

HISTORY OF THE OVIEDO WOMEN' CLUB

On a beautiful Spring day in the year 1906, a little group of Oviedo women (or ladies, they would have preferred to be called), met at the schoolhouse on what proved to be very important business.

They were interested in improving "reading" in the community both in quantity and in quality. To provide good reading material each woman agreed to subscribe for and to pass along one magazine. The magazine was tagged and each one receiving it signed the tag with the date, and woe betide anyone who kept a magazine more than four days. Sometimes it took a bit of walking, or the old nag might be harnessed up to get the magazine to its next stopping place.

Mrs. H.B. McCall was made President, Mrs. W.J. Lawton Secretary, and Mrs. B.F. Wheeler Sr., Treasurer of what they called the "Oviedo Magazine Club". They met weekly at each others homes for a program and refreshments. The nine or ten women that began this group soon were joined by others. Everyone wanted to get on the bandwagon. The Oviedo Magazine Club was now launched on its successful way.

During the decade following its birth the club underwent a number of changes. Members found it difficult to finish magazines and pass them on. Some found it hard to attend meetings as it was forbidden to bring the children. Reading material became more plentiful. The Oviedo Magazine Club dropped the magazine exchange and became the Oviedo Women's Club, maintaining a high level in program interests and civic responsibility.

At sometime during these early years the club sponsored sidewalks for the town. Many of these were clay paths laid down over the sand but some were of boards built to carry heavier traffic such to the schoolhouse which for a long time was on the "Hill" beyond where now (1972) stands the Church of God of Prophecy.

Eventually, as the club grew in members it felt the need for a house of it's own. About 1914 the way opened. A lot, North of the old Seaboard Railway Station, was given by Mrs. M.M. King as a suitable downtown location for the clubhouse. All members busied themselves raising money, soliciting donations, selling baked goods, having ice cream socials, all of those things women can do to make money for a project. At a cost of approximately \$1500.00 a house was built with much volunteer labor. Mr. Z. Spinks, son-in-law of Mrs. M. M. King had a sawmill here. He donated shingles from his mill to completely shingle the exterior. The interior was still unfinished when the club women moved in. Mrs. Mead, wife of the great naturalist Theodore Mead, a prime mover of the club and the town's music teacher, gave her piano. She also had two long beautiful walnut bookcases which she moved in, each filling an end of the main club room. They contained choice books from the Mead library and for a number of years members worked and donated books to increase the size of the collection.

In 1919, during the Presidency of Mrs. W.P. Carter, the interior finishing was tackled. The train always came in on Fridays and the women on that day made ice cream and took turns making cakes. These they sold to the trainmen, setting up for business on the spot next store to the Town House Restaurant now occupied by Gale Ward and Winchester. Always they sold out and at last could finance plastering the walls, which up to then were two-by-fours covered by the outside shingles. The supporting beams overhead were enclosed to make massive and beautiful cross beams. A back porch, kitchen, and a ladies' room of sorts were added also.

Sometime in the decade following 1919 meetings were changed from weekly to semi-monthly. Time was spinning faster with automobiles running on "hard roads", more places to go, less time to spend in chatting. The club could accomplish as much in two meetings as formerly went on in four.

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During Depression Days, the coming of Mrs. H. L. Covington and her sister, Mrs. Oreon Burnett added immeasurable strength. The club began to be interested in the state organization, F.F.W.C. Soon after Mrs. James Wilson's presidency, 1935-36, Mrs. Wilson was appointed District Director of District 7, an honor which brought us in closer touch with state officers and state work. In this decade a change was made in the form of meetings. The first in the month became a luncheon meeting at which all business was transacted. All active club members served on a luncheon committee once during the year, donating and preparing the food. All members when not on a serving committee paid fifty cents for their meal, which money went into the treasury. The second meeting was held in the afternoon with a program prepared and refreshments served by hostesses.

With the onset of World War II other changes came. The one year term of officers was changed to two years, coinciding with the term of officers in the F.F.W.C. Mrs. Max Leinhart, 1942-1944 was the first president to serve a two-year term. The club was urged to join in war work. To this end it donated its house to be used for Red Cross work, and actively participated in bandage rolling, sewing and knitting. As the house was the repository for all Red Cross supplies it could not be used for meetings. Mrs. Covington graciously offered the use of her Guest House for meetings. The club met there 1943 to 1945. Beginning in 1943 only one meeting, the luncheon meeting, was held each month. A program followed the luncheon and business session. When in 1945 the club house was again used for meetings the once-a-month meeting, a luncheon, was continued.

