fellow man (xlvi).

The Friendly Circle Club’s article, “The Old Norwegian Church” (xi) reveals another situation in which differing aspects of a worldview reveal themselves. Though Norwegian settlers came to the Niobrara area in the early 1890s and took over Indian land, they “realized the importance of religious instruction and wished to bring them up in the faith they so dearly cherished, so decided to organize a Lutheran Church” (xi). There is no comment on the realization that the Indians were cheated out of their land in one fashion or another.
The Lutherans held services in neighborhood homes and in the District 87 schoolhouse before their church was completed in 1907. This author delineated efforts to solicit funds for the church, donation of the land, activities in the community, use of the Norwegian language (until 1918), the cemetery, and loss of members during the drought. She says that this country church merged with the Lutheran church in Niobrara in the 1940s. “Rather than let the church building fall into ruin, it was sold and razed” (xi). The site remains “an important landmark.”

The Friendly Times Club touched on a common theme—organized religion (xii). According to this vignette, the Addison Congregational church (later turned into a home), Victory Church (started as a Sunday School in a rural school), Star Church (holding no services by the early 1960s), and the Holy Faith Episcopal (called the “Hobo Church” and served an Indian population).

Conclusions for Chapter Seven

*The Papers* are informed by a general feeling that Knox County has been a better place than it would have been without Europeans. Hypothetically, a clubwoman might write:

Settlers’ hard work got us where we are; our hard work keeps us here. When our ancestors saw that there was a need for something, they worked together to accomplish the task. Some things European we retain, some have fallen by the wayside. We used to speak the tongue of the old country, but now we speak American. We have the natural gifts of space, game, fish, and natural beauty; but living here can be rough. We get the job done because we come from good stock. The settlers made a place in their lives for God, and so do we. We are proud of our county, our state, and our ancestry. We appreciate the world. We know about legal forms and history, having learned well in our one-room schoolhouses. ‘[We have] . . . no hard liquor stores, no town drunkards, no slums, no dead-beats’ (xlvi). We’re not perfect, but we’re close.

That general Knox County attitude acknowledges the value of hard work, exhibits a regard for history, shows how to face technological and societal changes, valuing of
language, reverence for the natural world, reliance on organized religion, pride in cultural heritage, and insistence on empowering education at all levels for all individuals. Other clubwomen (including Institute members) everywhere seem to buy into this same system of beliefs. The following chapter will show that Nebraska’s other extension club members have the same ideas as Knox County women do. The boilerplate of club life became more clear with each organization I examined. The links between the beliefs that guide adult education and the beliefs that guide clubwomen’s organizations are obvious.
Chapter Eight, like “social, bottom-up histories” (Frank, Wong, Meyer, & Ramirez 49-50), describes the self-conscious efforts of women to document their learning activities, their other personal challenges, and their accomplishments. It involves people like Pearl Urbom, an early club member, who declared, “My extension lessons replaced the college education I could not receive” (Schneemeyer 1985, 77).

It involves people like a German war bride who originally joined the Young Matrons Extension Club to learn American ways, “get acquainted, build friendships and confidence” (28). Through the club, she became newly aware of what value her European experiences had, and shared those experiences with other members.

It involves women like the twelve who attended the Zetetic Club on February 6, 1911. Fifty percent of them read papers or led discussions, a level of participation rare in modern organizations. Zetetics’ topics included Nebraska’s Traveling Library Commission, women’s role in the passage of bills, other people’s public libraries, Navajo and Mojave cultures, and “Art and the Indians of Arizona” (Reed 15-16).

Home Extension Clubs served as “the primary source of social and educational growth to the ladies of the county” (Schneemeyer 1985, 71), though some of them grew out of other federations. Chapter Eight is divided into uneven sections entitled History; Philosophy and Ritual; Service and Leadership; Education and Club Life; Friendship, Humor and Collaboration.

History

As early as 1889, Custer County had women’s groups whose members “prepared and read papers, attended meetings, and took part in discussions. The first woman’s club was organized in 1889 at the Custer Center School, five miles northwest of Broken Bow. The earliest home extension lessons were during World War I.” [Emphasis added.] (38).

A Clearwater Creek member reported that in the early years, if weather and roads were bad, some of the men hitched horses to a wagon, made the rounds picking up members and delivered them to club. The women all wore dresses then, and one very
cold day an older member was asked if she was cold after getting out of the wagon. She answered, “Lawdy, no! I’ve got on three pair of socks!” (22)

Congress passed the Smith Lever Act in 1914 (Schneemeyer 1985, 30-35). Nebraska’s State Extension Service was organized a few years later. The Nebraska Council of Home Extension Clubs (NCHEC), to which Urbom and the young German immigrant wife belonged, appeared in the surge of professionalism that was swept into being with twentieth century technological change and increased urbanization. Cheyenne County Farmers’ Institutes appeared in those early days of the Extension Service, and the DuCum Club (founded in 1927) was the first women’s club. Through the years, the members of this and other clubs have sent feed sacks to England, helped Chinese students attending the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UN-L), made contributions to CARE and the Red Cross, sponsored boys and girls to the Nebraska faux political conventions called “Boys’ State” and “Girls’ State,” and “entertained each other” (34).

Nebraska’s extension service grew through individual efforts, as the Women’s Institute had done. Madge Watt took the Women’s Institutes from Canada to England when she returned home after the death of her husband. Bessie Wiles, who lived in Otoe County, Nebraska, talked to a friend from Missouri. Wiles found women in Missouri were learning how to make dress forms, and asked her county agent if Otoe County could get organized. “The rest is history,” she said, “By so cooperating, 70 women were taught to make dress forms . . . and in those days construction it was” (75). Later on, Otoe County members learned techniques of food preservation, organized blood drives, and constructed floats and booths for county fairs. The felt need for efficient and inexpensive clothing construction provided the impetus for the initial organization. The always-ongoing need for volunteers to support the medical community and the desire to celebrate a good harvest reflected the service and social aspects of organizational life.

Mrs. Otto Hardesson contacted the Keith County extension agent for help in forming a club through which she could organize her efforts to help neighbors raise baby chickens in 1921. It appears that, since she had the knowledge to ask for help and the skills her neighbors wanted to acquire, she became the natural leader of the new group.
She was elected president! Dues were one dollar per year, and all-day meetings were held every two weeks.

The serendipitous use of available spaces has been a common theme in the history of voluntarism. The Johnson County Home Demonstration Council was organized in 1936, but groups had been meeting in “City Hall, the court room, private homes, community buildings, [the] county agent’s office, church basements, parks, and [the] basement of the post office” (61) for years before that.

Another 135 Nebraska women took advantage of an available space when they went east in 1936 to attend the Triennial Conference of the Associated County Women of the World (ACWW). Deviating from their path to Washington, D.C., the women took a side trip to Niagara Falls, where they all stayed at the same hotel. Conducting an impromptu club meeting, they elected a chairman for their group, a secretary, and a voting delegate. They also collected the necessary twenty-five dollars for ACWW dues. When the newly-formed delegation arrived at the convention, they were properly represented. Returning to Nebraska with their ACWW information, the veterans of that trek to the District of Columbia galvanized their colleagues. A few months later, eighty women adopted the constitution for a permanent association in the state. Evelyn Wolph was elected president for 1937.

The original plan had been to hold a meeting for North Platte delegates only, but requests from women in other areas were overwhelming. The “North Platte meeting” ultimately involved some 500 delegates. The second annual meeting was held in Grand Island, with 832 attending. NCHEC joined the National Council of Home Demonstration Clubs (later called National Extension Homemakers Council) in 1940. Helen Schneemeyer (1985) noted the irony of the Council’s genesis: “Isn’t it interesting that, in the midst of the great depression, a group of Nebraska women made this effort to attend a gathering of rural women from throughout the world?” (5)

Gage County recorded a gap in time (1912-1918) between the start of their extension programs and inception of programming specific to women. Once the women had their own programs, they pursued efficiency with a vengeance. One of their slogans was, “Wear it out—make it do. It’s better to belong to a construction gang than a
wrecking crew” (50). Putting this slogan into operation, they made gloves out of old clothing and pillows out of neckties.

In Garfield and Loup counties, “Just like the many intricate pieces and stitches of a patchwork quilt” (51), women worked together, cooperating when most of the travel was done by wagon or horseback. Later the Model-T Ford became common, but many of the members still came in on horseback or rode on a mule. They held all day meetings with the hostess providing the main dish and other members bringing another dish for lunch. (51)

Table 3: Efforts to Organize Voluntarism in Nebraska

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County or Area</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>County or Area</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custer</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td>1924</td>
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<tr>
<td>Furnas</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Merrick</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<td>Gage</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Kimball</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheyenne</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Dundy and Madison</td>
<td>1930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colfax and Hamilton</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Arthur, Holt, and Pierce</td>
<td>1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deuel and McPherson</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Boyd and Brown</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nance</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Chase and Dixon</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge, Frontier, and Knox</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Gosper, Keya Paha, Kearney,</td>
<td>1935</td>
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<td>Franklin, Howard, Nuckolls,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cherry, and Harlan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuming</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Garden, Johnson, Logan, and</td>
<td>1936</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pawnee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancaster, Nemaha, and Lincoln</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Dawes and Greeley</td>
<td>1937</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith and Phelps</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Hitchcock</td>
<td>1946</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garfield, Hall and Loup</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>1953</td>
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<td>Perkins</td>
<td>1923</td>
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This incomplete table was composed after dates were extracted from *The Golden Milestone* (Schneemeyer 1985). The pre-NCHEC picture that emerges is imprecise, but useful. Providing particular dates was not a mandate, so some of the authors noted the founding of their earliest organizations, some the founding of clubs dedicated to extension work, some the arrival of the first county extension agent, and some the organization of county councils. Though the table does reveal the extent to which organized activity was developing in rural Nebraska, it is not completely logical, with mutually exclusive categories delineated. It reflects the focus of the individual authors, availability of historical material, the geography, and the demographic composition of the various counties.

Dundy County organized a Project Club in 1930, several years after the Smith Lever Act, but before the formation of the NCHEC. There were 5,610 people and 709 farms in the county. County women were reeling from effects of the depression, rapid technological changes, and World War I, but by 1933, there were nineteen clubs in the county. It is recorded that they cured 1500 pounds of meat, canned another 3000 pounds, and made 400 pounds of cheese (45). The divide between women’s groups and men’s was porous out in the country, with Farmers’ Institutes usually involving programming for both sexes. The absolute necessity for cooperation in feeding the community overrode any fine distinctions in gender roles. In Holt County, men joined women at an Extension Club workshop for preservation of meat in 1933. Holt County women had held meetings on nutrition and general health from 1930 on (58).

“If a monetary value could be placed on the volunteer work accomplished by extension clubs, the figure would be phenomenal. The ladies sewed miles of seams for donated garments; provided sponsorship for foreign families and students; furnished hundreds of items for local schools, and needy families . . .” (34).

**Ethics, Ritual, and High Ideals**

Mary Stewart’s *Collect* not only reveals the philosophy of extension work, but also provides a link between extension clubs and other volunteer organizations. This prayer, conceived of as a daily exercise, was written while Stewart was principal of a
Colorado high school, printed in an American magazine and *The Countrywoman* (official publication of ACWW) in 1938, and has been adopted by volunteer groups all over the world. It antedates the Creed that was written in Lincoln. Stewart (a member of the Fortnightly Club) felt that “. . . women with wide interests working together for large ends was a new thing under the sun and that perhaps they had need for a special petition and meditation of their own” (Schneemeyer 1985, n.p.).

NCHEC is linked to ACWW, the Ladies of Essence, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC), and Business and Professional Women (BPW) through the philosophy shown in Stewart’s prayer. The creed used since 1953 echoes thoughts articulated in the Collect.

I believe a nation is as strong as the communities of which it is composed.
I believe my community is as strong as its homes.
I believe, as a homemaker, my responsibilities are:
To guard the morals and ideals of my family;
The mental, physical and spiritual health in my home;
To be myself without conceit, envy or false pride, that
I may seek and appreciate the better things in life.
To grow by study, observation, and participation in the affairs of the home, community, nation and world.
To share what I have in talents, time, and material with others.
I believe my job as homemaker a magnificent challenge, with heart-warming compensations. (Schneemeyer 1985, n.p.)

Recitation of the creed and the daily prayer are only two of the customs that bind club women to each other. Construction of tapestries and quilts, having Secret Pals and Spring Flings, recognizing long-term members, singing in groups or choirs, treasuring a certain secrecy, collectively preparing meals and dining together, respecting achievement, and manipulating color symbolism are also important. In 1976, the bicentennial year, NCHEC members completed a tapestry that was first displayed at the annual meeting in Scottsbluff, then shown at various places around the state. It was finally presented to the
Nebraska State Historical Society (Schneemeyer 1985, 68), a tangible artifact symbolizing the connection between individuals and clubs.

As each county determined the design of their [canvas] block, pride in heritage swelled. Blocks depict[ed] local landmarks, agriculture and landscapes. In one county, every member put in a few stitches. In another, a grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter each did a portion of the block. Still another was made by an 88-year-old woman who was “thrilled to work on the needlepoint.”

One member reported, “It was the most interesting thing I have ever done.” (18) Rural women made quilts out of desperation and to construct pieces of art (Schneemeyer 1985, n.p.; Welsch 1991, 128). “Club ladies often made friendship quilts as a farewell gift to a departing member. Each member embroidered her name on a block, often using flour or feedsacks for material, then the club set them together and quilted it at a meeting” (48).

Though contemporary women also construct quilts as art or memorabilia, not every woman is a particularly talented seamstress. Some members are writers. Louise Bernhardt Corcoran is an example. Corcoran attempted to describe her connection to voluntarism by offering a metaphor as part of her 1936 statement for the annual report:

The development of the extension work is similar to that of human life. In the first years, growth is rapid as that of a child growing toward adulthood. After the adult stage is reached, there is still much growth, but it is in the form of development and not so much in physical size. I believe that in extension work, we are now in more or less the adult stage. (54)

One [paid] 1923 County Agent, Boyd Rist, also used figurative language to try explaining his situation, “If local farm organizations hadn’t taken an active interest in the promotion of the work I would have been as useless as a cistern without a pump” (49).

Service and Leadership

The Nebraska Council of Home Extension Clubs appeared in the lull between the two perceived “waves” of social activism on either side of 1920:

Since the early nineteenth century women had influenced what took place in electoral and legislative halls from outside, not only by seeking suffrage but also by inquiring into
a wide range of health, safety, moral, and welfare issues. Women had built a tradition of exercising political influence and efficacy—admittedly hard to measure—through voluntary organizations. (Cott 1995/96, 9)

Nebraska’s women’s clubs were hard hit during the 1930s. The Depression and arid “dust bowl” conditions caused many farming families to leave the area and find jobs elsewhere (45, 48). This migration drained the membership, but county home extension committees still included women from the County Farm Bureau Board, a county chairman, a group chairman, and other members as deemed necessary. In spite of this vigorous outpouring of time and energy, they needed help. Turning to the government, they obtained some federal money in 1935. This enabled the state to hire ten Home Demonstration Agents and bring the central staff to twenty-four. “Six state specialists were employed to give leadership in subject matter [and] by 1936, membership in project or home demonstration clubs had increased to 26,600” (Schneemeyer 1985, n.p.).

