

HISTORY OF THE OVIEDO WOMAN'S CLUB

The "Gay Nineties" were not very gay in Oviedo. The freezes of Ninety-four and Five, coming only a few weeks apart, had ruined the orange industry for years to come. Oviedo, at that time the second largest shipping point in the state, had very few oranges for several years.

Many families moved away, leaving empty houses with flapping blinds, and staring windows, to add to the general desolation. The Ninety-nine freeze again hurt the groves and further discouraged the people. However a few valient souls held on and brought their groves back to bearing by dint of much back-breaking labor and great privation. Laborers received fifty cents per day and many Negroes would undoubtedly have starved if the white people had not helped them.

Much sickness followed as a result of privation and insufficient food. After the turn of the century things took on a brighter aspect and our people had more time for reading and some social life. Good reading matter was in great demand, so in the spring of nineteen hundred and six a small group of women met at the school building to form The Oviedo Magazine Club, the object of which was to disseminate good reading matter and to give more social life for the people.

The club was very small at first, with only five or six members. Mrs. H. B. McCall was the first persident, with Mrs. B. F. Wheeler secretary and treasurer. Other members were Mrs. M. M. King, Mrs. Henry Younge, and Mrs. W. J. Lawton. Mrs. T. L. Mead and several others joined soon and we had perhaps a dozen members in a short time.

Each member contributed her own magazines to the club, pasting a slip on the back, on which to record the length of time the magazines were kept. These were passed from house to house. A fine of two cents per day was imposed for over time and the fines used to purchase more magazines.

The club met every Friday afternoon at the homes of the members. A short program was given and a social hour followed.

From the beginning the interest of the club was not confined to literature and social-ibility. As time went on our club ~~has~~ became to a large extent the guardian of community life and spirit. The scope of our interest was as wide as the town and few things were too large or too small to escape our attention. We planted trees, we laid sidewalks, we cleaned up the cemetery, we instituted cleanup weeks. Indeed it became the town joke that Oviedo's civic affairs were guided by the Woman's Club, tho in all fairness it should be added that we were generously aided and abetted by the men.

In 1914 it was decided that we must have a club home. It seemed an impossible task but we ~~we~~ went at it with a will. As an inspiring beginning to our efforts, Mrs. M. M. King gave us a lot. Mr. Z. Spinks gave shingles for a shingle-type bungalow club house. The plans were drawn by an architect friend of Mrs. O. G. Wolcott's.

With this as a beginning, and between eleven and twelve hundred dollars in cash, we built our club house. This money came from small donations, none larger than fifty dollars, and from food sales, suppers, plays, etc.

We now had our club house, but entirely unfinished on the inside and NO FURNITURE. This was given a table here, a few dishes there, and three dozen chairs were bought out right. Not for years did we have a rug or a curtain, but we did have a grand big fireplace, and we enjoyed our programs and our simple refreshments around it, and to grow to know and love each other better for our work together.

During the World War years the club house was the scene of great activity and became more than ever the center of community interest. It housed the local Red Cross Unit, with its knitting, sewing and bandaging bees. Liberty Loan and Red Cross drives were launched here and the club house became identified in the minds of the people of the community with civic and patriotic organizations- an identity it keeps to the present.

Our club became federated in 1916 under the direction and with the help of Mrs. Henry Wight of Sanford. Since that time she has been known as the Mother of the club and has helped us many times with advice and inspiration and has even delightfully entertained us in her own home.

In 1922 we finished the interior of the club house and added to our store of furnishings. Mrs. T. L. Mead, wife of the celebrated Dr. Mead, gave a piano and two large walnut bookcases which still add dignity and charm to our club room. Draperies, rugs and awnings followed and we soon had quite a presentable house.

We had been collecting b-oks from time to time and with Mrs. Mead's untiring efforts, we now had some seven or eight hundred volumes, many of them coming from her friends in the north. Mrs. Mead was made librarian, which office she held, without remuneration till the time of her death in 1928. Just here let me pay a tribute to the memory of Mrs. Mead. She was president of the club several times and a most faithful worker. She it was who kept our standards high, and our aim always for better things. After her death a cedar tree was planted in the club grounds as a memorial to her.

In 1926 Mr. and Mrs. Mead presented the club with five acres of wooded hammock land to be used for a park, to be known as Sweet Water Park. Several years were spent in trying to develop this property but our small club found it entirely too great a task and with the consent and approval of Mr. and Mrs. Mead, the park was deeded to the town. It now contains a swimming pool and excellent facilities for picnics.

Today our club marches on. And while its course may be directed by younger hands, its standards are the same as those ~~original~~ of the original Magazine Club- improvement of cultural and social standards for our town, that we may have a more pleasant place in which to live and rear our children.

xi Lilliam Lee Lawton
Historian, 1940