

## WOMEN'S CLUBS OF CHRISTIAN COUNTY

A couple of weeks ago, I was asked to speak about the history of women's organizations in Christian County. Frankly, at that point, most of you knew more about the subject than I did. Lacking the records of any club except one, I realized the best way to get most information would be to read and take notes from existing 117 years of county newspapers and then use the notes to write about what I'd learned. That's no project for a single month or probably even a single year. I couldn't really properly begin, even had weather and other obligations permitted necessary library time. Plan number two: thumb through the rich variety of county books at home. Just the more than dozen titles and maybe five thousand pages by Wayne Glenn offer far more than most counties have. I appreciated the information found in leafing through them. Most information, though, came from *Christian County: Its First 100 Years*. Contributors of most chapters on their own areas in this 1959 book were women. They thought to include information about women. Second, I had the transcribed early The Ladies Literary Society annual books on The Transcribed Records website. I think we have some interesting stories and hope you aren't disappointed in what I didn't find in this brief search.

People have always gotten together to share plans, ideas, experiences and good times and sad ones. Early social events in Christian County included fund-raisers such as pie suppers and box suppers and turkey shoots; events centered on the plentiful streams and springs, caves and forests of Christian County; celebrations such as dances, street fairs, picnics, or holidays; anniversaries like the national centennial in 1876; family events – births, weddings, funerals, reunions and multi-generation and combined households; Civil War reunions sometimes including former combatants from both sides; local performances such as spelling bees, Tom Thumb weddings, debates, recitations, fiddler contests, and plays; work related events such as threshings, quilting bees, corn husking or teachers' conferences; church activities like baptizing, all-day singings and dinner on the grounds, singing schools, brush arbors, denominational association meetings or camp meetings; political activities; and sometimes traveling entertainers. When these meetings are formalized into a regular schedule, agenda and expected behavior, organizations are formed. In Christian County, there are few records of 19<sup>th</sup> century organizations other than churches, military groups and combination insurance/social groups. The story of Christian County Churches and their activities is beyond the scope of this research and talk. However, I might mention that other than many pictures and summaries in Wayne Glenn's pictorial histories, published individual church histories, and stories from other county histories, a place to research the churches are the brief histories and simple drawings in the WPA work on Christian County, available on microfilm in the Christian County Library.

Surviving records of 19<sup>th</sup> century non-church organizations and sometimes later belong most often to men's organizations - town bands which seem usually to be exclusively male; baseball teams; military reunions, encampments and GAR meetings; farmer's associations; hunting and fishing groups; secret societies like Masonic lodges and those mixture of insurance and social organizations, Woodsmen of the World and Odd Fellows; and of course the very brief but best known men's organization, the Bald Knobbers. Odd Fellows had chapters in the county as early as 1870, often starting cemeteries as they did in Highlandville, Sparta, Chadwick and Ozark. And, there were always all the school and children activities. Soon after the Civil War, the first Masonic Lodges to begin Eastern Star chapters welcomed women as well as men. Some men's organizations had women's auxiliaries. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows had Daughters of Rebecka. Woodsmen of the World had Royal Neighbors. Knights of Columbus had Daughters of Isabella. Often the men's organizations had chapters in not only Ozark or Nixa but also in Garrison, Boaz, Clever, Sparta, Highlandville, Spokane, Oldfield, McCracken, Linden and Billings. One of the largest and longest local encampments of The Grand Army of the Republic was held in Garrison in 1898. Unfortunately, I have not yet located proof of whether any or many of the Christian County Masonic Lodges, Odd Fellows, Woodmen of the World or Knights of Columbus included women's auxiliaries.

Women's clubs not only gave impetus to the cultural growth of Ozark but took an important part in civic development. Study; subjects of contemporary affairs on local, national and world levels; projects of civic importance and philanthropic works were among goals of women's groups. Other than study, performances at meetings and socialization, the clubs often emphasized community clean-up and beautification, citizen health and generosity toward those in the community who struggled with the basic necessities of life.

