

Group focused on enriching women's lives

By Jerry Bowen

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Over the years, women's social clubs in Solano County have been in the forefront of many civic improvements to their respective communities. One of the oldest is the Wednesday Club of Suisun that was founded in 1911.

At the time, Fairfield was just rising from obscurity when compared to the vigorous and flourishing city of Suisun.

On Sept. 11, 1911, 16 young ladies determined to enrich the lives of women in the area and make the community a better place for all its citizens, met in the home of Mrs. Edward (Ellen) Dinkelspiel to form a women's club. Among the attendees were many familiar names: Mrs. W. U. Goodman; Mrs. J. Kyle; Mrs. J. M. Oliver; Mrs. Lewis Pierce; Mrs. William Pierce; Mrs. W. C. Robbins and Mrs. B.F. Rush. By the end of the meeting they agreed to call their organization the Wednesday Club of Suisun, and to meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 2 p.m. By November 15 the club grew to 106 members after a meeting at the old Crystal Grammar School.

During the next four years, meetings were held in the old Armijo School Hall. Activities included lectures by prominent citizens and music. In 1915, Sen. B.F. Rush made one of many appearances. During one of his appearances he introduced Lt. Gov. John T. Eshleman who spoke of "Nonpartisanship in Government." After four years, many of the ladies decided it was time to acquire a permanent home. They formed a committee led by Ellen Dinkelspiel to find a building suited to their purpose. They selected a large white-framed building adjacent to Southern Pacific Railroad tracks that was up for sale at the time.

The building was owned by the A.J. Rich Company, the same company that tried and failed to build Solano City a few years later. After negotiating a price of \$350, the club arranged for a loan with the Bank of Suisun; the Wednesday Club of Suisun owned their first headquarters in 1915. Unfortunately, it proved to be a less than desirable choice as the noise from trains passing nearby disrupted almost every meeting.

Ellen Dinkelspiel's committee was called upon to find a suitable lot to move the building. Suisun City came to the rescue with an offer of a lot for \$5 a year. The offer was accepted and the motivated ladies had the building moved. They painted it, planted trees and had electricity installed.

As the First World War loomed on the horizon in 1917, the women became active in

political activities. At a special meeting held in March, Sen. B.F. Rush urged the women to use their influence to gain support for a physical education bill and to defeat a bill proposing enforced military training. The forced military training bill was defeated and the physical education bill was introduced to elementary schools. They continued their support of the war effort with many related projects abroad and on the home front. On Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1918, the Wednesday Club joined other organizations in giving a rousing Welcome Home Party for the returning servicemen.

The automobile and improved roads brought other changes as ladies from Rio Vista, Vacaville, Vallejo and Benicia joined the growing club. In a Wednesday Club history written recently by Lois Dittmer, she stated the ladies "...found it much faster and classier to arrive at the Wednesday Club in a Cadillac, a Ford or a Chevy, rather than by horse-drawn carriages." In 1919, historian Mrs. J.T. Caulkins spoke to the club about the early history of Solano County and urged the club to initiate a movement to raise funds for the erection of a statue of Chief Solano. But they were a little ahead of their time and ultimately turned down support of the proposal.

The roaring twenties brought other momentous changes in the activities of the Wednesday Club. Political activism and "flappers" were a part of a more frivolous time, especially after the repeal of prohibition. The 19th Amendment passed in August 1920, gave the women the right to vote and the club dove right in to sign up other ladies and to vote in the elections. Other activities they supported were the League of Nations, the Child Welfare Bill, the Save the Redwoods Bill, the Care of TB Patients Bill and the Community Property Bill proposed by the state of California.

During the 1920s they also became more involved in local community enrichment programs.

With the need for a free branch library in Suisun the members petitioned for it. When the board approved the library the club was given \$200 to furnish it and \$400 to buy books. Turning to other local improvements, the Wednesday Club's agenda included welfare programs, a community nurse, child welfare, public recreation, a community college and a Well Baby Clinic.

Concerned with the lack of historical markers in Solano County, they joined other women's clubs to place historical markers at important sites in the county including preservation of the old Rockville Church.

In 1922 during an annual party that was dubbed the "May Fete," President Katherine Goosen reported the club was out of debt and had a bank balance of \$346.78.

Good fortune continued when on Oct. 22, 1920, Mrs. Sadie Robbins, widow of R.D. Robbins, and her six children deeded a valuable lot on Sacramento Street and Washington Avenue in Suisun to the Wednesday Club for a future clubhouse. The lot

had been vacant since 1899 and the aim of the Robbins family was, "...to hand down to posterity their faith in the club, and that the good works of the club would be carried on, and greater ideals accomplished." The deed stipulated that should the Wednesday Club or other civic organization cease to exist on the lot, the property would revert to the Robbins' heirs.

The members plunged into a campaign to raise funds for a new building that would be a tribute to the Robbins family's generosity. They decided that when the fund reached \$5,000 an architect would be hired. Anticipating success, the old clubhouse was sold to the Winters Canning Company for \$500, and the Wednesday Club met at Odd Fellows Hall for the duration. Chief fund-raiser and later Mayor of Suisun, Clare McFall, planned a carnival, theatricals and a watermelon feast, among other sundry events to reach the goal. By the end of 1924 they reached the \$5,000 goal.

Architect William W. Crim was hired and his plans approved. A low bid to build the structure of \$14,984 was accepted and, armed with a mortgage from the Bank of Suisun, construction began. With some changes decided upon, the total cost increased to \$15,900. On February 24, 1926, the new clubhouse was accepted from the architect and an open house held for the community on March 3. The first regular meeting in the new clubhouse was held on March 11. The future looked bright for the ladies of the Suisun Wednesday Club.

This is the first of a two-part series condensed from a history of the Suisun Wednesday Club written recently by Lois Dittmer. The full story will be published in the next issue of the Solano County Historical Society's "Solano Historian" magazine to be issued in December.

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