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## The Evolution of Women's Club

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# THE IOWA HOMEMAKER

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## The Evolution of Women's Clubs

By MARGARET LOOFT

THE woman's club movement represents a part of the great popular educational movement which is sweeping like a tidal wave over the country, and of which summer schools, chautauquas, night schools and university extension are all manifestations.

Women who had leisure on their hands first organized themselves into clubs for the study of the art of the Renaissance, Chinese religion before Confucius, or the mystery of Browning. The immediate need of the women at the beginning of the club movement was education; the higher education they missed by not going to college, and they formed their clubs with this idea in view, that of self-culture.

### Change Club Plans

This study period did not last very long. In fact, it was doomed from the beginning, for it is not in the nature of women, at least not in the habit of women to do things for themselves alone. They have served for so many generations that they have learned to like serving better than anything else in the world, and they add service to the study and pursuit of culture, just as some of them add the important postscript to the unimportant letter.

Dallas, Texas, had a woman's club of the culture caste. They became interested in the stegomyia mosquito, which is a disease produced by insect, and they waged a campaign against it by covering all the pools with oil. They soon received the cooperation of the town officials, and now the same thing is done each year.

This story can be paralleled in almost every city of our country. Clubs everywhere organized for intellectual advancement, for culture in music, art and crafts, soon added to the original object a department of philanthropy,

public school decoration, a department of child labor, or a department of civics. The Woman's Club of San Francisco established a flower market.

The movement which has resulted in a national program in favor of public playgrounds for children began as a woman's club movement. At first, the women did all of the work themselves, buying apparatus, organizing games and supplying the workers from their own membership. Civic club leaders soon recognized the earnestness of the women and the worth whileness of the work, and the boards of education and the city councils finally gave their support. Out of this persistent work the Playground Association of America was born, an organization of men and women, which, in three years of its existence, has established more than 300 playgrounds for children.

The scope of woman's work for civic betterment is wider than the interests which directly affect children. They also have been effective in organizing campaigns for regular town housecleanings and street cleaning.

### Magnitude of Clubs

In round numbers, eight hundred thousand women are now enrolled in the clubs belonging to the General Federation of Women's Clubs, holding in common certain definite opinions and working harmoniously toward certain definite social ends. These women are the educated, intelligent and socially powerful.

Long ago these women ceased to confine their studies to printed pages. They began to study life. Leaders developed, women of intellect and experience, who could foresee the immense power an organized womanhood might sometime have, and who had courage to direct the forces under them toward vital objects.

When, in 1904, Mrs. Sarah Platt Decker of Denver was elected president of the General Federation, she found a number of old fashioned clubs still devoting themselves to Shakespeare and the classic writers. She simply laughed the musty study clubs out of existence. A few clubs are still devoted to the pursuit of pure culture, and a few merely to congenial association, but the great majority are organized for social service. A glance at their national program shows the modernity and the liberal character of the organized women's ideals. The General Federation has twelve committees, among them being those on Industrial Conditions of Women and Children, Civil Service Reform, Forestry, Pure Food and Public Health, Education, Civics, Legislation, Arts and Crafts, and Household Economics. Every state federation has, in the main, adopted the same departments, and the individual clubs follow as many lines of the work as their strength warrants.

### Clubs Contribute to Education

The contribution of women's clubs to education has been enormous. There is hardly a state in the Union the public schools of which have not been beautified, inside and outside; hardly a state where kindergarten and manual training, domestic science, medical inspection, or other improvements have not been introduced by the clubs. In the South, where the opportunities for the higher education of women are restricted, the clubs support dozens of scholarships in colleges and institutes.

The women's clubs have founded more libraries than Mr. Carnegie. Early in the movement the women began the circulation among the clubs of traveling reference libraries. This was extended and books were sent to

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### Women's Clubs

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schools, factories, lonely farms, mining camps, lumber camps and to isolated farms and villages.

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Not only in the United States, but in every civilized country, have women associated themselves together with the object of reforming what seems to them social chaos. In practically every civilized country in the world today there exists a Council of Women, a central organization to which clubs and societies with all sorts of opinions and objects send delegates. In the United States more than a million and a half women are affiliated.

#### Eight Million Strong

The International Council of Women, to which all the councils send delegates, represented more than eight million women, to which countries as far apart as Australia, Argentine, Iceland, Persia, South Africa and every country in Europe.

The object of this great world organization of women is to provide a common center for women of every country, race, creed or party, who are associating themselves together in altruistic work. Once every five years the International Council holds a great world congress of women. It discusses every important question presented, but commits itself to no opinion nor lends itself to no movement until it has passed the controversial stage. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, a graduate of Iowa State, has been president a number of years.

#### Women Work Together

Those who cling to the old notion that women are perpetually at war with one another will learn with astonishment that eight million women of all nationalities, religion and temperaments are agreed on at least four questions. In the course of its twenty years of existence they have agreed to support four movements; peace and arbitration, social purity, removing legal disabilities of women and woman suffrage.

The whole club movement, as a matter of fact, is a part of the great democratic movement which is sweeping over the whole world. Individual clubs may be exclusive, even aristocratic in their tendencies, but the large organization is absolutely democratic. If the president of the International Council is an English peeress, one of the vice-presidents is the wife of a German music teacher, and one of the secretaries is a self-supporting woman. The General Federation in the United States is made up of women of various stations in life, from millionaires' wives to factory girls.

#### Club Support Needed

Every public movement—reform, sanitary, philanthropic, educational—now asks the cooperation of women's organization. The United States government asked the cooperation of women's clubs to save the precarious Panama situation, and it now asks cooperation in the conserving of natural resources.

There are not wanting in the club movement many women who have taken college and university honors. Club women taken the country over, however, are not college products. If they had been, the club movement might have taken on a more cultural and a less practical form. As it was, the women formed their group with the direct object of educating themselves, and being practical women used to work, they readily turned their new knowledge to practical ends. Nine-tenths of the work they have undertaken relates to children, the school and the home. Some of it seemed radical in the beginning, but none of it has failed, in the long run, to win the warmest approval of the people.

The women who form the International Council of Women, and express the collective opinion of women the world over, are not exceptional types, although they may possess exceptional intelligence. They are merely good citizens, wives and mothers. This program contains nothing especially radical. And yet what a revolution would the world witness were that program carried out!

The woman mind of all ages is interpreted through the modern American woman, partly because she has learned the great lesson of organization and has thus been able to work more effectively and to impress her will on the community more strikingly than women in other ages.

If we turn back and count over the club women's achievements we observe first that they want very little for themselves. Most of the things were needed directly—playgrounds, child labor laws, juvenile courts, kindergartens and pure food laws. Many of the other things are indirectly needed by children—ten hour working days, seats for shop girls, living wages, opportunities for safe and wholesome pleasures, social purity, legal equality with men, and all objects which tend to conserve the future mothers of women. These are the things women want.