Professional home extension leaders, nation-wide, were required to have degrees (personal communication, North Carolina retired Extension Agent, 2002). Mary Ellen Brown, after whom the Mary-Ellen Brown Scholarship Fund was established in 1945, was Nebraska’s Home Extension Leader from 1923 to 1945. The University of Nebraska Foundation accepted the initial deposit of $223.70 in 1946. The first grant ($50.00) was awarded in 1948. The amounts of the grants may seem small by today’s standards, but they were valuable in the earlier economy. In 1964, the fund stood at $2,800.00. By 1985, thirty-four University of Nebraska Home Economics students had benefited from this fund.

Florence J. Atwood served from 1945 to 1957. Atwood held a master’s degree from Michigan State (Schneemeyer 1985, 6). Agnes L. Arthaud was the State Leader-Assistant Director from 1957 to 1974. She held degrees from the University of Nebraska and Cornell. Roberta E. Sward was Assistant Director from 1974 to 1985. Sward’s degrees were from Colorado State and Oklahoma State; her doctorate was from the University of Nebraska (7).

Council presidents served closer to the grass roots (8-15). Viola Houdek (Thompson), for example, served from 1941 to 1944. She was a retired English teacher.
(8), and may also have had a degree; however, at that time she could have easily attended a normal school instead of university to obtain teaching credentials. Virginia Jones, president in the early 1970s, was on the board of the university’s Home Economics Alumni Association. This implies she had a degree, but she also may have earned the position in another way.

State Council presidents, the general membership, and State Home Extension Leaders all developed lessons and programs at different times. Participation was high in many early clubs. Six of twelve members present gave talks or read papers at one meeting of the Zetetic in 1911 (Reed 15-16). “In the 1910s and early 1020s the lessons were presented directly to club members” (Schneemeyer 1985, 16). That kind of face-to-face learning was changed about 1924, when it became customary to pair inexperienced with experienced leaders. Individual groups elected a Leader A and Leader B. These women obtained the lessons from a central location and presented them to the general membership. Leader B was the assistant for the first year. After one year, Leader B became the primary, and a new Leader A was elected. The one-leader custom returned in the 1940s. These leaders not only assimilated the book knowledge and skills necessary for hands-on activities to benefit their sisters, they also had the opportunity to observe experienced professionals conducting meetings and giving instructions. Each month, the lesson leaders became more proficient at managing groups of people and illustrating new techniques. Thus, the transfer of knowledge and skills from the central location to the outlying areas doubly empowered the women who carried the knowledge from Lincoln to Scottsbluff or Ainsworth, etc.

The author of the Boyd County vignette wrote, “The need to learn and the need to help are probably the two most important reasons that Home Extension will continue in Boyd County.” Having estimated the education and activist purposes of community organizations, she continued:

The total impact of extension club work in Boyd County is hard to measure. Through the years the women who have belonged to extension clubs have also been leaders in other community and rural efforts to improve their way of life.
Some of these persons became good leaders because of their participation in extension [emphasis added, PJM]. (27)

Education

Though their remaining in existence is their most amazing activity and service to the community is easily proved, the articulated major activity of extension clubs is the acquisition of knowledge. Topics for study have included community and club histories, biographies of exemplary women and leadership techniques, traditional skills and theories of the future. Club members have learned through collaborative behavior and individually. General knowledge was gained informally through socializing, and nonformally through specific lessons targeting the rules of club life (public speaking, using Robert’s Rules of Order, etc.).

The primary objective of club work is continuing education. Clubs use lessons prepared by the Extension service, [at] county level and [by] individual members. In the beginning most of the lessons dealt strictly with some aspect of homemaking. The scope has been widened to include community affairs, taxes, legislation, candidates for election, wills and estates, extending the horizon beyond the home. Rural and urban club members have the same interests. (60)

Urban GFWC members of the 1800s, had access to libraries, schools, lighted streets, cabs, and paving, but such amenities were rare for Nebraska’s rural women. In spite of erratic weather patterns, bad roads and isolation, however, women such as those from Broken Bow gathered to read aloud and discuss papers they had written (Schneemeyer 1985, 16).

Antelope, Banner, Brown (28), Buffalo (29), Cherry (33), Fillmore (46), Frontier, Greeley (53-54), Harlan (57), Jefferson (61), Keith, Keya Paha (65), Knox (66), Lancaster (66), Nance (73), Pierce (78), and other county authors presented information to prove club life was a learning life. One Madison County writer noted getting up in front of other people helped members overcome their insecurities. Though she deemed Madison County clubs heterogeneous, all members were “assumed to be thinking women . . . Thinking women understand that living is a continual learning process and recognize
the lessons offered through extension bring continued education to us as homemakers, wives and mothers. Thinking women appreciate growing in leadership” (70).

The format of the lessons and degree of formal organization depended on the knowledge and experience of the women involved. The founding of each group depended on the determination of the potential members, and on their access to good roads. The continuation of the groups was contingent upon their being able to reconceptualize club life in times of stress. For example, 1940s project clubs in the drought-stricken midsection of the state remade themselves to deal with the exigent circumstances. “Since the gas involved in driving to take demonstration lessons became a hardship for many women, some clubs became Study Clubs, using only study lessons or creating some of their own lessons, such as quilting or rug making” (62).

Pawnee County programs “have provided for a unique blending of the needs of our young homemakers and the accomplishments of our established ones. All members believe that the rewards and challenges of homemaking are manifold and that each member’s contribution to the organization’s efforts will strengthen the program” (76).

Extension lessons during the World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II included gardening tips, preparing dried foods, and ways of keeping Christmas merry (people fed and children happy). After the war, when the POWs from German forces had been released, US military personnel returned from the front, and families reunited, the country was concerned with economic and emotional recovery. For the first time, rural Nebraskans had a chance to obtain electricity in their homes, paved highways, a modicum of leisure time, and machines that lessened the heavy outside work. These changes insured that Nebraskans would not be left completely behind the rest of the country in education or development. “[Extension] Lessons reflected the interest of club members in the many new small electrical appliances. They wanted to know how to care for home furnishings and it was evident that homemakers were interested in quick tricks to reduce time spent in the kitchen preparing meals” (17). Consumer affairs and self-improvement were stressed in the 1950s. The educational level of the youngest clubwomen was rising, and girls’ access to formal schooling was a given (17). Knox County extension club members collaborated with the Red Cross to offer a workshop in
basic first aid. It was facilitated by Helen [Mrs. Ancil] Bell, of RR # 2, Bloomfield, once president of the Afternoon Off Club. One of my friends and I attended the workshop as adults. She was a teenager; I was about eleven. Other clubwomen thought I was too young. My mother spoke on our behalf, stifling dissent, “If there was an accident out here in the middle of Highway 59, wouldn’t you want someone out there who knew something about first aid?”

“In 1941 a [Phelps County] lesson was given that sounds almost unbelievable today . . . The women, in an effort to help the southern cotton industry, bought bales of beautiful pure white cotton and made 246 mattresses which were covered with a blue and white pillow ticking” (77). Heavy and warm, some were later adapted to use with inner springs; they lasted for years.

Jefferson County clubwomen were, early on, “determined to better their everyday living situation.” In later years, the changes in rural life allowed them to combine learning and pleasure in trips to Willa Cather’s home in Red Cloud, the state capitol building, Arbor Lodge, Shenandoah (Iowa) and the Eisenhower Memorial at Abilene (60). The ease with which these club members in these late twentieth century members completed excursions to such far away sites and treks to meetings would have seemed dreamlike to the earlier rural plains residents. Roads, weather, and distance combined to deter all but the most resolute travelers in the early days. The same barriers exist today. With more than 6,000 square miles of rolling sandhills in Cherry County alone, difficulties abounded. In 1985, there was approximately one person per square mile of that county. Still, eighty determined women attended a countywide meeting during the Depression in Valentine’s city park. The meeting was held in June; by the close of that year [1935] “there were five Home Extension Clubs with an enrollment of 116 homemakers” (33). In Blaine, Hooker and Grant counties, which make up the administrative unit known as the Central Sandhills Area, travel could be as difficult as it was in Cherry County. Here again, in spite of the obstacles, there were four study clubs in the area in the mid-1930s. In 1936, Extension Agent, George A. Adams said,

Throughout the last 50 years the agents have presented a wide variety of lessons, but the focus remains much the same. Extension club members still receive
information on how to improve and decorate their homes, shop wisely, update methods of food preservation and preparation, and all the newest sewing techniques. (32)

Most counties submitted some information about how they diffused the knowledge they had gained. Some of this information was explored in the notes about club leaders. The Cherry County clubwomen sponsored a radio program in the 1960s, spreading county extension club information, but also refurbished church hall, offered community health insurance, and helped furnish a traveling library (33). In each case, club members had to discover, assess, and discuss the need. Then funds, time and labor had to be found to bring the project to fruition. Evaluation of their efforts became part of their repertoire of behaviors.

The primary function of the Extension Service was, and still is, to educate. An early goal was to raise women’s concepts of what was within their capabilities and means to improve their living conditions . . . Many still live in sod houses, straining their eyes to coal oil lights, carrying all their fuel and water and combating conditions which even persons living in the slums of the large cities would consider degrading. Women’s project clubs could improve these conditions by covering inexpensive home conveniences to be had without electricity or a large outlay of cash and which might decrease the burden of homemakers and assist in making rural homes a more pleasant place to live instead of a drudgery hole. (31)

Learning how to raise healthy children has always been a major focus of extension club members. The fourteen Antelope County clubs cooperated in a countywide immunization campaign in 1942, working with the schools to combat smallpox, diphtheria and tetanus. Boyd County clubwomen fought polio and tuberculosis. Lincoln County had addressed the topic of nursing before 1920. Douglas County extension work grew out of efforts to combat disease in hogs, and Douglas County gives two nursing and two home economics scholarships each year. Health has been featured as an annual theme twice at NCHEC annual meetings. Adams County helped purchase Jaws of Life for the community, supplied workers for the Chest X-ray unit, and provided 35
smocks for Red Cross workers in 1976 (21). Cherry County women have studied “a wide range of topics from undulant fever to rabies” (34).

Nutrition, sewing and general health were topics of discussion when state specialists went to Holt County in 1930 (58). Health has also been a major focus of Fillmore County women since 1918, when their activities were recorded as part of Agricultural Extension work. Blood pressure, diabetes, and bicycle safety have been major projects.

Personal health issues, such as “stress management, substance abuse, weight control and [general] health” (42), were the focus lessons in the second quarter century in the Five County Northeast Area. The Red Cross, the heart fund, farm safety, nursing homes, and hospitals were the focus of lessons in Howard County. Need for public toilets and resting places in Adams County led farm women to educate the city council (21). Joined by other women’s organizations, Hastings lobbied the council to establish ladies’ restrooms. The issue of toilets does not arise in the literature concerning urban women or literature concerning the late twentieth century, possibly out of ladylike reticence, but more probably because public toilets were more in evidence and the concept of ladylike conduct had changed.

In Dodge County, club women raised money for Fremont’s Opportunity Center, a school for handicapped children. The Center was taken over by the Fremont Public School System. During World War II, Arthur County women were among other Nebraska women who “. . . took turns taking and making sandwiches, cakes, and candy at the North Platte Canteen 75 miles away” (Schneemeyer 1985, 22-23). Club members and their families served coffee and baked goods to military personnel who briefly stopped in Nebraska on their way to staging areas on the coasts (Reisdorf 1989). “The North Platte Canteen” recently has recaptured the attention of columnist Bob Greene and a general public. In five years the canteen served six million military personnel, in spite of receiving no federal assistance. The Hemingford Ledger on-line reports the canteen ran on contributions from benefit dances, local business and personal donations and volunteering. Each month, the canteen served approximately 40,000 homemade cookies, 30,000 hard-boiled eggs, 6,500 doughnuts, 4,000 loaves of bread, 3,000 pounds of meat,
450 pounds of cheese, 60 quarts of peanut butter, 1,350 pounds of coffee, 1,200 quarts of cream, 750 rolls, and 600 birthday cakes.

Exercising political influence and efficacy is part of the leadership responsibility. Providing leadership to organized groups like sewing clubs or Parent-Teacher Associations strengthen the general community. There has always been a problem providing ongoing and continuous leadership. One way of dealing with this challenge is staggered elections. AAUW elects president and secretary for two-year terms, then elects membership vice-president, program vice-president, and treasurer two-year terms the following year. This process ensures that only part of the board will be inexperienced at any given time.

The Nebraska Extension clubs has utilized a system that was much the same as the AAUW scheme. In 1924, individual groups started electing two project leaders, Leader A and Leader B. These women received the lessons and presented them to the general membership. Leader B was the assistant for the first year. After one year, Leader B became the primary leader and a new Leader A was elected. Every year there was one experienced and one inexperienced leader. During the 1940s, however, clubs started having one leader for each lesson, and this practice continues today.

Additional scholarships and grants serve slightly different populations. The Home Extension Clubs Scholarship Fund was aimed at women who were studying Home Economics at the University of Nebraska and planning to be Home Agents. The first six people who received this kind of scholarship did so serve. Between 1955 and 1985, 64 scholarships totaling $17,297.00 were awarded. The Homemaker Grants were the brainchild of Melva Christensen (NCHEC president from 1970 to 1971) and others. She kept the focus on club members who wanted to continue their education, rather than traditional students. The eligibility requirements for the grants are (1) membership in a Nebraska Home Extension Club, (2) evidence of enrollment, and (3) submission of a plan for further education. “The first recipients received $100.00 each” (18). The total monies disbursed have been $6,950.00 and 45 people have benefited.

Scholarships have been given by individual counties, which sometimes specify the field of study. Sixty-one County Councils sponsored scholarships for young people.
by 1983. The 1983 scholarships totaled $18,170.00. The money for these scholarships came from many different kinds of activities. For example, to save money during the Depression, Pierce County clubs, “... collected milk weed pods, scrap iron, tin, newspapers, old rope and scrap fat.

Home Extension Club members believed themselves different from other organized women because of their “lessons, lessons, lessons” (16), but their lessons in cooking, sewing, and lobbying were analogous to those of Country Women’s Association of Victoria [Australia]. The purpose of their lessons “has remained constant—to provide the homemaker with information for improving skills and knowledge of the home and family life” (16). Though Schneemeyer (1985) says, “The Cooperative Extension Service has from the beginning carried the responsibility for developing lesson materials,” it is questionable exactly what “the beginning” means in this context, since there were many clubs in Nebraska much before 1910.

Logan County organized a service club in 1918, became part of the Council in 1936 (four clubs and 86 members), and published a history of the area in 1962. As their history was published at the same time The Knox County Papers were, it is difficult to keep from imagining a link between the efforts, but I have found no proof these efforts were connected. Providing a written record of clubs or of small towns, when none previously existed, is a service to the community. Genealogists and students may avail themselves of a written record.

Another way of enabling community members is to create or share a vision of the future. Twelve annual meetings of the Nebraska Council have featured themes concerned with vision, the future, moving forward, the dawn, tomorrow, horizons, and like ideas. One author said, “The 80’s have brought new problems to challenge extension clubs [but. . .] we look confidently to the future knowing that whatever turns society takes, there will be a home extension program developed and led by the people of Custer County to meet the challenges in a spirit of shared learning” (39). This seems to mirror the same attitude Burt County had. They took “Harmony in the home, order in the nation, and peace in the world” as their theme in 1948 (29).
During the drought and the Depression, service-minded Nebraskans finished and paid for their new vernacular architecture state capitol building (US NARA). Hall County clubwomen dealt with their problems in that same fashion--just getting on with their lives as best they could (54-55). Two Hall County women had served on the Farm Bureau Board as early as the late 1920s (perhaps not surprisingly just after the first two women’s groups were organized). Though German settlers around Grand Island had a work ethic that did not include women’s going away from home to attend meetings and did include women’s helping in the field more than others (54), there were nine clubs by 1926. Hall County hosted the 800-member-strong state meeting at Grand Island in 1938, and brought the general public up to date by using radio, newspapers, and television. They have also delivered food to prisoners of war housed nearby during World War II and worked for the Special Olympics since 1981.

