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HISTORY

OF THE

ALLIANCE WOMAN'S CLUB

BOWMAN: Thank you Mary. After long research we're forced to think and believe that the founding of women's clubs, the gathering of women are today is comparatively new. For instance, if we had had clubs at the time of the pilgrims, if the ladies on that Mayflower that crowded boat, had banded together they could have forced the old navigator to sail past the big rock and go on down and land on the sunshine coast of Florida. And how wonderful that would have been. They could have found a rock. There were lots of rocks around. And there were lots of Indians--plenty of Indians. And for Thanksgiving they could have had black eyed peas and chitlins instead of pumpkin pie. It was wonderful. But they lost the opportunity, and years they crowded together in the log cabins, freezing cold and had cabin fever, as most of them did. We even get some of it down here, you know. But finally the opportunity to lead a fuller life was lost for a long, long time. Until finally it became a woman's world. A son is born. We say, "How's the mother." He's married. "Wasn't she a beautiful bride." He dies, and we say, "How much did he leave the widow?" And yet it became, then, a woman's world and the regime of the "papa time" when the father controlled the pocketbook and controlled everything, and that was gone.

Introduction by
Mrs. Yost Osborne
May 14, 1982

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BOWMAN: Thank you Mary. After long research we're forced to think and believe that the founding of women's clubs, the gathering together of women as we are today is comparatively new. For instance, if we had had clubs at the time of the pilgrims, if the ladies on that Mayflower that crowded boat, had banded together they could have forced the old navigator to sail past the big rock and go on down and land on the sunshine coast of Florida. And how wonderful that would have been. They could have found a rock. There were lots of rocks around. And there were lots of Indians--plenty of Indians. And for Thanksgiving they could have had black eyed peas and chitlins instead of pumpkin pie. It would have been wonderful. But they lost the opportunity, and for years and years they crowded together in the log cabins, freezing cold and had cabin fever, as most of them did. We even get some of it down here, you know. But finally the opportunity to lead a fuller life was lost for a long, long time. Until finally it became a woman's world. A son is born. We say, "How's the mother." He's married. "Wasn't she a beautiful bride." He dies, and we say, "How much did he leave the widow?" And yet it became, then, a woman's world and the regime of the "papa time" when the father controlled the pocketbook and controlled everything, and that was gone.

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Now our Alliance women were quick to realize that things had changed, and some two hundred of them met together and founded the Alliance Woman's Club and it was then incorporated under the laws of the State of Ohio on August 1, 1922. Everyone was happy about it. Everyone was glad that they had the Club. There was a good feeling everywhere, and things looked pretty good. It was incorporated, and I must read you the purpose of it if I can find it. I left most of my notes at home, as is usually my custom to do this. But the main purpose of our Club as we have it this afternoon even: to promote culture, to advance civic interest, and to maintain the club house. And that has been our aim and desire from August 1, 1922, to the present day of May 14, 1982. That has been our thought. To keep the purpose of the Club ever before us and that's what we have to do. And they went forward from that time then, and on August 1st more than six hundred people toured the new club house at 229 South Union Avenue. More than six hundred people toured the club house from attic to cellar and enjoyed the beautiful surroundings, the beautiful rooms. Many of them were furnished with gifts. Many with other furniture. And the women were well on their way to a happy life. It was from the very first we had the good will and the respect of the women in town and men in town, and that has paid off in many instances. We even are friendly with the IRS. They stop in to see us every now and then, and we get along fine with them. But it pays to do that. We've heard of that.

And then, when the time came to make West Broadway, where the cow path was before that ran back to Walter's barn and was his cow path--although he claims he never had a cow--that he wasn't old enough to have a cow. But he had a cow path back there, anyhow. And when the time came to widen the street, we were on such good terms with the men

of the city that they allowed us buy some feet to the south of our building. And that's why we have a parking lot there today for our cars--the convenience of our cars. There had been some buildings as we'll hear about later perhaps--buildings along there. One large building was moved onto Oxford Street and several others torn down to make room for West Broadway. And so we go on and on and on, and it's quite a change. The house to the north, which you have known, I think, as belonging to us, was bought so that we wouldn't have a peanut stand there or a hotdog stand. And it has paid for itself. Has been well kept up and rented. Now with Mabel Hartzell as our first president of the Club, the Club house at 229 South Union, where we are today, we might know that the good works of the club would be started. And the first thing that was put in the proposition was to start a day nursery and finance it with a thrift shop. A prominent man of the town gave the room for the thrift shop which was set up to maintain a sort of continuing rummage sale. You know, you sell things. And it was to be manned by our members of the Club. They rallied round and turned out to be good salesmen. Many should have been in stores along Main Street, as they found out. But they loved the work and went on with it. And the story is told of one woman, in a burst of enthusiasm, took the dress off her back and sold it. And then had to go home, not in a barrel, but in her apron. And this thrift shop then proved to be able to pay for the day nursery which took place in a large building and helped the working women of the town, furthering the purpose of the club to promote civic interests.

