

BISBEE WOMAN'S CLUB

-History and Timeline-

1890-1918

In the words of the Bisbee Woman's Club's first secretary:

"In December of 1898, I found Bisbee not a camp of restless, roving prospectors, but a well established town with its several thousand people housed picturesquely up and down the mountainside and going about the business of daily living, and of producing tons of copper. Primarily it was a man's town with both mines and smelter working 24 hours a day. Yet many, many families, and all mail, provisions, world news, and necessities were supplied by the one train each day coming in from Benson, where connections were made with the Southern Pacific Overland Trains.

There was the Copper Queen's large Department Store, a graded school of three rooms, a library, a YMCA, a hospital, community church services and a cordial welcome, typically western. After that, it was up to you. There was also an Opera House - it said so over the door - and up and around a hill, a large barn like structure where everyone, I believe, had good times at some locally produced entertainment or dance, but never an "opry!"

Most houses were small...some very small...so housekeeping was simplified according to the wood stove and oil lamp pattern and social life was informal. People from all walks of life and all parts of lands naturally developed congenial groupings - small sewing clubs or reading clubs for the womenfolk in the afternoons and card games or games for couple in the evenings. We did not play bridge in 1898.

Mrs. Stuart French belonged to one of those reading clubs and conceived the idea of a larger group - a real Woman's Club - which could meet in Library Hall and be of service to the community and to each other.

The idea was well received, there being 20 or more charter members, and the Bisbee Woman's Club was launched in the fall of 1900. A year later we were asked to send a representative to Phoenix to consider forming a State Federation. It gave us a big thrill - outside recognition - a sense of belonging, as it were, after having been tucked far away in a corner of the Territory and enduring the local "razzing" that all clubwomen were given in the early days.

As Secretary of the Bisbee Club, I went as a delegate to Phoenix in November of 1901. It was quite some journey then, by train all the way fortunately, but with waits at Benson and again at Maricopa that accounted for a large part of the nearly 24 hours required. The fare was around \$25.

The Federation was formed as you well know, and I was very proud to carry back to my local club the honor of a State (territory) office." - Mrs. C.P. Hart

Once the club was organized the next important thing was to find a meeting place. The club was meeting in the Library Hall and sometimes in the parlors of the Copper Queen Hotel. The members wanted their own clubhouse and through balls, concerts, bazaars and card parties they provided entertainment for the townspeople and brought dollars to the club treasury. Sympathy for the women of Bisbee with no running water, electric lights or indoor plumbing and yet trying to hard to improve their lot stirred Phelps Dodge company directors who, with their wives, would visit from New York, so they helped by donating money and furnishings. The building was finished for the opening fall meeting in October of 1903 at a total cost of \$2,805.95 and was erected by the firm of Perkins, Holder and Hurst.

Their efforts then turned to the new school, now known as Central School, which included a kindergarten room. They raised funds for a piano and furnishing for this room. Their plans included having the upper sections of the windows with stained glass depicting scenes from Mother Goose nursery rhymes. They raised money from an art exhibit and other events. Later they bought framed copies of good pictures and placed them in all the rooms of the school.

In 1906, a Shakespeare class was formed to meet twice a month, not largely attended but all who attended greatly benefited intellectually. When the Grace Dodge kindergarten room in the new school building became a reality in the fall, the club donated a piano and colored plate glass windows.

They also held a Tacky Party and Dance to raise money to paint the clubhouse and solicited personal subscriptions. The best work of the club that year was establishing a Manual Training Dept in the schools, raising nearly \$1,000 for this project.

In 1908 a series of musicals was started. In 1909 Mrs. Gerald Sherman interested the club in having a watering trough built in Tombstone Canyon below the site of the courthouse. For many years thirsty horses and mules stopped here for a long, cool drink after the hot and dusty trip from Tombstone or after pulling heavy loads up the rough roads of the Mule Mountains. The club donated the fountain to the city with the special purpose to provide a drinking place for dogs and horses although an attached sanitary cup afforded convenient relief for people. In 1916 the city requested permission to remove the horse fountain, which was granted

The city jail was always crowded, especially on paydays and its condition was indescribable so the ladies decided to get it clean and keep it that way. They endured a great deal of ridicule and good natured jesting, but the jail was cleaned and kept that way. City fathers never knew when the ladies would show up to inspect the jail.