Hall County club members and other volunteers not only have a vision of a future that will be an improvement on the present, they participate in activities to bring that vision into reality. When Hall County women gave food to prisoners of war or supported the Special Olympics, they exemplified the service component of voluntarism. Because they interacted with friends while they did their work, and made new friends as they served lunch, the social component of voluntarism was also at play. Service activities have also included planting and caring for flower beds and trees in public places, sponsoring and participating in Red Cross blood drives, and various other efforts to improve mental and physical health. The leadership and public speaking skills members learn in meetings are useful in all of these activities.

Antelope County engineered a school-based immunization campaign against smallpox, diphtheria, and tetanus in 1942. Boyd County members fought polio and tuberculosis. Douglas County combated swine disease. NCHEC annual meetings often featured health topics. Adams County supported volunteer efforts of others (21); Holt County held meetings on nutrition and general health in 1930 (58); Fillmore County had blood pressure and diabetes projects. All of these are examples of projects that improved

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4 See discussion of German settlers’ attitudes in Goldberg’s 1997 book on women in Gilded Age Kansas: “German women’s role and status in the farm family was [sic] quite unlike that of their Anglo counterparts. Most first-generation German families held little doubt about all authority: women and children were expected to treat men as true patriarchs . . . Germans believed that educating women was wasteful” (30).
community health, and each had multiple purposes. Education, friendship, networking, and service were combined in each of these efforts.

Sixty-one separate councils had sponsored scholarships for young people by 1983, the total of which was $18,170.00. The money for these scholarships came from many different kinds of activities. For example, to save money during the Depression, Pierce County clubs, “. . . collected milk weed pods, scrap iron, tin, newspapers, old rope and scrap fat. V for Victory was carried out in many ways” (78). Education is involved both because members must study the applicants and because higher education is the aim of the applicants. Social life is involved through the political processes of judging and awarding the money. Service to the community is a given—members of local school bodies are recipients.

One health topic appearing over and over in the literature concerning rural women, pre-industrial cities, and public situations is toilets. Keya Paha County clubwomen put public toilets in Cub Creek Park (65). Early [Arthur County] clubs raised money for outside restrooms at the old Klan Hall. Plainview (Pierce County) had a Ladies Restroom (clean public free toilets and a warm clean lounge where women could take their babies and wait for their husbands) in the early 1900s, but Creighton (Knox County) didn’t have one until the 1950s. Some women were actually in pain before they got home (personal knowledge). Men had access to toilets in the pool halls and bars, but women were not supposed to be in those places. Women and children did not have money to spend time in restaurants. They had money for groceries on Saturday night, but [as my mother said] “You can’t keep going into a store you aren’t spending money in.” In Adams County, Hastings extension clubs joined with other women’s organizations and lobbied the city council to establish a ladies restroom downtown (21). The women were too proud to use facilities intended for customers, and cultural barriers kept nice ladies from going into the bars and pool halls. One of my mother’s ways to encourage my father to quit playing cards and go home at the end of the Saturday night socializing was to allow me (at six or seven years of age) to go into the bar and ask to use the toilet. Though I was never refused access to the facilities, my father always was always embarrassed and quit at the end of the current game.
One innovative activity is the pattern collection housed at the Beatrice Public Library. [Note: Dress patterns for home sewers can cost up to $20 in 2002. Five to ten dollar prices are usual, and could conceivably double the cost of a garment. PJM] Gage County programs are varied and constantly changing. The Phelps County council also started a unique program in the 1980s. They lent cake pans for the Holdrege Library in the 1980s (77).

Lancaster County clubs sent food and clothing to England, and money for textbooks to Pakistan. They sent Pennies for Friendship to the Associated Country Women of the World (67). Fillmore County women sent precious feed sacks off to England, helping provide an important source of clean, pretty cloth for dresses and blouses at no cost to devastated families (46). “In over 60 years [Colfax County] women have become even busier. Many work away from home. Children are left with babysitters. Those who stay at home find themselves occupied with volunteer work that is still needed to keep a social society alive” (37). March of Dimes, Heart Fund, Hope Training School, bloodmobiles, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, libraries, scholarships, Diabetic Screening Clinics, Highway Safety Programs, and county fair activities are supported by Clay County clubs. Many counties formed choruses that performed for local events and State Council meetings. In 1941, there were 313 voices representing 14 counties at the Hastings state meeting. The radio station, WOW, recorded the performance.

“The [Adams County] Home Extension Clubs were instrumental in assisting the passage of a 1942 general election ballot which allowed county taxation for extension work. Prior to this time extension work was financed by memberships sold to Farm Bureau members” (26).

Networking, Friendship and Humor

In Antelope, Knox, and Pierce counties, a collaborative “Spring Fling” (community picnic) facilitated learning about activities and problems in neighboring counties and acquainted members with neighbors who might have lived only a few miles away, but were separated because of governmental boundaries (14) or cultural practices. In each case, members had to explore possible venues, peruse membership lists, and learn names of the more well-connected or politically-savvy members who could be counted
on to smooth out the bumps along the way. The three counties took turns hosting the event.

Friendship and learning require communication and trust. Humor requires trust and open communication. “Sharing a sense of humor lays the foundation for other, more difficult communication” (Berry and Traeder 39). There has always been a plethora of cartoons, one-liners and satires targeting the women who wanted to vote, to dress in pants, and so on. The authors of the Milestone did not pass on any anecdotes that might present women in a bad light. Papers’ writers repeated an anecdote about an Indian woman who lived alone under a tree and one about a “little old grandmother” who drove an automobile and honked her horn while she did it. Since it both takes and builds emotional stability and political acumen to laugh (Barreca 130), perhaps the women who submitted articles in 1985 were more sensitized to traditional or current biases.

No clubwoman said that friends “... are not only essential for coping with day-to-day frustrations or sharing private jokes, they help us limp through a crisis, and in the long run, help us grow as women and human beings” (Berry and Traeder 3, 190). Even Milestone authors were not that direct. They did, however, provide comments that show they would have agreed with Berry and Traeder. “Box Butte clubwomen value their membership in an Extension Club for the things they learn, the traditional events sponsored by the Council, and most of all they value the close friendships that develop through membership in an Extension Club” (26). In Franklin County the homemaking lessons were the professed reason for belonging to extension clubs, but the greatest gains were made in community relations. “Frontier County clubs are proud of our heritage and the welcome mat is always out. We’re small in size but big in friendship!” (48). Six clubs’ names included “home,” and several used the adjectives “jolly” and “merry,” indicating that the social purpose of club work was important. That social purpose may not have been dominant, but it obviously was a driving force. Naming a club is a social and identity-building activity. Logan County’s reporter was one of the many who noted the importance of the naming process. She specified “Lone Valley, Loup Valley, Banner, Nesbit [after a school], Friendly, Neighborly, Twilight Twelve, HubBub, and Living & Learning” (68).
In Lancaster County, the importance of the naming exercise was acknowledged:

When a club is organized they choose their name that becomes their identity through the years. Some clubs select a name of the community they are located in, such as North Bluff, a voting precinct, or Beltline, Happy Center, or Plainview for school districts. Firth Homemakers and Davey Women’s Club were named for small towns. (66)

The Forty Niners were the 49th club in the city; the Century Club was the 100th, and the Jolly Dozen changed their rationale and called themselves a baker’s dozen when they added a thirteenth member. The Apple Corps live on streets that intersect Apple Street (66-67).

The Cherry County writer points out how club life nurtured friendships that otherwise might have been defeated by vast distances and inadequate transportation: Home Extension club meetings provided the bond between the isolation of ranching, the thirst for new knowledge to better face living and the socialization with neighborhoods and communities. Not only did Mom benefit from the social aspect of work, the whole family often went to club meetings! Families pooled rides from far distant ranches for the noon ‘carry-in dinners’ and the men enjoyed visiting while the ladies conducted their afternoon meetings. More than one Cherry County member recalls riding horseback several miles cross country when other transportation wasn’t available! (33)

Volunteer networking held communities together. Lifelong friendships and associations made through [Douglas County] Extension. In our Club some of our women were childhood schoolmates. Brides, mothers, grandmothers and unfortunately widows have worked together, played together, bore joy, pain and sorrow together, knowing their friends and neighbors were in sympathy. Many of these life-long bonds are broken only by the finality of death. (44)

Some of the Cherry County women traveled ninety miles for a meeting--the term “extension” is more appropriate for some counties than others (33); “several long-time [Madison County] members said their monthly meetings were the only time, besides church functions, that they got to visit with their neighbors” (72), and the Burt County
vignette emphasize the importance of friendships associated with club membership with a poem: “So—Thank you friends, for starting the clubs/In our wheel of friendship, you’ve been the Hub./We hope that the clubs will go on and on/For in our groups we work as one” (30).

The dissertations and books on women’s groups I examined did not include humor or display a pattern of joking that could be cited here, though women wrote much of the material. This lack of humor was not congruent with my memories of my mother’s extension clubs, with my personal experience in AAUW, or even with speech patterns of the Women’s Institute women I spoke to. Humor has always been an integral part of my experiences in women’s groups. However, even professional psychologists often ignore the role of humor. *Psychology of Women: Behavior in a Biosocial Context* has no listings for laughter, humor, jokes, fun, friendship, or support in its index (Williams 427-444). The terms closest to these concepts in that index are “values and interests.”

Women’s humor is about life, death, sex, work, families, politics, social custom, and shoes . . . women’s lives have always been filled with humor. Women’s humor emerges as a tool for survival in the social and professional jungles, and as a weapon against the absurdities of injustice. (Barreca 2)

Clubwoman Betti Jo Mathis may have been considering unjust absurdities when she wrote “Bread in a Bag.”

The girls were at Extension Club/ The hostess’ house was purged and scrubbed.
The roll was called, the minutes read. The lesson was on making bread.
We’d all made bread since years way back.
But we’d never made it in a plastic sack.
We mixed and measured ‘till nice and gooey,
Then it happened – my bag went flooey.
Out gushed the mixture – what a mess.
It slithered down Irene’s red dress.
That yeast and flour and water fused/ Into the suede on Irene’s shoes.
It splashed and dripped and oozed some more.
It desecrated Laura’s floor.
The ladies squealed in shocked surprise.
I wrung my hands and apologized.
“Please do forgive,” I meekly begged
And scraped the dough off Irene’s leg.
I learned my lesson that fateful day
That no matter what the experts say,
I’ll use a bowl to mix my bread.
And wear the bag upon my head. (52)

The house was cleaned for the lesson, yet the lesson led to the house being messed up. The house was not only clean, but “purged.” The mess desecrates the floor. The poem assumes an audience that would appreciate the situation. Hostesses always hope that their houses will survive. The picture of a proper clubwoman wearing a bag on her head in penance for having sullied the dress and floor is broadly humorous.

Most of the wit in the Milestone is quietly deadpan. One example is a Hall County quip. “Perhaps this was due to the women’s leadership involvement!” (54), which dealt with the phenomenal spurt of growth experienced after women were allowed to serve on the county board.

Another quietly humorous anecdote concerns the Hemingford county chair during World War II:

... one day she was scheduled to preside at an important meeting in town.
Just as she was ready to leave she saw her husband drive off with the car.
She waited with growing despair. What she did not know was that her husband had scared up a coyote and given chase without regard for the precious gas that was to take his wife to the meeting in town. So it was perhaps fortunate for all that the coyote escaped and Mrs. Nitsch used the remaining gas to take her to the meeting where she had been given up as lost. (25)

The humor here involves women poking fun at themselves. Mrs. Nitsch would have had to tell the story in quite a flamboyant fashion for the other women to have thought it deserved representation in the history of the county’s women’s extension clubs.
The irony concerns the coyote showing up on her club day, her pacing and worrying about the gas situation, the wasting of gas to chase a coyote, the husband’s not knowing she was waiting for the car, and her late arrival. The foundation of the humor concerned belief that a coyote chase was or was not more deserving of petrol than travel to a town meeting was, and probably reveals a schism between male and female preoccupations. Since humor depends on context, the Golden Milestone vignettes are either very funny or boring, depending on the age and experience of the reader.

The Wright Precinct Club reports it was once asked to perform in Hemingford, but “it started to rain and the car slid into the ditch, landing on its side. A Good Samaritan happened by with a tractor and pulled them out, and they went on to Hemingford” (26). Those who have not experienced that slow slide into disaster will not be able to appreciate the humor in this anecdote as much as those who have lost control on rural road and had control of their lives wrested from them. Those who cannot visualize passengers in a heap on top of the door (which had become the floor of the automobile) will be at a loss to figure out why this was put into a serious study of women’s volunteer achievements. The Good Samaritan probably went straight to the pool hall and told the guys at the counter how he had to get a bunch of women out of the ditch, but the rescue’s being mentioned in Milestone speaks to the ability of women to see humor in almost any situation.

Shared laughter offers us pleasure during the fun times and a resilient strength during distress. Sometimes life is just too ridiculous and unexplainable. Laughing by yourself in these times seems somehow bitter and mirthless, but . . . laughter shared with a friend feels sweet and healing. (Berry and Traeder 90)

Extension efforts there “contributed so much to the development of our [Greeley] county. The ideas, talents and feelings shared by club members have created a strong bond of understanding and friendship” (Schneemeyer 1985, 54). Adams County women had met once a month as a club and once as a “circle” during World War I and before. In 1919 they missed that companionship of their sewing group and organized a club.

“Through the years, the goals set by those first [Adams County] extension women have
helped develop a close community fellowship that survived the dustbowl days of the 30’s, war time gas rationing, and joining the labor force. Strong community spirit fostered by extension clubs has helped many” (21).

Jefferson County reported that “Home Extension work has . . . made club members aware of their surroundings, helped them appreciate their heritage, taught better homemaking skills, emphasized family relationships and health habits, made better community members, gives the opportunity to serve, and allows fellowship with friends and neighbors” (61).

Dakota County “Extension Club members will continue to be aware of their responsibilities toward their home and community as their daily life changes. The lessons and fellowship at their meetings assist them in meeting these challenges” (39).

Nance County project demonstrations were active before the 1917 creation of their Extension Service. Their generation-spanning programming has increased member knowledge, enriched their lives, and “cemented friendships” (73). Pierce County members “grow old learning something new each day. Through extension work, knowledge and friendships are gained and linked in a chain of love and understanding” (78).

Kearney County’s eleven clubs (179 women in 1935) reported that both fellowship and lessons were important, but they also revealed how the social, study and service purposes of voluntarism blended in their area. In spite of gas rationing, lack of available tires for sale, and other austerities caused by World War II, club members extended their friendship to others through support of Kearney’s United Service Organizations (USO) Center.

Dawson County organized in 1921, with leadership training accomplished in the same manner as in the rest of the state. After the 1936 trip to ACWW, Dawson County’s Home Demonstration Agent became interested in county choruses and organized one. “In the early years the social aspect was a very big part of club meetings. Every club had a music leader and a song leader and always spent a good part of every meeting singing and listening to some form of entertainment” (54).
“We go to our friends for nourishment, both figuratively and literally . . . a shared cup of tea . . . Replenishment can be an easy thing” (Berry and Traeder 111). One [early Madison County resident] said she “just lived to see someone else’s house and eat someone else’s food” (Schneemeyer 1985, 72). Kimball County “has helped hundreds of women enjoy a richer and more meaningful life” through Extension Service activities (65), but their records from 1929 through 1935 have gone missing. From 1925 to 1931, twenty-eight regional camps were held for tired mothers who needed inexpensive recreation. “A total of 1,278 mothers attended the three-day outings. They forgot about cooking meals, washing dishes, and doing chores. They rested, studied and played” (19).

