

## **Suisun club remains alive and well every day**

**By Jerry Bowen**

Sunday, September 26, 2004

In the first installment of the history of the Suisun Wednesday Club we saw it evolve from a meeting of 16 civic-minded ladies who in 1911 wanted to do something positive for their community to the building in 1926 of a permanent clubhouse on Sacramento Street and Washington Avenue.

On Feb. 24, 1926 the new clubhouse was completed and an open house held on March 3. The first regular meeting in the new clubhouse was held March 11. With a new facility, other chores required attention since it was yet to be decorated and furnished properly. The ladies plunged into fund raising to outfit the building with furniture and kitchen equipment. They salvaged useful items from the old clubhouse and as funds were raised bought new and more elegant items.

The building still was far from furnished in 1927 when they decided to do something other than hold meetings there. The first Anniversary Tea was held on March 19 to celebrate the first anniversary of the new clubhouse, followed in May with the annual May Fete with 150 members and guests attending.

The May Fete of 1928, held at the Fred Jones Ranch, was impressive to say the least. A picnic with more than 400 members and guests present also were treated to Shakespeare's "As You Like It." It was directed by Miss Jean Davis, with a cast of club members and local thespians. The Fete was a total success and funds then were sufficient to finish the job of furnishing the clubhouse.

In her history of the Suisun Wednesday Club, Lois Dittmer wrote, "By the fall of 1928 the clubhouse was sufficiently dressed and outfitted, and a period of elegance followed. Ladies arrived for meetings dressed in their Sunday best, wearing fancy hats and long gloves. They sat in rows of chairs facing the raised stage, and applauded appreciatively for speakers and musicians. Following the program tea was served in the tearoom. Long tables were laden with dainty sandwiches and petit fours, and a gracious lady sat on each end of the table pouring tea from shining silver services. The ladies made their selections, and enjoyed a pleasant social hour."

The children of Armijo School District had donated a sundial and birdbath in memory of school nurse Lucy Howatt to the club. During a dedication on Memorial Day 1929, the sundial was imbedded in the front lawn and the birdbath placed behind the building in the garden area. The American Legion, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and club members

joined the schoolchildren in the ceremony.

In 1929, the stock market crash ended the good times for many and the Suisun Wednesday Club was no exception.

Faced with the depression, the leadership of Presidents Mrs. Lewis Morrill, Mrs. Ellen Dinkelspiel (second term), Mrs. Ernest Lockie, Mrs. Percy Neitzel, and Mrs. K. I. Jones, among others were equal to the tasks thrust upon them. Under their guidance, food and clothing were provided to the needy and contributions to the March of Dimes and other local and national charities were made.

While many outstanding people share credit for the success of the club, one of the members stands out as among the most active: Mrs. Lewis (Vera) Morrill. She joined the club in 1917 and became president in 1930. In between, Vera served in most of the various offices, chaired many regular and fund raising events, served as program chairman repeatedly, and hosted many meetings and events.

She was ready and capable to write a poem or a skit, give a book review, conjure up stunts, give travelogues, or initiate spontaneous entertainments, taking the place of program "no shows" without notice. She also attended more board meetings than any other member and made more motions from the floor for and against proposed changes and activities than any other member. During her term as president, ladies planted a redwood tree on the lot housing the new Solano County Library. Vera and other members joined the Lions Club in successfully petitioning for a mosquito abatement district.

Another bright star was Mrs. (Wilmere) Percy Jordan Neitzel who joined the club in 1934. Lois Dittmer wrote, "Wilmere, an educator and community leader, was an elegant lady who brought glamour to Wednesday Club events. Born on April 16, 1906, the day of the San Francisco earthquake and fire, Wilmere was a mover and shaker in her adult years. Her uncle was Secretary of State Frank Jordan; with her political and social contracts Wilmere was able to bring notable political speakers and up-scale fashion houses to the club for outstanding programs."

Over the years, the May Fete became known as the May Luncheon and continued as an elaborate and fun occasion.

Politics became an important function of the club as indicated by the resolutions that were wired to Washington supporting the Supreme Court Plan, and the Social Security Plan.

Educational and cultural programs continued to be continuing projects of these energetic ladies. Humor was also an important ingredient of many of the programs. Joe

Chadbourne, as well as club members Clare McFall and Hazel Lockie, penned many humorous skits. Joe's titillating melodramas were always a contagious laughing matter, with such intriguing titles as "They Ain't Done Nellie Right," "The Farmer's Daughter" and "Her Husband's Other Wife."

Fund raising continued to receive the attention of the club. In August 1938, Ways and Means Chairman, Clare McFall, received permission to buy a car at Woodard Chevrolet and sell raffle tickets for 50 cents each. The raffle was a success and added \$500 to the Building Fund. Along with other efforts to raise funds, the club was successful in erasing the mortgage on the clubhouse in 1939.

During World War II, the Wednesday Club volunteered to lend a hand to the Red Cross and Blood Banks whenever requested. Concerts and entertainments were given for servicemen. Members volunteered to work at the Travis base hospital and performed other war-related works.

When the war ended the Wednesday Club became the community headquarters for the National Clothing Drive to collect clothing for war-torn Europe.

The club was an early and continuing supporter of the Monticello Dam project beginning in 1946.

Accomplishments continued as Police Chief Rex Clift requested the club to "look into opening a teenage canteen in Fairfield." With Mrs. Wood Young in charge it was soon accomplished and became as popular "hang out" spot for teens in 1946.

Fairfield was one of the fastest growing cities in Solano County in the '50s, surpassing its sister city, Suisun. Many of the young wives, along with wives of servicemen were eager to become a part of the Wednesday Club, and were placed on the waiting list after approval. To accommodate the ladies, allowable membership of 200 was increased to 225, and shortly afterward increased to 250.

Many changes were considered and enacted which would be an influence for years to come during Mary Tooby's presidency from 1952 to 1953. Outdated policies and laws were updated; an increase in rental rates for members and approved organizations for use of the building was enacted as well as increased charges for various functions catered by the club. A music scholarship was established, the Fall Festival inaugurated, and a ban placed upon hard liquor being served within the clubhouse.

A Fall Festival began with Leora Mangels as chairman, becoming an annual event with a luncheon and bazaar, and the main moneymaker of the year.

With the passing of time, a great number of city, county, and specialized offices had taken over many civic and welfare duties, and the Wednesday Club found itself with fewer matters to put in order. Attention was shifted to sponsoring and helping children

and youth organizations. Gradually, the club became more culturally and socially oriented.

Since 1911, and in every decade, members have followed in the footsteps of their mentors. Monetary contributions and helping hands have been given to youth, health, welfare and community organizations. Members have promoted community and political improvements to advance the status of women and to make their neighborhoods a better place in which to live. They have used educational and cultural programs to broaden women's horizons; they have provided members with social entertainments and extended friendships. The camaraderie experienced and enjoyed by the ladies of the club has knit members together year to year and decade to decade.

Whether yesterday or today, the ladies of the club have continued to follow the mandates of the founders and the Robbins family. Mode of dress has changed and activities have changed for timely interests. However, the cherished traditions have remained unchanged and unchangeable. The Wednesday Club of Suisun is alive and well, and looking forward to its big 100 in 2011.

This very condensed version of the history of the Suisun Wednesday Club by Lois Dittmer will be featured in total in the next issue of the Solano Historian to be published in December. I'd like to thank Lois Dittmer, the club's 49th President, for her very excellent work.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/234>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/234/>