Among the earliest women's clubs mentioned in First 100 Years was a group of twelve Ozark women whose Shakespeare Club met weekly beginning in the mid-1890's to study the Bard's works. The group included Mrs. James F. Adams, Mrs. J. E. Clark, Mrs. J. H. Fulbright, Mrs. J. C. Rogers, Mrs. Wash Wade, Mrs. G. A. Watson and Mrs. Dave Wolff.

Today, we think of the Women's Christian Temperance Union as focusing solely on controlling and eliminating the social ills of alcohol. While that was the original reason for the 250 chapters in the first five years 1874-1879, soon they sought broader reforms: women's suffrage, shelters for abused women and children, eight-hour work days, stiffer penalties for rape and sexual abuse, ability of women to support their families financially, the vote for women, kindergartens, parent-teacher associations, traveler's aid, equal pay for equal work, pure food and drug act, legal aid, women police officers and prison matrons, promotion of nutrition, allowing labor unions,

Americanization of immigrants, easing of poverty, homes and education for wayward girls, uniform marriage and divorce laws, passive demonstrations, drug resistance education, and world peace. It actively opposed drug abuse, polygamy, child labor, white slavery and army brothels. That's why in the well-known photo at a 1909 Ozark street fair, a lady carries a sign saying, "Let the women do the work." It wasn't entirely about booze and votes. It's unclear exactly how many or how early chapters existed in Christian County, but I found a couple of references to the 1890's. The WCTU in Clever often sponsored speaking contests. Soon after the death of the leader who supported the broad life-improvement objectives, the WCTU returned to its first goal, outlawing the production, sale and use of alcohol. The organization had spread to thirty six nations. By the 1920's, most communities had an active WCTU chapter, the membership peaking in 1926. It continues today with the mission of protection and moral education of children; and a lust-free and substance-abuse free marriage with shared respect, equality and responsibility for both spouses. Like a quick burning fire, the organization was most fervent nearing the completion of its mission. Membership declined quickly after the passage of prohibition.

Another cause women took to heart was care of the nation's fighting men. During wartime, Red Cross chapters composed almost entirely of women sprang up. Some of Wayne Glenn's books show women meeting during what was then called The Great War in the nineteen teens to wrap bandages.

Members' shared homemaking and parenting responsibilities and support were the impetus for many organizations made up entirely or mostly of women. Nearly every school since not long after the start of PTA has had an on-going organization of that or a similar name. Those who care about the school and the students it serves, school staff and the adults of the community, have met to discuss issues, raise funds and provide the school with volunteers, landscaping, playgrounds, sports or band uniforms, musical instruments, start of hot lunch programs, art supplies, classroom equipment, technology, and other enhancements not supplied with school income. They also sponsored health projects for individual children such as vaccinations, hearing examinations and eyeglasses. In addition to the individual Parent Teacher Associations, a County Council was organized in 1931 and still in existence in 1959. The Nixa Women's Progressive Farmers Association was organized in 1931 to improve rural living, build better homes and schools, promote friendly neighbor relations, discuss mutual problems of farm life, and provide wholesome entertainment for farm young people. A chapter also existed in Highlandville. Through the years, WPFA supplied household necessities to families in trouble, and supported many worthy community causes. Extension clubs focused on homemaking skills Nixa Home Craft Club, Chestnut Ridge Help Your Neighbor Club, Chadwick Extension, Billings Extension,

Kinser Extension, Clever Community, Caring and Sharing and Logan Extension are only some of the clubs where women shared and learned home economic skills.

Following World War I, new military organizations appeared. The American Legion Post No. 327 was organized and received its charter in 1920 with R. Neil Gray as Commander with fifteen charter members. The post was named the Graham-Wasson Post in honor of two local men, J. A. Graham and Lowell Wasson, killed in service during World War I. An Auxiliary to the Legion was organized in 1931 with seventeen charter members. Mrs. Charles Roper was the first president. The Legion and Auxiliary have participated in many civic undertakings such as improved school facilities, aid for dependent children, and supplying insulin for diabetic persons. Their independent projects have included obtaining from the War Department a World War I cannon and mounting it on the courthouse lawn, and erecting, also in the courtyard, a memorial drinking fountain.