In the years immediately following the war, membership and attendance sky-rocketed. There was much talk as to how to manage with so little space. Some thought to enclose the spacious front porch, remove the front wall and so to have one large room adequate to seat everyone comfortably. Others thought to tear down the house and build a roomier, more modern one. Still others favored finding a new location. The noise of trains passing by occasionally drowned out speakers' voices. A down town location seemed less suitable than it had in 1914.

In the meantime came the fiftieth anniversary of the club (1956). This was celebrated by a Golden Anniversary Tea to which all former members, especially past presidents, received a cordial invitation. They came from far and near, reminiscing of "you remember when". A far cry from 1906 in numbers and scope but a group still much interested in community betterment, with a golden back-log of goals achieved. Perhaps the 75th anniversary will have other accomplishments to show.

The following year's president, Mrs. J.M. Staley, together with Mrs. Don Ulrey, was much interested in having a cleaner town through garbage pickup. They worked valiantly to interest club members and before the term was over they were happy to see this accomplished. A regular garbage pickup with most residents signed for the service.

A major accomplishment during the presidency of Mrs. Don Ulrey was the organization of the Oviedo Area Combined Drive. This was the first drive in Seminole County to cover all major charities. Oviedo Women's Club continued sponsoring the O.A.C.D. through February 1971.

During Mrs. James Partin's term the Oviedo Memorial Building was constructed. The club, by numerous fund raising maneuvers, was able to completely furnish the kitchen. Also about this time the Oviedo Clinic Building was built with the Women's Club buying office furniture for it. Those days, much money was raised by serving dinners for political rallies where the candidates brought their following for the dinner followed by speech making.

The O.W.C. many years ago sponsored a Blood Bank for the benefit of any in the community needing blood. This has been maintained in connection with the Central Florida Blood Bank through the years, serving the community which in turn under the direction of the O.W.C. replenishes the fund when the balance gets too low for safety.

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Beside offering awards for high scholarship to high school students and cooperating numerous ways with school officials, the club kept a library for many years and furnished books on loan to the school library. Mrs. W. P. Carter was the faithful caretaker for the library keeping it open come rain, come shine, both Winter and Summer.

But in 1958 the question of an adequate building in a location satisfactory to all was still unsettled. It finally came to a head when an offer was received from some one who wished to buy the club building, move it away, and convert it to a dwelling. After much heated discussion the club members agreed to this. The house was moved and strenuous action became necessary. The First Methodist Church offered use of its Fellowship Hall for meetings. This was the meeting place of the club the several years that plans were being readied and funds raised for the new clubhouse.

In 1961 Mrs. R. L. Croom purchased and graciously gave to the club a 100 ft. lot on King Street midway between the First Methodist Church and the High School. Then events really did zoom! Every legal way to raise money was explored. Members worked and worked some more, enthusiastically and diligently-long hard hours. The building was begun in 1961 to be completed in the Spring of 1963. Meetings were held there in the Fall of "63".

Much credit belongs to Mrs. R. W. Estes who was elected president in 1958 and who was persuaded to stay at the helm with some hardship to herself until the building was finished. This occurred in 1964 when Mr. Harden Webb, Executive Vice President of the Citizens Bank of Oviedo paid a surprise visit to the May meeting, and in the presence of all, burned the mortgage which the club had signed. So passed the years of stress and struggle leading to the goal of a building of which all can be justly proud.

Over the years many eminent people have spoken at the club. Among these we note Dr. Hamilton R. Holt, Dr. Theodore Z. Mead, Dr. Louis M. Orr, A.M.A. President, Colonel Sam Brabson, war-time commander at Orlando Air Force Base, Dr. Edwin O. Granberry and Dr. A. J. Hanna and wife Kathryn Abbey Hanna, all of Rollins College, F.F.W.C. Past Presidents Mrs. A. J. McKay, Mrs. Walter Jones, and Mrs. Ralph Austin Smith, Mrs. Edith Todd Little, Judge Mattie Farmer, Sheriff Dave Starr, Morris S. Hale Jr., President of Orlando Junior College, Loch Haven Director David Reese, and many many other notables.

Always the Oviedo Women's Club has been the organization which gave community service in civic projects, while keeping alive broad cultural aims. Cutting across the lines of religious groupings it has served to involve women of all faiths, all cultures, and all financial levels. As the By-Laws state, "The objects of this club shall be to unite our efforts towards civic betterment, and promotion of the social life of its members." Have we done this? Let time answer for us.

Helene Zimhart
1972