And so we go on then to what happened in the rooms here. Not this room, but the front of the house. What happened there. By the way, meals were served; especially Sunday

dinners. And we have lists and lists and lists of prominent people who enjoyed Sunday dinner here. Tables were placed about the rooms in the front there, and you'll never believe this, but there was a dining room upstairs. Up the stairway. A dining room to take care of the people who came to enjoy the food. A black couple from Canton were in charge of the kitchen and furnished the food. But with the advent of Mrs. Kathryn Webb as the second president, she capped the climax by bringing in our Margaret as the "chief cook and bottle washer." And she is here today, as you know--our Margaret.

The need for more space became evident, and in 1931 the Georgian Room, where we are today was built and furnished. It was the beginning of the Depression, but it proved to be easy to pay for it, for the contractors, feeling the weight of the Depression, lowered their prices and everything went along fine. We're in the room today, and it had been a wonderful help for us for serving and for having programs and so forth. We've taken care of it, added improvements as we go along; and one improvement has been this air conditioning, which is only bottled wind, as you know. And it's of great interest to our members. Even today they never get tired of wondering about the air conditioning. You'll never get tired of hearing that.

Now the Board with its committees is the working machinery of our Club, and we salute them today, the past and the present members, because we couldn't be as comfortable, we couldn't be in such a beautiful place if it were not for the Board and the boards which have gone on before us. We salute them today. They're a dedicated bunch, and because attendance at meetings is the first thing of importance to a board member.

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Nothing, but nothing must interfere with attendance there. We have the story of the dedicated member who lost her shoe in the mud flats over there by Stanton School in a cloud burst. And in groping for the shoe, she found not the shoe but a handful of flu germs. And she was kept out of traffic for quite a while, but did make it then to the next meeting. Then we have the story of the member who needed to have her gall bladder taken out, and her doctor thoughtlessly scheduled the whole affair for a Board meeting day. Now that wouldn't do. This is such a delicate question we don't dare deal it much publicity, and the member wouldn't want us to. We're sure of that. But she forced the doctor to reschedule her, and then had her gall bladder taken out in the normal way and then made the next meeting. We think that was pretty good. Periodically, a complete redecorating project goes on, and we have had many amusing things come while the decorating is going on. At one time, there was to be new carpet laid on the floor here, and the carpet was delivered and then an anonymous inspector came and looked at the large roll of carpet and passed the word along the grapevine that the color wasn't right. It was supposed to match the carpet in Carolyn Akins entryway, and it didn't. The color wasn't right. It didn't match it. And so, naturally, the chairman was upset. And she hurried and went to Carolyn's place, looked at the entryway, and came back and looked at the roll of carpet. By that time she'd lost the color from the entryway--went back again, back again. Mrs. Akins left the door unfastened so she could get in and out, in and out. Eventually, she was so dizzy that she finally gave up. Word went around--lay the carpet. And it proved to be the best wearing piece of carpet ever put on this floor. It isn't the carpet now, but it was wonderful, wonderful carpet and it wore really very well.

The color--can't tell you what the color was--but it was the color of Carolyn Akins entryway.

We salute the Board members today for their cheerful willingness to work at anything. As we said before, we wouldn't enjoy our meals, we wouldn't enjoy our parties here, we wouldn't enjoy coming today and meeting as a club except for the work of the Board. And it's nice work if you can get it. But it's dedicated work, and we're glad that they feel that way.