More military organizations followed after World War II. Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 6758 was chartered in 1946. By 1952 the Post had a membership of 130. Membership declined during the severe three-year drought starting in 1954, and the organization became inactive until December, 1958 when the charter was renewed. By 1959, the Post had redecorated the Legion Room in the Court house where its meetings were held and installed a public drinking fountain and playground equipment in the Boosters Park at Ozark. Nixa Memorial Post No. 434, American Legion, was chartered in September, 1949, with 32 members, veterans of all wars. The Legion's well-known aims at Nixa include aid to the welfare of disabled veterans, the welfare of the children of veterans, and the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. The Post and its Auxiliary also sponsor the annual old fiddlers' contest which draws crowds from near and far. The post kept on hand, available to any resident of the community, a hospital bed, wheel chair, and crutches which are loaned free as needed.

In Nixa the Community Club, in partnership with the Nixa Garden Club formed in May 1947 and the Flowerette Garden Club began in the fall of 1949, sponsored a city park of 10 acres at what was in 1959 northwest city limits. The idea of the first garden club was formed during a spring wildflower walk. The second, meeting less often, was seen as a need for young mothers who could not devote as much time to club work as ladies whose families were more mature. Projects for beautification of the city by 1959 had included: decorated signs at each entrance to city; landscaping grounds of waterworks; planting of climbing roses on school grounds and of other roses in a hundred spots about town; an annual spring clean up-paint up campaign; planting of a hundred walnut trees to replace those which have disappeared; cleaning up highways, decorating the city for Christmas; planting of pink dogwoods; sponsoring flower shows and displays at Ozark Empire Fair

On September 23, 1910, Minnie Lawing, and Jessie Bronson met in Etha L. Reid's home to discuss beginning an organization for members' literary and social improvement. Each agreed to invite three other women to total twelve charter members and begin meeting weekly. Although the by-laws gave the name The Literary Club of Ozark Missouri, from the beginning it was known as The Ladies Literary Club. Most of what we have on them is thanks to annual booklets left to the library at her death by charter member Ethel Shollenberger Ellis.

A four-year Chautauqua course was completed in the years 1910 to 1914 by each of the twelve charter members. The membership was raised to twenty-four in 1914. The organization continued as a study club for the next two years. In 1916, it joined the General Federation of Women's Club and since then has carried out varied programs consistent with the Federation's aims. As the parent federated club in Ozark, it has sponsored four other federated clubs organized later and was a "grandparent" of yet a fifth Ozark club.

Who were the three women who began the Ladies Literary Club? Jessie Martha (Pearson) Bronson was the twenty-nine year old second wife of lawyer Solomon Ernest Bronson whom she had married in 1904; step-mother of eleven year Ellen and mother of two year old Eugene. Born 1870 in Bolivar, Missouri to Enos and Lydia Ellen (Carrier) Bronson and named for his maternal grandfather and uncle who were also next door neighbors, Solomon along with parents and much of his mother's family ran the Cherokee Strip in 1893 and founded a town they named Carrier, Oklahoma. S. E. Bronson moved from Oklahoma to Ozark before 1900 with first wife Lazada. During his time in Ozark, he contributed one of the first housing developments, founded the Ozark Club Theatre for community events and traveling entertainment and was primarily responsible for the Finley River electrical plant which gave the town its first reliable electrical power. In 1912, Mr. Bronson was elected Missouri State Senator, serving until 1920. In 1920, Solomon E. Bronson was hounded out of Christian County and Missouri after discovery that he had illegally taken funds from a trust company he had founded. He died a pauper in the home of his sister and brother-in-law Fred W. and Estelle Park and mother in Portland, Oregon in the 1930's. Before the 1920 census, Texas native Jessie was separated from Solomon and living in the home of her furniture store owner step-father, Henry C. Clark and her mother Lizzy in Dallas, Texas. In 1930, Jessie was listed as a stenographer and widow. Her son was working as a mail and stock clerk. Still in Dallas, on the 1940 census, Jessie was retired. Her single son Eugene was then an Internal Revenue Agent. On-line Texas death records show divorced Jessie Martha Bronson died in Dallas June 30, 1969. Social Security death index gives a date of birth as December 9, 1877. She may have outlived her son. He is shown in neither of these indexes which began in the 1960's, and I didn't find him in Find-a-Grave.