By 1910 the clubhouse was much in demand as a social center and many functions were planned, including Halloween costume parties, dance class and card club. Bazaars and public dances were held to raise funds to help the YWCA, needy people and to continue assistance to the school. It was also used to raise funds for surgical dressings for war work.

In 1917, all members signed a note with the Bank of America for repairs to the building. In 1918 a new roof was put on clubhouse at a cost of \$375 and the foundation, doors and windows were repaired. In that same year, they served refreshments at Warren Ballpark to benefit the Red Cross. 1920 was a bit more frivolous year, as an evening of cards and dancing was held each month.

1925-1952

1925 was a highlight year. The members of the club celebrated Arizona Book Week by gathering, compiling and donating an available history of Bisbee and its people to the University of Arizona, which dedicated a special room to this purpose. In that same year, the club staged a show called Hi Jinks – no men allowed. The show, which was a parody of townspeople, was a hit and it is said that if laughter had been sold for one cent a giggle the audience would have been broke before the first act was over!

In 1933, a new plan was followed in which there were no department chairmen. This was unsatisfactory in some respects and after a year's rest it was requested that the membership of 26 ladies respond willingly to the new President's plans and requests.

1938 was the year that a new kitchen range was installed. To celebrate the club held a Valentine Box party for couples as well as the annual Husband's Dinner. In 1938-39 France declared war on Germany Phelps Dodge Mercantile opened its new store in December, after a fire.

In 1940 a new roof for the clubhouse was put on at a cost of \$75. In March of that year, the club celebrated the General Federation's Golden Jubilee and the Bisbee Woman's Club's fortieth anniversary with a tea attended by all members and 19 guests. The lighting of a tiny white candle symbolized the origin of the first true woman's club in 1825, called the Female Social Society.

During the 1942-43 period, the current budget system was first adopted by the club. To make membership more effective, associate membership was dropped. In 1950, a third type of membership, called a Life Membership was added to the Active and Honorary memberships. This new category was open to those who had been a member for 15 years – and their dues were \$1 a year.

During World War II, little outside activity has been recorded. In addition to aid for local youth groups and the USO, there were national wartime drives in which our club participated. High School student dances were sponsored and held in the clubhouse.

In 1952 the club began a tradition that continues today when they voted to provide a scholarship for a deserving graduating senior. Kay Reppe was chosen as the first recipient, and she's still living an active life in Bisbee today.

1960s-1986

The Club held a 60th Anniversary Tea and had members dressed to represent the 1900s, 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and World War II.

In 1960 the Copper City Women's Club, formed in Warren, joined the Federation. In October of that year the club participated in the Bisbee Merchants Fair where they raised money by selling slices of cake at Greenway School. They also held a cookie swap, prepared Happiness Boxes for the aged and took cookies and baskets of gifts to the Arizona Children's Home in Tucson and made a generous contribution to Arizona Boys Ranch.

The club applied to the Arizona State Parks Board for consideration as an historical property, as ours was the first and oldest Woman's Clubhouse still being used for meetings in Arizona. A late Christmas Present to the club was received when Phelps Dodge gave them the deed to the leased land on which the clubhouse is situated.

A fundraising brunch they hosted for Delta Kappa Gamma was declared to be lovely, very time consuming, difficult and tiring. All members were required to participate. They also hosted an Easter Brunch and fashion show open to the public.

In 1985, the club won first place in the Southern District International Affairs event by sponsoring a dinner given by Japanese students at Cochise College. It showcased Japanese food, a demo on paper folding, flower arranging, martial arts and Japanese music.

Their annual Christmas party was held at the home of Bob and Rosalie Butler in spite of a blizzard. Bob saved the day by picking up members who lived in old Bisbee whose vehicles were snowed in.

March 13, 1985 was a proud date as the Bisbee Woman's Club clubhouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

In that same year, Judy Jo Williams was one of the delegates to the Southern District Convention and accepted eight first place, one second place and two third place awards for Bisbee. One of the first was awarded to Judy Jo for her original painting.

1986 - The clubhouse was used for Santa's Workshop as a gathering point for the Home Tour. They experienced more roof problems (probably that darn sleigh) and started fundraising, running such things as a rummage sale, a buffet dinner and rental of the clubhouse. The club took annual field trips to such places as Lehner Ranch, Phelps Dodge Smelter and the Amerind Museum.

That year, the music series took a quantum leap under the fine leadership of Katherine Hagstrom and the club was described as exceptionally fortunate to have such a capable and hardworking person at the helm. The program was expanded and renamed "For the Love of Music."