The Lincoln County author reported that an Assistant County Agent was once queried about how to sew in a gusset: “He laughed about it later” (68). Whether the Lincoln County official was laughing about his own inability to answer the question or at a woman who thought she could get the answer to a technical sewing question from a bureaucrat in the courthouse is unclear, and perhaps knowing the butt of the joke is unnecessary. The ambiguities in the situation allow various interpretations of the circumstances and strengthen the importance of the anecdote.

In Dodge County, clubwomen raised money for Fremont’s Opportunity Center, a school for handicapped children, and the Center was taken over by the Fremont Public School System. This is another example of clubs having begun an enterprise and taken over by men in the public sector.

The Knox County Papers and Golden Milestone: A Comparison

The Golden Milestone is Norma Schneemeyer’s celebratory anniversary compilation of facts and memories constructed from data submitted by individual county councils of home extension clubs in 1985. It covers the entire state. All of the women who wrote these separate histories belonged to the same statewide organization, but they did not attack their writing in the same fashion. The writers of vignettes for Golden Milestone focused on themselves. They turned inward, as members of black and white women’s study clubs had done a hundred years earlier. No Milestone author downplayed her contribution, as some of the Knox County Papers contributors had done. They were
specifically concerned with networking and reward systems as they played out in women’s clubs.

The women in 1963 focused on the folklore and personal memories of Knox County communities, instead of women’s organizations. The Papers spread from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, and follow the convention of ignoring women’s contributions to the development of the county or attributing their accomplishments to men, as is usual in gendered discourse. *The Knox County Papers* were created by extension club members turned outward—toward their history and their communities. When compared with the voices of Milestone women, theirs seem timorous—almost as if they were afraid to focus on their own accomplishments.

Unlike the authors of *The Knox County Papers* (explored in Chapter Seven), they were proud of their clubs and proud of their individual achievements.

Luckily, Milestone provided a miniature history of club work in Knox County. That examination of organizations in the northeast corner of Nebraska is quoted in Chapter Seven (above). It includes information about very early Knox County activities that might have logically been included in the *Papers*, but the gap between 1963 and 1985 is problematic. The Milestone women know a great deal that the authors of the *Knox County Papers* couldn’t know. They share a common history,

Correspondence to Arlene Binger, Knox County Extension Agent during the 1950s, indicates there was an earlier publication, *Silver Milestone*. That correspondence includes histories of separate clubs, facts about scholarships and grants, and alludes to other aid for schools.

The Milestone authors discussed nonformal lessons, informal learning, formal schooling, and familiar organizational problems (declining membership numbers, haphazard record-keeping, etc.). The Knox County women documented information that was available in the oral tradition, but not necessarily elsewhere. They spoke of one-room schoolhouses (formal education), but did not celebrate their having awarded grants or scholarships.

Conclusions from Chapter Eight
This chapter grouped information in a different fashion than data presented before. It illustrated the three general purposes of volunteer groups, rather than focusing on the worldview of individual clubwomen. It focused on the same kinds of material, but adjusted the perspective, as Rowe adjusted her perspective in her lecture about the rings of Saturn. Taking this new view afforded me a depth of comprehension that would not have been possible with a fixed approach.

Quotations and other data above illustrate the three purposes of voluntarism clearly, but also show how these purposes overlap in Nebraska’s club life. Members have reported increased self-esteem, new knowledge, more friends, laughter and having fun, satisfaction from helping others, healthier families and communities, easier access to public toilets, better county fairs, recognition for aptitude in crafting, opportunities to improve sewing and cooking skills, and opportunities to travel.

Clubwomen gave time to plan and execute blood drives, to make and deliver cakes to the North Platte Canteen, to learn how to can meat and fruit, to lobby the state legislature, and to sew for babies and military personnel. They acquired new knowledge through serendipity and through planned exercises shown in state-developed curricula. Though they did not say that European-American culture was superordinate, they hinted at it by eliminating mention of Indians. Though this omission of Native Americans from the discussion is not congruent with the attitudes of our multicultural 2004, there is no way to go back in time and re-engineer the writing or try to understand how a vision of a strong Nebraska could sideline a whole indigenous people and how the thumbnail sketch of Knox County could differ from the rest on this point.

Constructing the Milestone, lobbying, laughing, writing poetry, participating in county and local choruses, attending state and international conventions, and talking to military personnel (in prison camps, at the USO, or on the train to the west coast) were all ways that these clubwomen were not “silent.” The emphasis on improved housekeeping throughout the various counties is clearly documented. The ethical code that most of the clubwomen tried to live up to was set out in the Creed and the Collect. Several anecdotes illustrated gendered societal relationships and showed how clubwomen dealt with them. Humor and friendship were stressed throughout the Milestone, over and over again.
These facts prove that the clubwoman’s worldview is a relevant filter through which to view NCHEC actions and that the three purposes of voluntarism are adequately served by this group.

Bob Greene’s recent book on “the world famous North Platte Canteen” (2002, 68) only mentioned the efforts of clubwomen in passing. He praises area farmers and North Platte residents for their great efforts, but seems ignorant of the great distances some women came to provide the company and lunches (62, 72). It was organized women who provided so much of the labor and food. Arthur County women “. . . took turns taking and making sandwiches, cakes, and candy at the North Platte Canteen 75 miles away” (22-23). Servicemen en route to military assignments by train during WW II received “all kinds of homemade food” (68) and other benefits from hours volunteered by Dawes (40) and Lincoln club members (68). Whether Greene intended to do so or not, he marginalized the contributions of organized women. He focused on the military personnel, on the town, on his feelings, and on individuals—but he never discussed the logistics necessary to avoid clogging the supply lines or requiring any one woman to do more than her share of the work.
CHAPTER NINE:

THE P.E.O. SISTERHOOD IN NEBRASKA

Chapter Nine describes the P.E.O. Sisterhood (PEO). Started as a secret society at Iowa Wesleyan College in 1869, PEO later reconceptualized itself a community group instead of a sorority. Membership requirements concern gender, age, and faith (being a woman eighteen or older and believing in God). The emblem for the group is a star, which is included in their initiation ceremony. The rich experiences the Sisterhood derived from travel and higher education enhanced individual development and enabled PEO organizational development (Garrigan 1996, 211).

Today P.E.O.s are facing tough challenges through increasing demands in the workplace and family. But P.E.O.’s foundation is strong and unfailing. The magnificent sandhill crane, the convention symbol, has defied odds and survived threats of extinction. So has P.E.O. endured societal upheavals to emerge as a premier women’s organization. As P.E.O. looks to a new millennium, let us rejoice as we build upon the foundation forged for us by the Founders years ago. Like the graceful and powerful sandhill crane, may we soar on the winds of destiny as we continue to thrive. May joy be with us on our journey. (106-107)

Robley Garrigan explored further the idea of how social life was shaped. She found it interesting,

... and probably not coincidental that many of the organizations such as P.E.O. started in and around the prairies. Small towns at the heartland were isolated and even a buggy drive to a neighboring town was considered a day-long event that was not a frequent occurrence. Local clubs and organizations for both men and women offered opportunities for people to share their lives and stave off loneliness. I would be interested to see if clubs such as these germinated in the big cities as well. I do not know of any, but haven’t looked either. I do know that P.E.O. is not as well known on the East Coast... (E-mail, 23 Oct. 2003).
The first Nebraska chapter was started by a member who had been initiated at Belden’s Seminary. Though determined to “promote the P.E.O. standards of character and culture,” she could not keep the chapter going. No one knows why the chapter vanished, because the rules about secrecy were so strong. In spite of this loss, twenty-six Nebraska chapters were formed between 1885 and 1902 (Garrigan 1996,15).

Early Growth

On the plains of North America, these founders were surrounded by “. . . vast acres of rippling grasses waiting, needing, calling to be worked . . .” (Fink 1992, 30), challenged by violent winds, snowstorms and scorching heat, just like their families. Nature governed urban growth and social activities. Grandmother “. . . must have been nearly crushed by the unexpected bigness of the prairie, the blue of the sky, our rough, homemade furniture, and the almost total lack of neighbors” (Fink 1992, 30, xxi), her daughter said.

One fictional pioneer wife looked at the empty horizon and thought
. . . human life could not endure in this country. She had lived here for six weeks and more without seeing another civilized face than those of their own company. Not a settled habitation of man lay nearer than several days’ journey; if any visitor came, it was a savage, a wild man, whom one must fear! To get what supplies they needed they must journey four whole days . . . (Rolvaag 98).

The feminist movement and desire for women's organizations were felt keenly in Eastern Nebraska, perhaps because women were often lonely and longed for the more advanced culture of their former homes. Their hearts and minds hungered for education, female companionship and spiritual growth. The appealing ideals of the P.E.O. sisterhood gave a lift to their groping spirit. Although several of the early chapters ultimately disbanded, P.E.O. had found willing and strong homes . . .. (Smithberger, in Garrigan 1996, 1-2)

Nebraska’s new PEO sisters were determined proselytizers, and they lobbied for a state charter in 1887 (3-5), which earned them the label of “revolutionary.” They started pushing for changes as soon as they joined the group. In 1950, Winona Evans Reeve wrote about the influence of the state PEO:
Nebraska’s contribution to the general organization of P.E.O. itself was a notable one. As the first state chapter to be formed, she set the pattern for our form of government, that of a republic. In all the history of P.E.O., there is no more interesting and dramatic incident than that night in the Savery Hotel in Des Moines, Iowa, when a small group of delegates from Nebraska stood their ground against all comers, for the right to be the first state chapter; that Iowa should form a state chapter and that the two of them should be on a parity with over-all jurisdiction. (415-416)

The records of the earliest PEO chapters had the same characteristics as The Knox County Papers. They “. . . were handwritten and erasures frequent, making them often difficult to read” (Garrigan 1996, 8). Still, the Sisterhood recovered sufficient documents and conducted enough interviews to create valuable histories of the organization. Midwestern chapters are plentiful.

. . . As you can see, the states bordering Iowa (and Nebraska, because P.E.O. came here only four years after being founded in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, in 1869) have a large number of chapters. Every little town in Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, etc. has chapters. However, the similar sized towns in the East do not have chapters. They are clustered only in the big cities. . . . Also, retirees in Florida brought P.E.O. there and that's why there's a large number in that state . . . .” (Garrigan e-mail, 2-24-04)

Secrecy

Unlike the WI, AAUW, NACW and other groups who drew attention to themselves intentionally or fostered a façade of ineptitude and silliness in order to create the illusion they were no threat to patriarchal society, PEO members kept their activities secret for many years.

I remember how P.E.O. guarded secrecy. When I became a P.E.O., I was deeply impressed by the way I was instructed to preserve secrecy. Newspaper publicity, as of today, was unheard of. It would have shocked a P.E.O. sister to read that some chapter would hold Exemplification of the Ritual at the next regular meeting. (Hughes in Garrigan 1996, 431)

My high school English teacher and my godfather’s wife were PEO sisters, but neither of them told me--in spite of the fact they would have had to vote for me when the
Creighton EJ Chapter awarded me a scholarship loan for UN-L. Another woman I met at the Lincoln USO in 1962 was PEO. Forty years later, in 2002, after I told her the Sisterhood was part of my dissertation and showed her my personal photographs of Cottey College, she confessed: “[But] I’m not much of a member. I don’t go to many meetings, but I do enjoy taking things around to the elderly members” (personal communication).

Just as the incomplete chart concerning NCHEC membership in Chapter Eight provides only a general idea of the Council’s development, the following notes give only a general idea about the sophistication and strengths PEO officers have shown.

**Humor**

The Nebraska State Chapter hosted the first convention held outside of Iowa, the first convention that required hotel accommodations for members, and Supreme Chapter conventions in 1895, 1903, 1917, and 1991. By the time of that first Nebraska convention, the Sisterhood had been in existence long enough to revise their Constitution, acknowledge gifts from the four living founders, and grant those founders life memberships. The Sisterhood set aside part of their dues for the ongoing publication of the *P.E.O. Record*.

More interesting than the facts about that first convention are the anecdotes. The mythology of the organization includes a humorous description of the influenza epidemic struck Omaha. One by one, members of the Omaha Chapter—who should have been doing the work of the convention—got sick. Then the organizer was put to bed. The young sons of the president carried chairs from a church four blocks away. The maid fed and cared for thirty guests all by herself, and only two ladies of the chapter were available to run the convention. Of these two, one had an injured eye and had to wear a bandage over it. The assembly finally got through the roll call, welcome, devotions, musical numbers, and reading of a scholarly paper. Then, the only Omaha member who could see out of both eyes was called away because her fiancé became ill. Nevertheless, the day ended with the Nebraska Grand Chapter well in place.

The determined Omaha women who ran that convention in spite of eye problems and illness set a standard. Mary Alice Briggs (1848-1992) . . . helped construct the PEO
Table 4: Approximate Numbers of PEO Chapters:

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system of government. After her request for establishing a state chapter was voted down, she smiled and went away. The next year she came back with the same request . . . . Her encore performance swayed the membership and state chapters became a reality (317).

Another humorous struggle occurred when the size of the official PEO emblem was reduced in 1915. The uproar ceased only when a woman from North Platte said that
it was the size of the woman, not the size of the pin that counted (424).

Leadership

Robley Garrigan (1996) was both one of the most influential leaders of the Sisterhood and the editor of *The Spirit of the Prairie*. “To me, the spirit of the prairie is loyalty, strength, kindness, devotion, determination, and most of all love,” she said (iii). Spirit identifies the founding members as having great foresight (520) and provides vivid verbal portraits of pioneers and teachers (317-411). Garrigan’s first PEO memory was singing “Who’s Sorry Now” for her grandmother’s chapter. She was seven (106). In 1967, she joined Chapter EQ, and was later a charter member of Chapter HL, Blair’s first evening chapter. She was State Convention Chairman in 1984, has served in every state office, organized Chapter IF and Chapter IG, gave the Orientation Programs at the 1991 International Convention, and has served as parliamentarian for two state conventions (106).

Mary Alice Briggs was born in Iowa, initiated in Nebraska, and later became active in Chicago’s Chapter A. She moved to Indiana and died in California (317). Maude Hart Weaver graduated from high school in White Pigeon, Michigan in 1903, then from Michigan State Teachers’ College. She did graduate work at Northwestern (364). Maude Mollyneaux Hendy graduated from Peru State Normal School in 1906, after attending the University of Nebraska. She spent the summer of 1910 in Europe, and was president of the State Chapter from 1924-1925 (341). Ohio’s Clara Smith Crawford West was born in 1855. By the time she was fifteen, she was teaching music at the Morgantown Seminary in West Virginia. She attended Tilden Seminary in New Hampshire and college in Quincy, Illinois (320). Barbara Cobb (President 1977-1978) graduated from Marymount College in Kansas (389). Bobbie Koefoot was born in Idaho, raised in Broken Bow, and graduated from the University of Nebraska (388). Susan Harr . . . began her P.E.O. experiences at the knee of her mother, Dorothy Smithberger, who was serving as an officer of the Nebraska State Chapter. Susan was only twelve when Dorothy was president. They are the only mother-daughter combination to serve as presidents of Nebraska State Chapter. (400).
Haar graduated from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UN-L) in 1965, and was a leader in the 4-H, Girl Scouts, and Cub Scouts. Marion Hart Crites was State Chapter President from 1944-1945. She received a B.A. from the University of Nebraska in 1909 (358).