Etha L. (Lawrence) Reid was born in September 1858 in Illinois, a daughter of Joseph and America Lawrence. Soon after her birth, the family moved to Paola, Kansas. She married in 1883 Charles E. Reid, a printer. Early in their marriage, they lived in Paris, Monroe County, Missouri. June 5, 1884, she gave birth to a daughter they named Clarence Bertha and in March 1887 had a son Emmitt T. Before 1900, they were living in Ozark where Charles founded the Ozark Democrat in 1900. He continued editing the Democrat until retiring in 1925 and turning management of the Democrat over to his son Emmitt who later moved to Marshfield and died in Oklahoma in 1958. In 1928, Mr. and Mrs. Reid went to St. Louis and moved in the 1930's to Shreveport, Louisiana. Etha died there before 1940. Charles died 7 October 1941, both in the home of their daughter, Clarence Bertha (Reid) Kent.

A Ladies Literary Club founder who left Ozark probably around 1912 was Minnie J. (Maxwell) Lawing. According to the 1900 Webster County, Missouri census, she was born Minnie J. Maxwell in 1885 in Missouri, the only child of Henry Lee and Mandora "Dora" (Daniels) Maxwell. Perhaps the J stood for Janet. Perhaps not. A packet of letters, fliers, posters, photographs and other information was found about 2006 during a renovation of a one-time opera house in Eldorado Springs Cedar County, Missouri. The letters from our subject were addressed to Mrs. Frank Churchill in Eldorado Springs, called cousin in the letters, and researched by Mark Devicchio, a Churchill heir in Southern California. Frank Churchill had been the long-time manager of the Eldorado Opera House. Mark made an on-line search and found the Ladies Literary Club file. Mark and the found items provide most of what we know about this lady. Among other relatives, two of Henry Lee Maxwell's older brothers, James W. and George W. Maxwell and their families lived in Eldorado Springs. The three Ohio born brothers' parents, John Harmon and Elizabeth Jane (Slusser) Maxwell are buried in nearby Jerico Springs. In 1910, Minnie was a music teacher in the Ozark school, claiming to be age 23. She was married to dentist, Dr. Ernest O. Lawing born March 1879 to John Osslan & Jennie (Nichols) Lawing and grandson of Robert Preston & Margaret Brooks (McDaniel) Lawing. Among the found papers was a mounted photo of a pretty and elegantly dressed young woman. On the back of the photo was written Janet Malbon, Minnie Maxwell Lawing. A 1915 letter from Chicago, speaking of her years in opera school and performing opera in Chicago is signed Mrs. E. O. Lawing. A mere month after organization, in October 1910, the minutes of the Ladies' Literary Society show Minnie's resignation as secretary, saying she would be wintering out of state. It's unclear when and where Ernest and Minnie divorced. He was living with his parents in Long Beach, Los Angeles County, California in 1920, marital status single. He was still there in 1930 age 51 born Missouri with wife Ella age 31. His California death certificate in Los Angeles gives his lifespan as 10 March 1879 – 5 November 1946. Meanwhile, his first wife was an opera singer performing in Hinshaw Light Opera Singers on the Chautauqua Circuit under the stage name Janet Malbon. The picture of her on-line in