Now we come to perhaps the most important highlight of our Club. And I'm looking at it. If you'll all turn this way. I'm looking at the most important part of our Club--our members--our membership. You're the most important part of any club, and we're proud of you. I'm sure that the founders with their culture and their projects would be proud of you today. I could see some four hundred women of all shapes and sizes. You don't have to be Miss America to be a member of the Alliance Woman's Club. You don't have to be. But you are the important part of the Club. Be proud of the Club. Be proud that you are a member. Proud of it. And it is the highlight of the Club, and we like to think as we remember the founders of the Club--many of you weren't born when they founded the Club. Some of you were. I was. And some of you were. But many of you are too young to have been. But you're the important part now of the Club.

And when I think of the Club, a scene comes before my eyes. I'm in the old kitchen before any project was done at remodeling. And we've had a number of projects and operated on the kitchen several times. But we're in the kitchen, and a young man is sitting on a chair. At his knee is a little girl with cheeks rosy like apples. And bustling about the room is a young woman, putting food

away, putting pans away. Readyng the kitchen for the work of the next day, paying no heed to the young man seated on the chair with his urging, "Step it up. Hurry it up." She is going to finish her work in this home away from home which she has. And she has to be related to the little girl for her cheeks are the same rosy pink as the little girl's. So we think she's related to her. But she is, and I will give you her name. She is Margaret. The best beloved highlight of the whole Alliance Woman's Club.

LEVAKE: Well, of course, my husband got in on this too, and everyone seemed to have a different opinion about some of the colors and some of the things in the house. However, it has not been structurally changed very much. (I wanted to write it down so I wouldn't get lost.) In the latter part of 1907, Mr. Walter Webb, Sr., moved his family from their Webb Street home to this one. And I might say that he was the head of the family in every way because he did plan the building and had it built. And Mrs. Webb had no part in it which always hurt a little bit. But she was busy with twin babies. At any rate, he brought them up here, and the family consisted (Is this any better? My voice is hoarse anyway.)--the family was father and mother, Kathryn Ruth Webb, and the children. Donald was about ten years old then; Helen was about seven; and twins, Walter and Winifred, were six months old. So, of course, she was busy. Mr. Webb had taken full responsibility for having the house built on an old foundation by a Mr. Westover, contractor. They had a decorating firm from Pittsburgh. Everyone agreed it was an especially beautiful home, and the children remember it as such.

As you came in the front door, the whole door was made of beveled glass and leaded, you know. There are some samples of that around yet, and that glass is simply beautiful.

There is a fan light over the front door and little panels on either side, the round oval window as you come down the steps, and in what we call the living room, up over those windows there is a beautiful fan light too, and look at them sometime. They had the same kind of windows in the dining room, but of course many of you remember they had to change those because they began to leak, and you can do very little about it. The front door lasted a long time. Finally, when the boys were pretty big, there must have been some rough-housing, and one of the neighbors fell through the door. And it could never be--and, of course, he felt terrible. It could never be replaced. Well then coming into the hall, it was done in mahogany. And some of you too remember there were two columns, mahogany columns at the end of the hall. Then the bench that is there had a leather seat on it and they had a big chair in there someplace. Then as you went to the left to the little parlor, Helen remembers it as being such a beautiful room. It was painted in white, and the wallpaper was pink and gold striped. And they had a (I see Helen nodding her head. I'm sure she was in here, and I think she's the only one as you came in that would have been in here) this very pretty gold French furniture that we've had in the family until Helen moved back to Alliance and she had to sell it. But it was rose brocade with gilt wood frame, and Mrs. Webb would regild that every once in a while. And there was a little love seat and two chairs and a pretty little table which Helen has in her apartment now. Must have been very pretty. Then you moved on into the--what they called the living room, and that was the same. The window seat was for their toys. They had--now wait. Before I get into that. In the front room on that mantel, they had a pair of what Don always calls Satsuma (?) vases. They were about so big. beautiful thing.

If they really were, they're museum pieces. They were white with gold trim on them. And then later on they had a gold clock on that mantel. They came into some very lovely possessions with the death of an aunt, but that was later in their occupancy. Anyhow, for a while in that living room, they had a big picture that come from this aunt which was an oil copy of Raphael's Madonna of the Chair. And Don's wife has that in their family. We all have some of these treasures divided with the three children. There were beautiful crystal chandeliers all through the house that sparkled, and Helen said that they were really special. And you try to picture those. I know they had one in their home on Overlook, but just one. But anyhow, it must have been very pretty. At the north of the living room where we go out into the hall, there was a porte cochere. They had some steps on that, and they had a black horse, and they had a buggy. And they would get into that from the porte cochere. And, as you know of course, all this hall was part of their driveway. Well then we come to the dining room. And it was a light oak, and in between the wood parts there was, they said, real, beautiful leather. There's a disagreement about the color, so we'll call it blue-green. There was a lovely, golden oak table there. Round table, which we've had for a good many years, which had huge claw feet in the middle. And you could pull that thing way out, and two more pillars would appear. It filled the dining room when they had it out. And they had --Helen said they could seat thirty there. I don't know about that. But they did have 36 on many holidays. They would have another table for the children in the front room. And Mrs. Webb loved company, and she loved her relatives. And they must have had many big wonderful occasions in that dining room. My daughter has the table now. There were a dozen chairs with it, and it's still a beautiful thing.