Blanche Hinman Dow was inaugurated president of Cottey College in November of 1949. An active member and office-holder in AAUW, Dow graduated from Smith, had a doctorate from Columbia, was a native of Missouri and studied at the Sorbonne. She had also previously been chairman of the Department of Romance Languages, Director of the Division of Humanities, and a French teacher at the Northwest Missouri State College in Marysville. Dow and others like her looked to formal education, even in small schools like Cottey, to provide those needed leaders. She was cognizant of the ways women learn, share their knowledge in single-sex situations, and operate in coeducational venues. Her inaugural address closed with an allusion to the circle of creative life: “By our beginnings we shall move to a better life, a better future. The world’s peace and the world’s health and happiness depend on USA” (Campbell 305).

Links to Formal Education

The heaviest link between the PEO Sisterhood and formal education is Cottey College, established in 1884, in the middle of a cornfield and first called Vernon Seminary. Its founder, Virginia Alice Cottey Stockard, offered it to the Sisterhood in 1927 when she was about eighty (Stockard 87). She “recognized the similarity of its religious and educational purposes to her own aims for her college” (Garrigan 1996, 457).

[Alice Cottey] . . .lived in a generation when education for women was considered less important than for men. She was not a militant advocate for women’s rights, but she did believe women should have an opportunity to develop mentally. She was a good student herself and she was genuinely interested in the intellectual development of women. (Stockard 1) Cottey was so far from town [when it was built] that its unprotected state was a question of grave concern to many . . . From its beginning Cottey College was a modern school, incorporating into its program those principles of education which are rooted in human nature and human need.
Mind and character and social attitudes were its chief concern. (Campbell 301)
Cottee did not join a PEO chapter until she was a mature woman in 1926
(Stockard 43).

Cottee saw strong links between the PEO and Cottee College. Their colors
(yellow and white) were the same. They both had the marguerite as their flower. She
wore her gold PEO star with pride, and approached the Sisterhood about taking on the
college after she found they were raising a million dollar loan fund. (Campbell 258)

Alice Scott, president of the Supreme Chapter of PEO, waited for committee
investigations to conclude before she would put Cottee’s offer of college ownership
before the general membership, then shepherded the transfer through the somewhat
acrimonious discussion process. There was an “. . . understanding that the Sisterhood
would proceed to build an endowment for the college of not less than $200,000”
(Stockard 32).

As Cottee attempted to persuade the Sisterhood that owning the college would be
a mutual boon, she wore her new dress (“the last dress I will ever buy”). She refused to
let them put the decision off. She said that, at her age, she couldn’t afford to delay
settlement. She put the matter in the hands of God and slept through the night. While
she slept, little clusters of the membership debated and worked through the night to
defeat the proposition. However, in spite of the nay-sayers, the transfer was voted in, “. .
. so the ownership of one woman passed into the hands of forty thousand women. Cottee
was destined to be the only women’s college in the United States owned and operated by
a women’s organization” (Campbell 261).

PEO inescapably became less secret when the Sisterhood started to publicize
Cottee College. Members visited high schools, held conferences for state officers,
distributed calendars and bulletins, and provided brochures to highlight aspects of the
college program. Not only have members devoted two middle pages of P.E.O. Record to
Cottee College news, but they have prepared commercial advertising, signboards, and
workshops. Golden Key girls, second-year volunteers, guide visitors around the college
(109).
Cottey [Stockard] borrowed some of Mary Lyon’s Mt. Holyoke goals when she started Vernon Seminary [for women] in Missouri. Both educators felt God was their greatest asset, stressing religion, calling for prayers morning and evening, insisting teachers and administrators be Christians who were “. . . interested in the saving of souls. They were to do their best to train their pupils to be teachers. For if the teacher was a good Christian she could convert the future mothers in her classes and they in turn could save the world through their families” (Campbell 70).

Cottey wanted her school to be easily accessible, wanted to keep expenses low, and wanted pupils and teachers to clean and do other housekeeping chores (Campbell 68-69). Both Lyon and Cottey used a divide and conquer technique for girls who did not conform, splitting up rowdy groups or moving dissatisfied students to other dormitory areas (Campbell 68-71).

Chronological History

Spirit of the Prairie: A History of the P.E.O. in Nebraska consists of 270 chapters. It documents the lives of presidents from the State Chapter, the Grand Chapter and/or the Supreme Grand Chapter. Histories of individual chapters were written by members and sent forward for editing. Members identified exemplary achievements, discussed the origin and growth of PEO, described individual affiliates (called chapters), told something about forces affecting the group, and highlighted some of the cultural dynamics at work in establishing and maintaining the organization’s archives. This book provides institutional memory, provides factual material, and furnishes rank and file members role models and a folklore that makes their organization a real place. Garrigan divided her history chronologically into periods that reflect organizational development, economic realities and cultural constraints: Genesis, Early Years, Influence in the Community, Busy Organizers, “Christen” Daughters, Depression and War, Postwar Years, Working Women, Diversity, and Young Chapters.

Her descriptions of “sisterly understanding and good will” (Garrigan 1996, 3), delighted guests, and descriptions of “warm and bright meetings” (53) are plentiful.

*Genesis (1885-1902)*
Twenty-six chapters were formed. The author of the Chapter H vignette describes the charter members as “enthusiastic.” Enthusiasm is one of the characteristics of ideal clubwomen. Holdrege gave classical recordings to the public library when members died (15). Choosing this type of memorial was more pragmatic than sending flowers, which are ephemeral. Classical recordings benefited the entire community and transmitted the culture of Euro-Americans.

Chapter P was organized November 30, 1895, in Bloomington. It offered the homemaker members a chance to get away from home and to learn about the surrounding world . . . “Today, P.E.O. means much more to the women of the Sisterhood . . . The Chapter P members view their meeting time as a time of quiet fellowship, a learning time, and a time of caring and sharing love with their sisters. (25)

Even from this sketchy information from Genesis, it is easy to see characteristics of the clubwomen’s worldview emerging: (a) making and sharing communal meals, (b) education, (c) sisterhood and friendship, (d) allegiance to a strong ethical code, and (e) determination to revere those who have gone before.

Early Years (1902-1909)

This period saw twenty-six more chapters formed in Series A. Double letters were used to clarify naming. Fairmont’s Chapter AM grew out of the efforts of an already-organized group of women “who met weekly in the home of a blind lady who yearned to read. These ladies would each bring articles of interest which they would share at their gathering” (Garrigan 1996, 52). Their chapter was started by Louisa B. Hill, who visited western Iowa and came home to formalize the group into a P.E.O. chapter: “those seven planted what others are reaping today, and that their work has done much more than they could have ever dreamed” (52).

Characteristics of the clubwoman’s worldview apparent from the brief quotations above include (a) vision of the future, (b) strong sense of duty, (c) collaborative learning, and (d) belief in the value of personal effort.

Influence in the Community (1911-1918)

The twenty-six chapters in the B series were founded during this period; many activities were war-related. Chapter BQ in David City was organized February 16, 1916.
Three PEO sisters from other states worked with the state organizer from Kearney and officers of Chapter I (in Wahoo) to establish this chapter. They

“...contributed to near East relief, aided a worthy young woman who was sacrificing to secure a medical education by providing her with clothing and food, sent gifts to a city librarian who had been ill and in bed for many weeks, and made a quilted robe for the Veterans’ Hospital” (88).

They also furnished and maintained a hospital room and gave high school scholarships. Many were also Red Cross members (88).

The worldview characteristics that are apparent in this quotation are (a) interest in efficiency (they take on non-P.E.O. projects if money and time permit); (b) belief in the value of their chosen group (they submitted information to Garrigan that contributed to the unity of her history of the organization); (c) determination to make things better for others (they sent money to scholars, a war orphan, and a medical student); and, (d) willingness to work hard.

**Busy Organizers (1918-1923)**

There were twenty-six chapters in the C series. The Lyons Chapter CX was organized in 1923. On its 50th anniversary, a "Happiness Is" luncheon was held, and Nina Paine presented a special poem for the occasion:

- Happiness is dancing feet!           Happiness is fifty years
- Music, laughter, friends to greet!       Blessed with comfort through our tears.
- Happiness is quiet, too—               Fifty years of sisterhood—
- Hearth fires burning, bright and true.   Problems shared and understood
- Happiness is work and play,             While the Star with steady glow
- Time to dream and time to pray.         Leads USA on in P.E.O. (130)

The poem emphasizes cooperative effort and collaborative learning (“problems shared and understood”), vision (“the Star with steady glow”), Christianity and a strong ethical code (“the Star”), belief in the peerlessness of PEO (“friends to greet”), humor and willingness to share oneself (“fifty years of sisterhood”). Naming music, laughter, friends, and dancing alludes to the social purpose of club life. Including “USA” both
highlights the peerlessness of a chosen group (in this case, our nation) and alludes to patriotic duty.

“Christen” Daughters (1924-1931)

During this period, Hastings organized Chapter DA. At their 50th anniversary luncheon, one of the members read Dorothy Weyer Creigh’s “Fifty Years Ago in Hastings, Nebraska” (134). Chapter DE was organized May 15, 1925, in South Sioux City. For the first inspection in 1926, officers had worked hard for perfection in ritualistic works, but since none had been P.E.O.s before, they did not realize until the last minute that they were to wear white for initiation. Time was short so they bought white “Hoover” dresses that were actually maternity dresses! Mrs. Stephens, organizer, enjoyed their solution to the dilemma and was so impressed with their ritualistic work that she asked the chapter to perform their work at the organization of DG in Ponca. When they did, all officers had lovely new white dresses. (139)

Garrigan reported (e-mail, 2-23-04) that initiations do involve white, but only one of the chapters she visited had dresses:

. . . very occasionally a chapter chooses to have an assortment of white dresses . . . Most chapters have robes that are passed around to officers and are a "one-size-fits-all" garment. My chapter HL was organized in 1978 and polyester was all the rage. We have some very heavy polyester material caftans and we still use them. They wash wonderfully, cover up street clothes if the officer chooses not to disrobe, and miraculously fit the smallest to the largest members.

The use of the Hoover dresses and the caftans illustrates the push to efficiency so much a part women’s volunteer groups. Rebecca Kroll reports, via her website, that her grandmother said Hoover dresses were made with a double front, rather like a double-breasted suit. When one flap got dirty, the buttons were undone and the alternate flap appeared on the outside, giving the wearer a clean dress (Kroll website, 2004). This was the same description given by an AAUW member who saw women in her family wearing “a kind of apron thing” that buttoned in front (personal conversation, February 23, 2004). It is currently not clear if the South Sioux City women had a different kind of “Hoover
dress,” or if the person who wrote the excerpt for Chapter DE had received incomplete or erroneous information. “Anyone can misremember” (Fink 1992, xxi).

**Depression and War (1931-1945)**

Growth slowed. Chapters that had been in existence for years were threatened. Chapter BO in Sidney lost its savings in a bank failure. Still, the Sisterhood found ways to help others:

Money was raised by various means to help the needy. One winter tons of coal were given, as well as food and clothing, to alleviate suffering. World War II found Chapter BO [Sidney] sisters busy helping with the Red Cross by knitting, and collecting fat and tin cans. Instead of serving lunch and dinner at meetings, the chapter purchased War Bonds. (85)

The Sisterhood also found ways to continue expanding. Creighton’s Chapter EJ (which awarded me a scholarship loan during my undergraduate studies) was organized on December 8, 1936. They sponsored over sixty women for loans (181).

Chapter EJ had twelve Creighton women as charter members, including Verna Rice. “Verna had borrowed a beautiful hat from her sister for the occasion, only to find out that P.E.O.s do not wear hats to meetings!” (181). Chapter EJ raises money in various ways, takes cookies to shut-ins, and distributes information to high school girls about scholarship opportunities (181-182). The comment about the hat was followed by an exclamation point, indicating humor.

**Post-War Years (1946-1959)**

During this period, evening chapters became popular in F Series.

“Chapter FA is proud to include two three-generation families within its active membership and one four-generation family. Seeds of P.E.O. ideals have been planted in the hearts of forty-three daughters and three mothers” (204). “Chapter FB has been active in preserving and making P.E.O. history” (205). “[Chapter] FC helped sponsor Ruth Soong, a Chinese student, who attended Hastings College. After her return to Hong Kong, FC continued to give her support. When her teaching duties were completed, she moved to Scottsbluff, became a U.S. citizen, and a P.E.O. member!” (206)
Plainview’s Chapter FE was organized in 1948 and formed an organization called PACK with Pierce, Antelope, Cedar, and Knox counties. They have a joint picnic every June, alternating duties as hostess (208-209).

Working Women (1959-1973)

The G Series chapters were founded as Nebraskans dealt with The Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War. The “second wave of feminism” was building, and new civil rights legislation that would affect women and racial minorities was being written and implemented. As one of only two evening chapters in the area, most Chapter GA members are, or were before retirement, business and professional women. Among the members, many hold college degrees from Bachelor to Doctorate, and represent various fields including education, medicine, law, banking, accounting and county government. Thus, GA members bring a broad background of knowledge and resources in presenting outstanding programs, which are a real strength in chapter life. (235) [Emphasis added. PJM]

Diversity (1973-1983)

Chapters in the H Series reflected the increasingly mobile society and globalized economy in which Nebraskans and other Midwesterners participated. Hastings Chapter HT was organized in 1981 as an afternoon group. One member has gone to “Chapter Eternal” (293). The quotation below shows their emphasis on generosity, caring and laughter—several elements that are important to the social purpose of club life.

Following [Cottey College] visitation in 1989, the chapter took a survey evaluating needs and identifying strengths. Broadening the calendar to include one P.E.O. meeting a month, with additional meetings in February, April and June, helps the chapter face challenges. Half of HT's membership are employed or continuing their education. Membership contact and involvement receives priority attention. A yearly evening meeting, active telephone tree, and continuing assessment keeps the chapter sensitive to change while balancing flexibility and purpose . . . Most of all, the traditions in Chapter HT are GENEROSITY, LAUGHTER, and CARING. (293-94) [Emphasis in original. PJM]
Young Chapters (1984-1995)

The newest Nebraska groups organized comprise the I Series. The quotation below shows the overlapping of kinship, friendship, and club membership.

Chapter IN is a very diverse group of women. They have 114 years of P.E.O. membership. Their family history runs deep with P.E.O. tradition: great-great grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunt, and a cousin . . . Most of Chapter IN’s members work outside of the home . . . members’ interests are varied and include cross stitch, cooking, weaving, reading, concerts, 4-H, church, art, camping and hiking, singing, bridge, golf, Extension Clubs, . . . Historical Boards, aerobics, travel, flowers, quilting and collecting baskets, Fiesta dishes and dolls. (Garrigan 1996, 316)

Characteristics of the clubwoman’s worldview shown here are (a) reverence for history, (b) belief in the importance of this particular women’s group, (c) attention to traditional women’s arts and crafts, (d) involvement with modern life and efficiency (as in working outside the home), and (e) border crossings.

The quotations and comments above prove PEO sisters model behavior governed by the general mindset of clubwomen. The data below show how PEOs meet the three purposes of volunteering. The Sisterhood encompasses “love, friendship and dedication” (7), “chapter generosity and philanthropy” (11), “drama, music[al] inspiration, education, literature, humor and beautiful entertaining skills. Each sister has a talent. Sometimes she, herself, is surprised to learn what it is. All are enriched by each other’s growth” (15).