Library of Congress' American Memory project on Chautauqua matches the one in the packet of materials found in Eldorado Springs. The 1920 California Musician Hall of Fame says she graduated from opera school in Chicago in 1911 and includes a picture. The lady in both pictures clearly matches the high school music teacher pictured in the 1912 Ozark High School faculty in Wayne Glenn's Ozark of the Ozark. In 1929, the Ladies Literary Society presented Charter Member Janet Malbon with a life membership. Whether for vanity, career security or a desire to appear mysterious, Minnie/Janet seemed to reinvent herself at will. The 15 year old in 1900 became the 23 year old in 1910, but both said she was born in Missouri to a father born in Ohio and mother born in Illinois. By 1920, Janet Malbon reported her age as 26, saying she was born in Illinois to a father born in Ohio and mother born in Kentucky. When she got a passport to perform in the Panama Canal Zone in 1929, she said she was 27, born in Illinois to two French natives. On the 1930 census, she gave her age as 28 and said she was born in Illinois to parents who were both born in Spain. In the three official records under the name Janet Malbon, her occupation, opera singer, was consistent. I last find Janet Malbon in 1932 when she operated and performed in the Arcadia Playhouse in Arcadia, California, I do not find Janet Malbon anywhere on the 1940 census. The Missouri death certificate of Henry Lee Maxwell in Butler, Bates County, Missouri in 1947 lists Minnie Doran of Appleton City, Missouri as the informant. A California death certificate for a Missouri native Minnie Doran who died in Nevada County, California gives her lifespan as 17 July 1886 – 18 February 1970. Henry Lee and Mandora "Dora" (Daniels) Maxwell are buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Butler, Bates County, Missouri. So are Elizabeth "Lizzie" (Daniels) Doran Martin and a son Clarence Sheridan Doran. And so are Elmer Doran 1879 – 1944 and Minnie Doran 1886 – 1970. The three double tombstones have identical lettering and patterns. The third couple appears to be the Elmer Doran age 60, a lineman for the telegraph company and Minnie age 54, no occupation listed, but both born in Missouri, enumerated in DeSoto, Jefferson County, Missouri on the 1940 census. Elmer was in the same house, same occupation, age 50, single with his mother in 1930. The Bates County death certificate for Elmer James Doran 11 December 1879 – 9 June 1944 gives his parents as Illinois-born James Marion and Nancy Elizabeth "Lizzie" (Daniels) Doran and his wife as Minnie. Missouri death certificates for Dora Maxwell and Lizzie Martin show both were born in Illinois to William and Elizabeth "Ellen" (Wilhelm) Daniels. Their mothers are sisters. Minnie and Elmer were cousins. I believe Minnie (Maxwell) Lawing, Janet Malbon and Minnie Doran must be the same person. But, even in death, she keeps us guessing.

In 1926, Modern Seekers Club was organized with eighteen charter members and with Mrs. John C. Rogers, charter member of the Ladies Literary Society, acting as sponsor. Mrs. T. B. Chaffin was the first president. Membership was increased to

twenty-four regular and two visiting members in 1929. The club joined the Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs, remaining in the Federation until 1958.

The Ozark Book Club, sponsored by Mrs. Charles Cox of the Ladies Literary Club, was organized in 1934 with twenty four charter members. Mrs. Nina Kissee was the first president. In 1959, the club had twenty regular members and two life members, Mrs. Bedford Russell and Mrs. Docia Dixon.

The Ozark Study Club, also sponsored by the Ladies Literary Club, under the direction of Mrs. Margaret Wilson Yaekel, was organized in December, 1935. The twenty charter members voted to join the General Federation of Women's Clubs at once. In 1959, the club was still a Federation member, having participated in projects sponsored by that organization as well as in many civic projects.

The Utopia Club was organized in January 1953 with Mrs. John Boye of the Ladies Literary Club as sponsor, and immediately affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs, with resolutions to promote cultural education and social welfare. In 1959, the program embraced twenty-one projects, some sponsored by the Federation and some of local origin. Mrs. Sam Appleby was the first president.

The Cosmopolitan Club, sponsored by the Utopia Club, was organized in February, 1957 and joined the Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs the next month. Its 1959 membership was twenty.

Another GFWC still active in 1959 was Sparta's Readmore Club founded in 1935 with a membership of 18.