. . . where they had a gas stove. But it just seems like a big, thick one. Anyway it sounds like it wasn't anymore efficient than it's been over the years. Oh, of course, they have it fixed better now. Anyway that was the place that they all loved to be. Of course this then was the back wall where we have the entrance into the kitchen. Now upstairs where our office is was what they called their library. And the room back of that was the master bedroom. Then there are three other rooms there. There was quite a bit of discussion. They obviously moved around, depending on their sizes. And they had a great deal of company. Finally they had to make the library into a guest room. And the little back room they either had guests in it. Or sometimes some of the maids (they had help, of course) would not want to stay out in the little house. Back in here someplace there was a little house that Mr. Webb built, along with the other house, for help. And, of course, sometimes they had a couple here. That was the time, you know, when so many people were coming from Central Europe and needed a foothold in this country. Uh, I got the upstairs. Then there was a barn. I can't quite picture that, but at the end of the lot there was a barn that was used for the horse and the buggy and assorted animals over the years. They evidently had quite a few animals. I didn't mention the basement, but it was just like all basements of that time--for the laundry and of course they put up a lot of canned goods, and their heating and all that was down the basement.

This sounds like it was a very happy home. And a lot of people in Alliance remember having good times here. Of course they had their sadness, too. They had only been in here about three years when Walter's twin sister died. The mother always felt that she had had mastoid. They

didn't know anything about it in those days. She was treated for typhoid, but they tested all the water around here. They had a cistern. And nothing ever showed up. But of course she was the large one with black curly hair, and mother Ruth never got over it. Then only two years later her husband got sick and died of pernicious anemia. Again, a disease that we can treat now. And he was only in his forties. But somehow she rallied, and she took care of these children and all their friends (it sounded like they had a houseful). The attic was a big place and a wonderful place to play. And as they grew older they had their Victrola. Helen remembers many wonderful times when they would all gather around and sing and play various games. So the mother was a strong mother, and she of course had relatives in here from time to time. Some of them would come for a month or more. And she was always welcoming them.

The mistress of the house, Mrs. Webb, a lot of you know--remember her--she was one of my most beloved friends. And she was handsome, stately, gracious, and loving. And she was devoted to all her family and friends. So it's a pleasure to tell you what I know about the house, and I was never in it until it became the Woman's Club.

OSBORNE: Thank you, Evelyn. Along with my committee there are two other people that I would like to thank today, and one is Harriet Clem for taking care of all our audio equipment. Well, at least that was a big help. And Barb Graf for doing the publicity.

AKINS, CAROLYN.....	History 5
ALLIANCE WOMAN'S CLUB.....	History 1
ANTONINI, MARGARET.....	History 4, History 7
BOWMAN, MRS. BLAINE (JESSIE).....	History 1
BROADWAY STREET.....	History 2
BUILDING MOVED TO OXFORD STREET.....	History 3
CLEM, HARRIET.....	History 11
GEORGIAN ROOM (ALLIANCE WOMAN'S CLUB).....	History 4
GRAF, BARB.....	History 11
HARTZELL, MABEL.....	History 3
LEVAKE, EVELYN.....	History 7
OSBORNE, MRS. YOST.....	History 1
WALTER'S BARN.....	History 2
WEBB, DONALD.....	History 7
WEBB, HELEN.....	History 7
WEBB, KATHRYN RUTH.....	History 7
WEBB, MRS. KATHRYN.....	History 4
WEBB, WALTER, JR.....	History 7
WEBB, WALTER, SR.....	History 7
WEBB, WINIFRED.....	History 7
WESTOVER, MR.....	History 7
WOMEN'S CLUBS.....	History 1