The Three Purposes of Volunteer Associations

PEO sisters belong to consciousness-raising and book discussion groups at coffee houses, bookstores, and group members’ homes. They give scholarships to various kinds of students—usually in formal educational initiatives. They are involved in public speaking, lobbying, holding “Get Out the Vote” rallies, giving voters rides to the polls, taking responsibility for an organizational office, raising funds for the scholarships mentioned earlier, and sewing and cooking for shut-ins or the elderly. Though the social purpose of club life permeates everything, the teas, achievement days, picnics with
neighboring groups, Christmas bazaars, and conventions are also educational and often service-oriented.

**Education**

“From its inception, the P.E.O. Sisterhood has taken an active role in the promotion of educational opportunities for women. Today, education continues to be the primary philanthropy of P.E.O., as evidenced by the promotion of five international projects designed to assist women” (PEO 1999-2004).

Undoubtedly the greatest and over-all problem facing President Dow in 1949, was one of adult education—how to make all P.E.O.’s aware of the possibility of Cottey; how to acquaint them with the educational program of the college; how to awaken them to the opportunity in education they possessed. The problem of enrollment, still unsolved, was inseparable from this challenging question of the education of a large and growing membership to the responsibilities and the rewards of college ownership. The wide geographical spread of P.E.O. membership made direct acquaintance with the college difficult. Relatively few members had been or would be able to visit the campus . . .. (Campbell 106)

Lexington’s Chapter AN studied Russian contributions to America in 1935 and socialized medicine in 1939 (53). Five women from the Weeping Water (Chapter BT) have sponsored eleven women with educational loans, two for continuing education, and five to Cottey College (92-93). The Nebraska State Chapter was allowed to use the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben’s exposition and racing complex. They were the first “outside” organization to be allowed to do so. [Ak-Sar-Ben is itself a volunteer organization composed of business and professional leaders who come from the Douglas County area, in and around Omaha. Its purpose is “to promote well-being, cooperation, and prosperity in Nebraska and western Iowa to make the region a better place in which to live. It strongly supports charitable, educational, and agricultural activities”] (493). It is interesting to note that the exact wording of this article was, “Up to this time, no outside organization other than educational groups had been permitted” to use the complex (493). [Emphasis added.]
Elizabeth McClure Campbell completed a useful book on Cottey College that was reprinted in 1970. *The Cottey Sisters of Missouri* can be seen as an examination of the link between two volunteer organizations and formal education.

**Service**

The Nebraska State Chapter seems to have been one of the chapters most interested in preservation of PEO artifacts. They donated “A Star in the Window” in 1969, during the centennial convention of the Supreme Chapter in Des Moines. They donated handwritten minutes of early conventions, fancy embroidery, some cords, convention badges, three old emblems, an embroidered pillowcase from Broken Bow, and old tin box containing materials for a president to the archives (Garrigan 1996, 426-427). In 1990, they donated $12,305.00 for a climate controlled display area that would contain historical items on permanent loan to the International Chapter (Garrigan 1996, 425)—one dollar for every active member in Nebraska on March 1, 1990.

The PEO Program for Continuing Education supports efforts of women who are re-entering the workplace. The first year (1974), $855 was given; in 1988, $11,428 was given; in 1993, over $14,000 was given. The funds are distributed completely every year. (454-55). The PEO Scholar Awards are new, having been initiated in 1991. These funds go to women working on advanced degrees. Ruth Shaw said this fund is particularly relevant for her “for faculty women” (Miller 1999). There were 441 nominations in the 1992-93 academic year. By 1996, there were 617 nominations.

PEO has a service for “Reciprocity Groups” that sound remarkably like the “clusters” AAUW voted out not long ago. [See Chapter Five.] There are PEO support groups near colleges in Kearney, Wayne, Hastings, Lincoln, and Omaha. These facilitate communication between the organization and the community. In 1936, the organization founded the PEO [Retirement] Home in Beatrice, with a sliding payment scale and statewide support. Typical activities there include exercise classes, bridge, and Bible reading.

Almost seven hundred Nebraska girls have attended Cottey since 1927 (458). Of course, there are great similarities between Denman College in Oxfordshire and Cottey
College in Missouri, but there are equally great differences. The first is an institution of nonformal education. The second is an accredited institution of higher education.

Chapter J raised enough money to have a twelve-hundred-foot walk across a ravine so people could get to a cemetery in 1910. They had earlier erected a windmill there in 1894 (17). Chapter BQ, in 1916, contributed to near East relief, aided a worthy young woman who was sacrificing to secure a medical education by providing her with clothing and food, sent gifts to a city librarian who had been ill and in bed for many weeks, and made a quilted robe for the Veterans’ Hospital. For many years they furnished and maintained a patient’s room in the local hospital. Presently a scholarship is awarded to a girl graduating from each of the two local high schools. (88)

Chapter DK in Lincoln was organized in 1927. In 1939 they gave the new PEO home “twenty-four place settings of silver, a trellis, a garden chair, afghans, Bingo prizes, jams, jellies, magazines and ham . . . Chapter DK always supports a local philanthropy . . . the minutes during World War II tell of hundreds of hours of service being done and mountains of U.S.O. cookies being baked by DK members” (147).

Chapter EP in Wisner has sponsored six women for loans and “sponsored one woman for a grant from the Program for Continuing Education” (189). Proceeds from a 1982 harvest festival raised funds to establish a scholarship for a local senior at the high school. There have been eleven scholarship winners since then.

Chapter FM in Beatrice sponsored eight students for loans and three for grants (218). Chapter GL in Omaha was organized in 1966 and still had four living charter members when Spirit of the Prairie was published. They provided hand puppets for hospitals, bibs and wash cloths for Veterans’ Hospital, mints and napkins for the PEO home, and sent Thanksgiving food baskets to families that needed help (248-49).

Social Life

In spite of having matriculated in their own small, all-girl college, Cottey students formed smaller groups within the general student body. A Missionary Society, a YWCA chapter, a Ralph Waldo Emerson Literary Society, and a Magnoperian Society were among the first of these groups (Stockard 22). Over the years, these societies became
more social than literary (115). Cottey had an alumnae Association and a Chronicle by
the 1908-1909 school year. Receptions, music recitals, choral society, orchestra, Lyceum
Course and Honor Society were operating by 1916-1917 (53). The Lyceum Course
disappeared and was replaced in 1922-1923 by an Artist Series Course. A Nebraska
Club, Arkansas Club, Glee Club, Student Council, Romance Languages Club, and Junior
League of Women Voters (a branch of the League of Women Voters) appeared on the
scene not too much later (54-55).

These small groups reflect study groups in the WI and AAUW. Since the original
PEO members were college girls, displaced from their homes and living among strangers,
everyone was from somewhere else. It is probably safe to say members in the early days
of PEO were searching for their place. They were determined to make friends. I joined
AAUW when I was a stranger in Florida, and all three of the WI members in Ontario said
they joined because they were new to the area and wanted to make friends. “The Past
Presidents Club” is nestled within PEO as book groups or investment clubs are embedded
in AAUW or other clubs (412).

Kearney’s Chapter AS was organized in 1907, and has metaphorically been
“mother and grandmother to the other Kearney chapters” (59). This group has divided
several times to accommodate new populations, including one for young mothers’
mornings in 1974. “Many buildings of the UN-K [University of Nebraska-Kearney]
campus are named for Chapter AS members or BILs” [husbands . . .] A room at the UNK
library is named for charter member Anna Jennings, a dormitory for Carrie Ludden, and
the main theater for Miriam Drake” (59).

Chapter CO in Cozad held yearly Mother’s Day luncheons, “teas for senior girls,
Christmas cookie exchanges, annual dinners for the BILs and the reciprocating dinners .
. . Two BILs have been recognized for spending 50 years trying to guess the meaning of
P.E.O.” (118-19).

Chapter ED . . . celebrated its 50th Anniversary in April, 1984, with a lively look
at its history. Over the years, the chapter has enjoyed many three-generation
members and is eagerly awaiting its first fourth-generation family. The thread of
loyalty, devotion and cooperation has run even and deep among the sisters since
1934. Even though the times and events change with regularity, the spirit of sisterhood has remained constant and true in Chapter ED. (174).

Omaha Chapter FY was organized in 1958 when nineteen charter members met after finding there was no room for them in existing organizations. “At each meeting, joy in being together overflows the room . . . in August, the chapter holds a ‘Friendship Coffee’ to share love with others, to welcome home the ‘Snowbirds’ and to give each other summer hugs” (232-33).

McCook’s Chapter GY was organized in 1973. “The organizational meeting took place at the McCook Elks Club in a raging blizzard. Although one hundred forty-four reservations had been made, only ninety-four made it to the meeting because of the storm . . . Each April the chapter celebrates its anniversary” (264-65).

Chapter HI’s 53 active members hold meetings in the evening, usually once a month. With such an energetic chapter, HI also loves to socialize! They have family picnics (with many children), annual Christmas dinners (with magical moments) BIL initiation parties (with much laughter), late afternoon or morning coffee meetings (with more diversity), costume parties and inspirational candlelight installation ceremonies. (277-78).

This club sends flowers to the funerals of deceased members and gives money to the Nebraska P.E.O. home in memory of each deceased past president. Though there is an economic component to this last action, remembrance of aged or deceased members is primarily cultural or social. It might also be seen as political.

PEO’s educational initiatives overlap their social activities. Tours offered by the 1991 International Chapter Convention in Omaha included a football game, Henry Doorley Zoo, Boys’ Town, Arbor Lodge, an Arabian Horse Show and Dinner, a dinner concert; a Lincoln tour that included a restored Victorian mansion, the State Capitol, and Sheldon Art Gallery; a cruise on a Bellevue riverboat, a visit to Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist Willa Cather’s home, and an Oregon Trail ride. A tour of PEO historical sites would include the Cottey College campus, Des Moines International Headquarters), and to Kansas City (500-05).

Conclusions for Chapter Nine
The PEO Sisterhood obviously operates with nearly the same worldview that other organizations do. They focus on family and friends first. They see laughter, friendship, sharing and education as central to their lives. They have often had the advantage of higher education, so they are much like the AAUW members. They value history, like the authors and editors involved in *The Knox County Papers* and *Golden Milestone*.

The writing about PEO has provided a tenuous answer to at least one of the research questions posed in Chapter One. What do volunteer women get? PEO sisters gain new knowledge and skills, a support system, a social life, and an opportunity to be useful to others.
CHAPTER TEN:
DATA ANALYSIS

Always guided by that abstract question generated when I first came in contact with the Women’s Institute (“If the WI has done so much, why don’t we know about it?”), and by Slavin’s idea of best evidence, I examined the data in several ways, turning it this way and that through definition, comparison and contrast, process analysis, and exemplification. Because I employed storytelling techniques instead of statistics, the same facts appear over and over again in different guises.

As I began the research, my American colleagues and I knew nothing of the WI. I first thought people everywhere were as ignorant of its work as we were. British friends who discounted its value were no help. I soon realized how much my view of the world was centered in the United States. Not only was there a great deal of data available on the organization, that data showed strong links to other rural women’s organizations. As I discovered and began to analyze information on the WI, I came to amend the purpose of this study. I switched from finding, exploring and helping preserve information specific to the Women’s Institute, to doing the same thing in a more general sense. I determined to, before our access to the lessons in associational archives and the oral tradition disappeared forever, gather and document how women in several organizations learned the skills necessary to cope with a constantly changing frontier and an often repressive educational climate.

Many pressures caused the available information on women’s organizations to be excluded from traditional official records and historical chronicles. The constantly changing historiographical scene affected public policy and private relationships, as well as academic exploration and media scrutiny of women’s activities. Knowing all these things, I examined both organized and ad hoc groups for examples of how they used “that precious time when we come together for consciousness raising and intellectual enhancement” (Wall 1997, 13).

The research questions generated after an initial appraisal of data on the Indian WI (Mahila Samitis) and other women’s groups in the Associated Country Women of the World became:
(1) What have women gained from their participation in volunteer organizations? Particularly, what learning benefits have they—individually and collectively—derived from their experiences?

(2) How do organizational learners construct, manage and transmit this newly-obtained knowledge and transfer their skills?

(3) What were and are the common denominators for different kinds of women’s groups? How are the perspectives of different types of associations linked?

(4) How do a fuller knowledge and better understanding of women’s associations and their learning initiatives affect the history and social dynamics of adult and continuing education?

From Description to Understanding

I borrowed some initial definitions and analyses from earlier explorers of club life, and prepared an overview of Vero Beach Women’s Club and two federations as exemplary. Having these foundational elements in place, I turned to researching the WI.

I described in some detail British and Canadian women’s lives in the Victorian Era. That description provided a background for the discussion of the Women’s Institute. Noting the WI emphasis on certain ideas and actions, I began to compile a list of common themes. With these themes (education, vision, collaboration, etc.) in mind, I scrutinized other organizations to see if they exhibited the same concerns and achievements. I watched that pattern of common themes develop in data from AAUW, Nebraska extension clubs, the PEO and other groups. I also charted the ways those themes related to the three general purposes of organizational activity (intellectual, social and service) and to three generally accepted categories of educational endeavor (informal, nonformal, and formal).

I compared the Canadian and UK Institutes with each other in Chapter Four, then compared the WI with AAUW in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I compared and contrasted several organizations from the African-American community, including information on how club life played out in some all-black Oklahoma towns during Reconstruction and how clubwomen were instrumental in the establishment of formal education in the state.
Though continuing to mention comparisons and contrasts throughout the text, I also used the exemplification technique extensively. In most of the chapters, thumbnail sketches of persons important to the various organizations are provided. In addition to showcasing women leaders, these biographical sketches provide an opportunity for process analysis. The ways the WI, AAUW, NACWC, PEO, and others founded their organizations, attracted and maintained their membership, generated income, kept necessary records, and provided rewards proved to be predictable.

I say predictable because so many common themes emerged that it became apparent they reflected an entire worldview. Every group was concerned about and determined to improve the educational level of women. The ways they enhanced their own learning and aided others in formal schooling were complex—affected by time and place, economics, and women’s place in the various communities. In the 1800s, for example, rural women from North American plains were learning to piece quilts, preserve food for winter, and keep their children healthy. At the same time, certain women in urban areas were thinking about how to recruit and retain good servants, founding libraries, and trying to improve neighborhood schools. Women in both rural or urban areas either sought or formed clubs that enabled them to become literate and facilitate acquisition of new knowledge. Their clubs and other organized groups provided a metaphorical safe space, usually located inside a physically safe home, clubhouse, or church.

The fact that volunteers so often sought out a group experience, instead of reading individually, proved their belief in and need for collaborative action. This need for belonging has always been a major motivator—not so important as food, but more important than building self-esteem. In her inaugural speech to the National Association of Colored Women, Josephine Ruffin said, “. . . we need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other, we need to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends” (in Lerner 1972, 440).
To further develop these themes and analyze the “yield” of the data presented in preceding chapters, I turn now to answering the research questions posed at the outset and reflecting on the new facets of each that the process of research uncovered.

What Have Women Gained From Their Participation In Voluntary Organizations?

The short answer to this question is that clubwomen have gained the acquaintance, friendship and support of other women who have the same ideas and are committed to the same goals—more or less, the same mindset (Aerts, et al., 2000; Belenky, et al., 1986; Bouchard, 1986; Follett, 1991; Vella, 1994). But this formulation underplays the fact that women in such associations in fact generate new ideas to which all – with individual variations – may subscribe and create an organization with its own history and identity. The data show they gained new knowledge through Institute and extension club lessons, study groups and informal discussion. As they gained knowledge of the organization’s history and continued developing it, they grew stronger. The achievements of the women who led the group in the past held an almost talismanic power. Knowledge of the public policy of the group enabled the building of personal philosophy.