The only year of newspapers I had time to read was for July 1986 to June 1987. At that time, however, club news was a weekly feature. There were reports from groups serving children: Boy Scouts, Little League, Tomorrow 4-H Club, New Horizons 4-H, Clever 4-H, Horses Unlimited 4-H, Chadwick Ridge Runners 4-H, Christian County 4-H Teen Council, Sparta FBLA, Ozark FFA, Highlandville School Booster Club, and Chadwick PTA. Saddle clubs reporting included The Finley River Saddle Club which still maintains a small arena in the Ozark City Park and the Christian County Saddle Club. Church connected ladies clubs included The Betty Cummins Group of Ozark First Baptist Church; Ozark Presbyterian Women, Selmore Christian Women Fellowship; Christian County Fellowship; Susannah Wesley Circle, Lydia Circle and Caring Circle of the United Methodist Women; Cleo Circle of the Ozark Christian Church; and Hopedale Baptist Church Senior Adults. There were minutes from homemaking and garden clubs Chadwick Extension, Kinser Extension, Wolf Community, Brown Springs' Friendship, Mound Sunshine Workers, Clever Community, Caring and Sharing Extension, Chadwick Extension, Billings Extension, Logan Community, and Palace Garden Clubs. Newly formed that year were Sparta Booster Club, Christian County



Hospice and Kiwanis. Regular reports arrived from Friday Bridge Club, Welcome Wagon, Women's Support Group, Ozark Chamber of Commerce, Ozark Jaycees, Ozark Senior Citizens, Child Abuse Prevention Council of Christian County, Friend Lodge, Rotary Club, Christian County Humane Society, Christian County Museum and Historical Society, Clever Senior Citizens, and TOPS. Finally there were the groups of most interest to you, the GWFC clubs of Ozark, Ladies' Literary Club, Ozark Study Club, Cosmopolitan Club, Modern Seekers, and Utopia Club.

There's much more to be learned about women's organizations of Christian County, but this is at least a beginning.

Originally, I was scheduled to speak today about genealogy. In lieu of some of that information, I brought with me some of the fliers from the library on two subjects, resources for researching family history and specific bibliographies of materials on the history and people of Christian County, Missouri. Take them if you are interested. I was also asked to briefly mention genealogy forms. Nowadays, it's much more common for information researchers find or share to be entered directly into software called GedCom files where at request you can produce, print or store reports in all the variations previously painstakingly individually produced. However, books and websites of forms remain available for photocopying and printing. It's been many years since I checked, but possibly packages of blank forms on long-lasting acid free paper may still be purchased. On-line forms often permit the familiar and attractively labor saving option of fill and print as well as print and then fill. A couple of the more common, family group sheets and generation chart forms, each in both the completed and blank sheet options are on the Springfield/Greene County Library's Local History under Research On-Line then Genealogy Forms. At that location, you can also find links to a large variety of free forms from Family Tree Magazine <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms> or from <http://misbach.org/> under free PDF. The only forms for sale I located were much larger than 8.5" x 11" forms which sold individually. However, if fill and print, software or print and fill are just not your thing, I do know of one book which has forms you may photocopy. It was done in 1996, and I don't know if it's still in print. But, the Christian County Library does still have a copy. It's *The Unpuzzling your past workbook : essential forms and letters for all genealogists*, by Emily Anne Croom. It has all sorts of forms for documenting research you have done or want to do; ancestor charts; family group sheets; maps; and much more. You may photocopy whatever you decide to use. Finally, you may turn to the largest source of all and check <http://www.cyndislist.com/charts/>. As in the other instances, you may find only software and printable forms, since that's what is generally used now. However, there may be among the vendors and links some sources for the paper forms. For those not acquainted with genealogy, Cyndi's List is categorized lists of genealogy sites. As I was writing this speech, it includes links to 333,031 websites.

Also, as you may know, The Christian County Library, like most libraries, regularly hold classes on doing genealogy. Just check their website for the schedule of their next classes.