Traditional and contemporary clubs alike required attendance at local meetings, provincial or state conferences, national and international conventions. While all members gained an excuse for and rationale to travel, urban women had a wider range of transportation. Rural women were not deterred from attending, though they seldom drove automobiles in the early twentieth century. They went to meetings on horseback or in buggies. Women in rural areas were glad to escape the tedium of unending chores and the challenges of weather, distance, and isolation. Middle-class housewives in cities and towns were eager to meet friends and participate in learning initiatives, but didn’t have such a physical struggle to attend. After long hours in the factory or bent over a sewing machine, working class women looked forward to their sessions with friends. Farm wives, early working class women, and housewives with no paid vacation, found their weekly or monthly meetings an important release. Lessons that would make housekeeping more efficient were a good excuse for Institute and extension club
members alike. Times have changed; cruises and long recreational trips are common for both rural and urban club women.

_Broadening the Circle_

Aside from the chance to get out of the house, clubwomen gained friends and a wide circle of acquaintances. While not necessarily intimate, these acquaintances were a source of emotional support during the last illness and death of a loved one or other time of stress. All voluntarism is tied up with a need to belong to something—an issue, a religion, a campus, a political party, or a club. This raging need to belong is one of the reasons why Maslow’s hierarchy of needs remains a useful tool for analyzing the motivations and concerns of club members, despite the opposition sometimes expressed to it within feminist circles (Hanley & Abell 2002). Clubwomen always deal with the issues of self-preservation first—children’s vaccination, feeding the homeless, learning first aid with the Red Cross, etc—though they don’t thereby treat these realms as somehow lowest on the social hierarchy. The fact that so many women in traditional volunteer organizations were housewives blurs the line between the levels in Maslow’s hierarchy, but it does not obliterate the line or make his ideas unusable. Clubwomen wanted (1) to belong to the group that knows canning, cleaning, and preserving food in the safest modern ways; (2) to belong to the traditional women’s organizations their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers belonged to—strengthening the kinship bond; (3) to belong to groups of friends with whom they can laugh at themselves and others—they want to be in the group that knows the jokes; (4) to belong to a respectable group with the right terminology—ladies or women, sisters or sorors; (5) to belong to an organization with well-spoken leaders it is a joy to emulate, and (6) to belong to what Peter Senge (1990) has more recently called “learning organizations.”

They gained private satisfaction from helping others, but were also able to receive public recognition for packing boxes for soldiers, mentoring schoolchildren, and sharing traditional homemaking skills. They received applause for fundraising and other service efforts. They were able to practice public speaking, run meetings, serve on boards, and keep books within the group, acquiring skills they sometimes transferred to larger and different venues. Today’s clubwomen with careers sometimes list their memberships on
resumes, the better to display their determination to give back to the community through organized action and to remain intellectually active.

In the past, clubwomen involved themselves in efforts for and against abolition, suffrage, temperance, reproductive choice, the right to retain custody of minor children in divorce cases, and the right to sit on juries. Participation in such efforts gave women a greater sense of themselves and made them better citizens. Schools, libraries, and hospitals were strengthened by the individual and collective efforts. Through these and other venues, they helped change the world. Such changes are involved with the deconstruction of other ideas previously held sacrosanct. The notion of man as always head of the household, the owner of all family property, and the voice of the family decreased as women realized they had something to say in their own voice.

*Developing a Worldview*

As suggested above, so many commonalities in orientation, concerns and activities emerge across different types of women’s organizations and their educational affairs at different times and in very different places that one cannot help thinking of a shared “worldview.” Josephine Ruffin’s reference to the “need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other” is only one of those important threads. It is part of what I called the “Clubwoman’s Worldview.” As the physical Rosetta Stone helped clarify relationships between languages, this worldview clarifies relationships and terminology used in club life and in adult education. I address now dimensions of it that emerged from the data of the dissertation.

*Personal Investment*

The willingness to spend huge amounts of time and personal effort, working with other women, is the first aspect of that worldview. Examples of that expenditure include my own 100+ hours of work with the Family Services Welcoming Committee in Labrador and Texas, uncounted hours with various consciousness-raising groups, and ten years as a board member with the Fort Walton Beach branch of AAUW. WI members document their yearly organizational and community efforts in Tweedsmuir histories. Someone in every organization spends her energy writing, editing, and sending newsletters or taking minutes at business meetings. Robley Garrigan (1996) devoted
many hours, over several years, to editing her book on the PEO Sisterhood and served in every elected office the Nebraska PEO featured. In 1963, the Knox County farm women took time from their chores to write histories of their rural communities. The list of non-publishing activities, such as volunteering in hospitals and schools, or mentoring students from formal K-12 classes, is also a long one.

Lifelong Learning

Education, in all its forms, is a second major aspect of this worldview. Volunteers relieve teachers on playgrounds and in lunchrooms to give them a chance for much-needed periods of free time. Students who need help with reading or other skills are mentored by clubwomen and other volunteers. Early Texas clubs donated flags, flowers and fences to public schools (Christian 1919). British Institutes offer funds for members who couldn’t otherwise afford to complete courses at Denman College, their adult education center near Oxford (Parris 1973). AAUW members donate money for scholarships and grants to American scholars, international students, and public school teachers who emphasize math and science programs for girls (personal knowledge). Other educational initiatives are not so involved with formal schooling (Schneemeyer 1985). Extension club lessons (Sims 1997, Smith & Wilson 1999) and reading group discussions are two major nonformal educational activities (Slezak 1993, 1995).

The new knowledge members receive through their volunteer organizations helps keep them up-to-date with developments in technical and medical fields. Over the years, members have tried to be progressive and efficient. Whatever is modern at any given time provides goals for new lessons. One of the things club members wish for their children is that they be able to function well in their own modernity. Their vision for the future improved community that their children will inherit is balanced by members’ reverence for history. Older members provide institutional memory in the oral tradition, but age and illness are robbing women’s groups of those older members. Determination to take advantage of the latest technology and medical information, vision of the future, and valuing the past are three further characteristics of the worldview.
**Voice**

Developing and using authentic voice is a key element in club life. Dialogue is vital to all three purposes of voluntarism -- social, political, and intellectual. Book discussions; Great Decisions meetings; business conferences; state, provincial, national and international conventions; lobbying, and holding press conferences are examples of common situations in which women make their individual and collective voice heard. Loss of older members implies weakens collective voice. When older members are gone, their stories are gone and institutional memory flags.

Voice enables the social purpose of voluntarism--exchange of ideas, forming and maintaining friendships, and having fun. Bridge games, doll shows, fashion shows, banquets, and village markets provide excellent opportunities for networking. The Ladies of Essence have had several fashion shows, and the Fort Walton Beach branch of AAUW has two bridge groups.

*Managing Common Resources for the Common Good*

Throughout much of the history of this country, women have had little access to financial resources of their own. In fact, women and money were seen as antithetical and the involvement of women with financial resources as somehow illegitimate. Women’s associations provided willy-nilly a way to enjoy the empowerment of accumulating resources and using them to commonly-valued ends without incurring the opprobrium that individual woman risked when venturing into the financial arena. The money generated by seemingly superficial fashion shows and trivial pursuits is almost always funneled into scholarships that feed women and girls’ intellectual growth. The clubwoman’s vision of the future includes a female population that has had more opportunities than the members had. Because their efforts encourage others, members put up with jokes about their hats and card games. Social purpose, therefore, augments educational purpose. Members were determined, moreover, to present an acceptable face to the external world in this regard by having an efficiently-run and entirely above-boards organization.

In fact, these organizations were often quite efficient and effective. Stereotypically, club life concerns making preserves, arranging flowers, and taking tea breaks.
Beyond the stereotype is the fact—WI members were able to recover and preserve a great deal of fruit that would have otherwise been lost during World War II (Garner 1995). The food was welcome in a time of ration cards and scarcity. Behind the seemingly frivolous activity of placing flowers in a vase is the drive to bring order and beauty to everyday life, and after the coffee break or luncheon comes renewed vigor. Men and women with careers outside the home have legislation and custom to ensure that they have regular spaces of free time during their workday, but often speak slightly of housewives who have the same breaks without those precedents. In the midst of fund-raising and child-rearing, volunteers need a time to relax as much as anybody in an office of factory, but when they take their cup of tea they reinforce the stereotypes.

They are bound together by their tea breaks and book groups, but also by operating rest homes, assisted living facilities for elderly members, and village markets. During the holidays, particularly, communal meals are important to all kinship and community groups. Potluck suppers and Achievement Day banquets are just different manifestations of the nightly gathering of the clan. They are a bridge between our rural, cooperative, past and our largely urban present. Lunches served at extension club meetings in the early 1900s were important to the ladies who came for the lessons, the children who tagged along with their mothers, and to the husbands who acted as chauffeurs. In the 1940s, the North Platte Canteen provided lunches and emotional support to military personnel traveling through Nebraska by train on their way to the next post. That heroic effort to provide deserts, sandwiches, and coffee was divided between clubs, and is viewed with nostalgia by people who participated. Those who served and those who ate are bound together in collective memory. Other club activities in wartime included writing letters to service members, sending boxes of supplies overseas, knitting socks and scarves, and supporting the USO and Red Cross. The war effort was comprised of good food, service to others, laughter, history, music, sorrow, loneliness, and a determination to maintain democratic principles. Clubwomen looked to their organizations for a place in which to contribute and for a place to receive emotional support.
Protective Coloration and Broad Appeal

Patriotism is tied to organized religion in many organizations. The advertised value systems of most organizations hew fairly close to the social consensus of their environment, even if they were at the same time subversively offering women space and opportunity for new roles. This seems to serve at one and the same time as protective coloration, as a means to promote social cohesion within the group and as a way of making a broad appeal to potential new members. In an effort to attract and support members or different faiths, AAUW urged branches to choose non-sectarian invocations. Rituals of many organizations, however, still include prayers, anthems, and the Pledge of Allegiance. A prayer written for organized women in Colorado is still used by the Women’s Institute and the Ladies of Essence. The combination of patriotism and religion resulted in a strong ethical code. One of the most Quixotic tasks undertaken by the Women’s Institute and some other groups was prohibition of divisive subjects at meetings. The war effort, for example, was not discussed at WI meetings, in spite of the fact that everyone was working to make life easier for the military personnel in some ways.

This determination to keep things running smoothly and without controversy of the sort that might prove divisive or attract attention is paralleled by the fact that a certain proportion of women’s organization members have always felt constrained to keep their membership secret from family or church or source of employment. But it has also been a vital means of preserving broad appeal. Jews, residents of rural areas, degree holders, and African-American persons with light skin or dark skin have all seen their chosen groups as particularly positive. Volunteers may ultimately serve the larger community, but their own club and neighborhood come first. Many organizations are by-invitation-only, adding to the mystique of membership. Once inside the given organization, members’ usual policy is to downplay advantages of wealth and position, even in organizations with socio-economic status as a criterion for membership. Democracy is served by one-woman, one vote.

Their Space
These elements of the Clubwomen’s worldview – personal investment, voice, self-management, devotion to the common good, protective coloration and broad appeal – suggest, therefore, how women’s associations have built the “safe spaces” mentioned above in which their members could engage in shared and individual personal development at a time when few opportunities were offered for it by surrounding society.

Constructing and Transmitting Knowledge

The second research question goes to the heart of the process by which association members crafted a safe universe for women’s development in the heart of societies that were much less encouraging of it. Clubwomen built new knowledge together and separately, always utilizing the dialogue that Eduard Lindeman (1989) and Josephine Donovan (1995) both emphasized as central to collaborative learning. Serendipitous informal learning was combined with ideas and curricula borrowed from formal schooling venues. They wrote, conducted and evaluated locally-created lessons; completed programs generated by central administrative offices of extension, Institute or Association, and manipulated the top-down policies to fit local organizations. Grassroots ideas made their way through channels to the top, as in a resolution from any village Institute to the national convention or to ACWW.

Lessons were shared through panel discussions at meetings or on the radio, by speakers and other members in face-to-face encounters or through the media, and by discussions of new knowledge with family members. Each event was planned, executed, coordinated, and evaluated by members who modeled hands-on exercises and worked through theoretical material with less experienced people. In some cases, members puzzled together to make sense of directions in a language foreign to them. Style shows, make-overs, banquets, conventions, and all other events had to be suitable in topic, language, dress, and venue.

The membership of any organization disseminated lessons and evaluations within the group, but also shared information with others. AAUW publishes local newsletters, a state-level publication (FloriVision), and an Association-level glossy magazine called Outlook. The WI publishes provincial newsletters and the international Woman and Country. Press releases to newspapers, television, radio, and other media and press
conferences were common lobbying efforts. Dialogue with members on neighborhood committees and boards, participation in cooperative events (such as a fund-raiser for a young widow struggling to pay her husband’s last medical bills), and symbolic gestures (such as chaining themselves to the White House fence, participating in sit-ins or hunger strikes, or marching up Fifth Avenue) spread their message.

Writing personal letters and completing individual public speaking engagements or serving on panels provided opportunities for intellectual and emotional growth for audience and presenter. Constructing their own memoirs, writing biographies of club leaders, and allowing themselves to be interviewed by those outside the group gave members the chance to share ideas without worrying about whether they are using grammar correctly or not.

Sending out personal research or helping gather funds for someone else to do research helped disseminate ideas to local, state, provincial, and national elected officials. Position papers, curriculum, and applications for grants made the role of women’s groups more well known as the paperwork made its way through administrative red tape. Conventions and other conferences put clubwomen into the public scrutiny of outsiders, disseminating an image of the clubwoman. Formulating, debating and voting on policy, members scrutinized their colleagues in the private sphere. Archiving letters, minutes, and personal papers for state or local historical societies; covering stories about other groups and reporting back to the membership, and creating newsletters or journals were all ways of letting people know what is happening at the Institute or in the Association. Today, e-mail lists, blogs, Internet websites, telephone, FAX and the postal service are conduits for club news.

Possibly the most emotionally rewarding way of disseminating information gained in extension clubs, village Institutes, and other volunteer organizations for homemakers is involving family members in social events, such as annual picnics with neighboring associations, holiday celebrations, Achievement Days, county fairs, and fetes. Other kinds of organizations have members who are less rooted in home life, so it seems logical they would feel more fulfilled in ways that don’t involve family. There is something for every type of member in the panoply of organized voluntarism.
Common Denominators: Deconstruction, Patrimony and Hegemony

Arguably knowledge, too, abhors a vacuum. If clubwomen constructed new knowledge and norms for their own use, it is not because there was nothing there before. In fact, the data reviewed in foregoing chapters strongly suggest that to build their own knowledge and create the “safe spaces” for personal development, clubwomen had first to “deconstruct” – whether explicitly or implicitly – the tissue of patriarchal norms and male hegemony that characterized their environment. This was not the least of their tasks.

Mackenzie (1975) reported that female ropemakers and others of “unknown trades” attended suffrage meetings to learn about being better mothers. Since they had to listen to the speakers’ ideas about the vote as well as about hygiene and feeding, there is little doubt their ideas remained static. British women that went to early Institute meetings attacked the status quo by their mere attendance at gatherings not sanctioned by the squire. In the early 1900s, women in the UK were expected to know their place. Membership in the Grange and Farmers’ Institutes were indicative of changing attitudes in rural residents of the Progressive Era United States, and membership in the [Canadian] Women’s Institutes just over the border indicated a willingness to deconstruct barriers between North American populations.

Mary Stewart’s Collect for clubwomen, written in 1904, highlights many topics that would have made it suitable for indoctrinating young females into the cult of true womanhood, but it was also counter-hegemonic. It was written specifically for a new kind of woman—the clubwoman.

The WI in England was a direct attack on patriarchal systems of organized religion, class and politics (Garner 1995). The idea of one woman-one vote was anathema to “squirearchy” (21). Adelaide Hoodless addressed the British Poultry Conference, Lady Denman fought for written nominations and secret ballots, and members stuck to their guns when one Lady of the Manor fought the forming of a radical movement in “their village” (Morgan 1993, 37).

Saroj Nalini, who founded an Asian version of the WI, attacked patriarchal society when she encouraged Muslim, European, and Hindu to come together for study—in spite of differences in caste and creed. A delegate from Queensland told of women
driving a hundred miles to get to a meeting, and a Norwegian capped her story when she told of seventy-year-old women rowing across the fjord for an Institute meeting. These women traveled alone, something that was not common in the early 1900s. Resolutions during World War II were more scarce, because meetings were fewer, but WI members were adamant that women and men should have equal pay for equal work.

Every AAUW branch, club, Institute, and PEO chapter that raised money to build its own building or buy one was deconstructing the idea that men were the ones to hold property. AAUW also assaulted the idea of male hegemony because every member had suffered through college classes, in which some were ridiculed or shunned. Their holding degrees indicated times were changing.

Ida B. Wells Barnett sued the railroad and won when she was just a girl. Though she never collected any money from the suit, the fact that she sued was counter-hegemonic. She is also known for ignoring white clubwomen’s desires and marching in a suffrage parade with her group (instead of at the back, as she had been directed). Lucy Craft Laney founded an institute for black people in the basement of an August Presbyterian Church. It grew into a junior college. Mary McLeod Bethune started the National Council of Negro Women and was consultant to four presidents and the United Nations. Nannie Rice Burroughs spoke to mixed audiences in 1905 and published a magazine for missionaries. All of these actions by African-American women broke down long-standing patriarchal barriers between men and women, and black and white. Black men of all classes took advantage of internal squabbles in the [black] women’s movement because their whole concept of masculinity was at risk.

The Nebraska clubwomen who wrote The Knox County Papers were engaged in counter-hegemony by virtue of the fact they included so much information on Native Americans [Indians]. Though Knox County is not much different than most Nebraska counties, no vignettes of club life in A Golden Milestone revealed the same psychic investment. The writing by the Knox County women is overtly supportive of patriarchal systems in Nebraska, but the fact that they completed the mini-histories indicates they were determined to breach the societal barriers.
In numerous ways, therefore, women in their associations were not only building a “safe space” where they could exercise powers and develop capacities not normally allowed the “fair sex” in external society. They were also – if generally in covert manner and sometimes without being aware of the fact themselves – challenging the hegemony of patriarchal models and norms and seeking alternate ones of their own. Without this at least implicit task of “deconstruction,” they could scarcely have been so successful at constructing their own knowledge, co-opting many existing forms of education to their own ends and creating a distinctive worldview.

The Importance of Women’s Associations for Adult Education

... and for the History of the Field

Adult Education is substantively stronger when historical activities and persons are rediscovered. Adding back in the information about women’s traditional volunteer associations and documenting activities of contemporary organizations makes our general and educational history more complete. Recovering incomplete and crumbling hard-copy records of complex and productive organizations helps us with our efforts to provide an improved view of the education field. Knowing both that what is seen as important changes through time and that people evaluate activities through the lens of their personal worldview, we need to make rediscovery and rescue a constant part of academic activity.

Borrowing ideas and collaborative techniques from women's volunteer associations may help facilitators organize learning activities for individuals and groups, and HRD professionals bridge the gap between training and education. Storytelling is an important activity for families, clubs, communities, and whole cultures. If pressed, even academics that are basically interested in statistical analysis can come up with a story about how an ancestor was part of the only wagon train to survive one California trip (personal communication, Florida 2007) or how a great aunt took the tug out of a horse’s harness and beat a rattler to death with it before returning to her plowing (personal communication, Nebraska 1965). Businesses and industries may well find this kind of empowering story (Neuhauser 1993) helps recruit and retain workers. If genealogists and clubwomen have been spending untold hours to document the activities of the past, there must be some intrinsic joy in it. Statisticians might wonder about the reliability of data
from the oral tradition, but the fact that there even is such a tradition should prove its value.

Seeing how many goals clubwomen have accomplished with little or no money and without the help of professional educators can inspire today’s educators with fundraising and program planning. Knowing that rural women, various newly-arrived immigrant populations, and blue-collar laborers were able to realize so many didactic objectives gives us increased determination to plan and realize ours.

Reviewing the history of voluntarism highlights the irrelevancy of perceived barriers between learning initiatives. Boundaries between formal, nonformal, and informal education and between volunteer efforts and adult education should be left to credentialing and funding agencies.

Acknowledging the three purposes of voluntarism—social networking (friendship, fun, recreation), political activism (service, mutual benefit, democracy), intellectual growth (libraries, museums, book clubs)—makes it easy to see voluntarism’s connections with adult education.

Investigating the volunteer efforts of African-American women reveals ways of combating racism. Euro-American organizations have begun to work at attracting and retaining minority members, but overall dynamics are the same as they were in early GFWC meetings when Black women attended or applied for membership. Volunteer and paid adult educators and K-12 teachers alike must deal with multicultural classrooms and other demographic changes. The review of past nonformal learning activities helps educators visualize possibilities for present-day work.

Examining the skills volunteers have chosen to acquire or improve reveals the multifarious conception of what constitutes reality. Reality for thousands of AAUW members concerns the artificial construct of formal education for people who are teachers. Reality for rank and file extension club members and Women’s Institute members concerns housewifery, childcare, and animal husbandry.

Observing the problems volunteers have been able to solve in the past provides us with models for current decision-making in family life and education. “Lifelong learning” was always lived by clubwomen—now the concept is an important classroom
Collaboration works. Taking advantage of students’ cultural and experiential knowledge enriches educational experience, just as using members’ knowledge and skills enriched club life and Institute lessons. Each culture and each life provides another lens through which facts and theories may be viewed.

Realizing how today’s formal institutions now award credit for previous work students have completed in their careers heightens our sense of irony. Military personnel receive physical education credit from basic training [marching and strength exercises], public speaking credit from the Non-Commissioned Officers’ Academy, and credit in management and business courses from their on-the-job training and military courses. Certification College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and American Council on Education (ACE) formalize the kinds of knowledge clubwomen have learned in the past. Book groups’ study of literature would have earned members college credit if they had done the reading in a classroom instead of someone’s home.

Recognizing the links between volunteer organizations and adult education alerts us to links between formal and nonformal education and raises questions for future research.

Lessons for Historians and for Historiography

The question posed at the very beginning of this chapter was quite simple: “If the WI [and by extension the whole body of women’s volunteer associations] has done so much, why don’t we know about it?” This is a question for historians of adult education and a question of historiography and women’s history. Both types of resources were reviewed in Chapter 2. What insights does analysis of the data provide into the answer to this final question?

To begin with, the volume of educationally-relevant experience of women’s associations reviewed – and apparently reviewed for nearly the first time -- in the foregoing chapters clearly substantiates Lerner’s (1972, ix-x) contention that written
documents by or about women tend to be “lost, forgotten or neglected”; the general
disregard for women’s work in the humanities discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation;
and the specific complaint of Hugo (1990, 1) that the historical record of adult education
contains “only a few voices and a few stories” from the women’s side of the aisle. As she
moreover noted about these exceptions to the general rule (4),

   Women’s work in voluntary associations like women’s study clubs, while
   acknowledged, was discounted as having ‘added tremendously to the range of
   bulk of adult education without satisfactorily increasing its depth and penetration.

Though Grattan (1955) was generally dismissive and distinctly minimalist in his
treatment of women’s contributions to adult education, Stubblefield & Kean (1994) and
Kett (1994) do accord much more place to the topic. They seldom seem to get into the
heart of the matter, however, perhaps because the unique aspects of the kind of adult
education carried on by women’s associations tend not to be easily captured in the
language of statistics and historical events. They fly below that radar and arguably
require stories of the kind that this dissertation has tried to convey.

The relative absence of women’s contributions from the adult education literature
is therefore both a substantive and a methodological matter: substantive, insofar as much
of the actual history of adult education in this country is thus nowhere to be found, or at
least remains largely underrepresented; and methodological or “historiographic” insofar
as the tools used to develop that history have proven ill-suited to the task. To stem what
Marchand (1998) called the historiographic process of knowledge loss in this domain,
instruments adapted to the milieu and knowledge construction habits of women learners
are obviously needed. As the dissertation research has demonstrated, oral history is prime
among these, for it can render a sense of lived experience and at the same time enlist the
cooperation of the learners in the task of dignifying and recording their knowledge.

But the responsibility for general ignorance of the contributions of the Women’s
Institutes and the many other types of women’s associations that have carried on major
adult education activities over the years cannot all be laid at the door of adult education
historians, for at least the recent ones have in fact made efforts to rectify and better
balance the record, if with tools that are not overly well adapted to the task. If we “don’t
know much about” the WI and its North American equivalents, that is in part because few people pay much attention to adult education history anyway. Being marginal in a marginal field is thus inevitably a double burden. Even if women are better represented in that chronicle – certainly a worthy task – general recognition of these accomplishments is far from guaranteed, due to the fact that the field of adult education itself has remained peripheral to the main centers of public concern and is only gradually emerging from the shadows. And with better representation there is even the possibility of falling prey to the classic syndrome by which fields where women manage to assert their rights and gain a professional foothold (elementary education, social work…) risk ipso facto being relegated to or cloistered in marginal status. This in no way invalidates the important task of rectifying the chronicles of adult education and social history, but simply reminds us that such efforts must finally be paired with more general ones to achieve true gender equality.
CHAPTER ELEVEN:
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When I started this research, I was not aware I would learn more about myself than I did about any other research subject. When I turned inward, however, I identified several of the common characteristics of extension club members in myself as a five-year-old. When I listed the number of hours I had donated to Family Services, AAUW, and other organizations, I realized how much voluntarism and nonformal education have enriched my life. My exploration of women’s unpaid work alerted me to the continued need for recovery of archival material, assessment of past endeavors in nonformal education, and renewed practice of traditional skills. I will be a more effective researcher and writer as a result of reading about the historic work already done, and my teaching will be richer, by virtue of having become aware of female role models in the field of adult education.

Now knowing some of the answers to “If the WI [and the rest of organized womanhood] has done so much, why don’t we know about it?” I have determined to find and publish information about associations of women on the Internet and through public speaking. My future research will include patterns of behavior and attitudes in other organizations, historical records, and hands-on activities that might invigorate mentoring efforts. Such research should encourage teachers and trainers in formal schooling and business to not assume their students come to them as blank slates. Every stakeholder is representative of a culture, and every culture has some sort of communal activity from which we can learn.

“Teachers are learners” is a key aspect of the adult education belief system. We, “they,” often get back more than we give. Any future research should highlight that reciprocal relationship. More work also needs to be done on the relationship between volunteer efforts and formal schooling. My own feeling is that, where an actual campus is concerned, particular attention should be paid to emotional support as well as intellectual or economic support. What did attendance at the all-Black college in Oklahoma in the 1800s have in common with attendance at MacDonald Institute, Denman College, or Cottey College?
Are historic groups that could afford to erect or buy a building faring better in the twenty-first century than those forced to use other buildings (homes, church basements, restaurants, etc.)? How do present-day organizations attract new members? In earlier times, how much stronger were organizations that had enough money, time, energy and knowledge of the market to secure a visible monument for themselves? Were there members who joined, just for access to a space dedicated to women? Not to family. Not to God. Not to men. Not to a political party. Just to women.

Women’s groups that were established as auxiliaries to men’s groups should be studied to see if and how they become more independent over time. Are groups like the Rebekahs only supportive of patriarchal social institutions, or have they become counter-hegemonic over time?

The question, “Where are all the Asian Women?” needs to be answered. We need to find out more about Japanese women’s Red Cross work in concentration camps during World War II. Are Issei, Nisei, or Sansei women more likely to belong to groups with European roots than to ad hoc or organized groups of Japanese women? Are there informal groups of Chinese women who gather to play mahjong, as Amy Tan describes? Are there major differences between organized groups of Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Indonesian, and Korean women in North America and elsewhere? Are there other Asian countries that have organized groups, which could provide greater depth to a study of those differences? How have Japanese women’s groups in the United States changed over time?

What has been the role of the Hindu woman since the death if Saroj Nalini? Did her husband re-marry? After he wrote his 1930s book of her, did he cease his interest in the India WI? Are Mahila Samitis (Women’s Institutes of India) still workable? Who tried to fill Nalini’s shoes after her early death? Has any leader since Nalini tried to get Muslim, Hindu and Untouchable women to work together? Have women’s groups worked to eradicate the stigma of the untouchable label? Is the role of purdah still an impediment to WI growth?

The comment about African-American women taking advantage of the relative freedom on the Oklahoma plains when they came west after the [American] Civil War
raises questions about the role of space and self-efficacy. Were Black women more independent in Oklahoma than they had been in other locations? Did their having been slave or free change their development of self-knowledge or determination to become better educated? Were younger Black women as desperate to get a good education as their mothers were for them, or did they see less value in learning than their mothers did? Were there organized groups in which the mothers bolstered each other’s resolve to enable the younger women at their own expense?

Native American (Indian) women had a different social role than Euro-American and Afro-American women had. Were there Hopi, Lakota and Zuni groups for women that were in place before colonization? Colleges, Institutes, AAUW, and extension clubs gave rise to small support groups for social networking or cognitive development. Given the fact that many tribes worked and traveled together as an extended family, did Indian women need and form relationships somewhat analogous to women’s clubs?

African-American women are said to look to the oral tradition for knowledge of their genealogy and their racial history. Is there direct evidence in the oral tradition about precolonial Bush Schools of Black women? What historiographic processes have affected the oral tradition? Were these processes, across the board, more virulent than those in the world of publishing? And, not least, what specific books, authors, public speakers, and curricula have most consistently downplayed the contributions of women to unions, business, formal education, medicine, art, literature, music, agribusiness, animal husbandry, and sports? What publications have explored the work of researchers who are producing work that has, as its aim, the re-discovery of female leaders in education and in volunteer efforts?


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307


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Patricia J. Moran

Background Information

I was born in rural Nebraska, attended rural school (K-8), and graduated from Creighton High School in Knox County. I hold a BS in English and Reading from University of Nebraska-Lincoln (1973) and an MA (1980) in English from there. I also have a BS in Social Sciences from Troy University (1985). The research for my doctorate at FSU is strongly linked to my own experience as a volunteer and educator. I have two sons, two granddaughters, and a membership in AAUW. I belong to Emerald Coast Writers, Pi Lambda Theta, and the Comparative and International Education Society.

Literacy Consultant USAF Education Offices

As an USAF wife, I moved often and had many interesting jobs outside of formal education. At RAF Chicksands (near Bedford), 1980, and RAF Alconbury (near Huntingdon), 1979 and 1980, I taught Remedial and Developmental Communications to American military personnel.

Volunteer Organizer, Nonformal Education Initiatives

I’ve been a volunteer literacy tutor and ESOL instructor in Florida at various times, organized and taught a reading clinic at the American Youth Association (1980-81, RAF Mildenhall, England), and taught ESOL to Korean wives of American military personnel (1974, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas).

In Labrador, Michigan, and Texas (1971-73), I founded and facilitated consciousness-raising groups in which we explored experiential learning, upgrading skills of analysis and synthesis.

Educator, K-12, College and University


I also taught World Literature, mythology, and writing to Troy University students for over fifteen years as an adjunct faculty member and writing at St. Leo College twice. On Tallahassee and Panama City campuses, I taught FSU’s “Introduction to Education” and “Schooling in America.”