

A History of Tri Club

On Wednesday, June 3, 1959, twenty-four women, former members of Thomas Jefferson, Westwood, and Westhampton Junior Clubs, met at Willow Oaks Country Club indicating an interest in forming a new senior club. The guiding spirit behind this endeavor was Mary Miller who, with Betty Crytzer and Virginia Leidheiser, had arranged this luncheon following the first Community Center fundraiser in which the Junior clubwomen had participated. Even before Tri Club was officially organized, it had a project – continuing to work toward establishing the West End Community Center and providing the major support for its operation. In September 1959, Tri Club's organizational meeting was held and the first officers were then elected and installed. There were 18 charter members.

The first of the follies, CUTTIN' CAPERS, produced in 1959, had netted more than \$14,000, and in 1960 the second, STOCKS AND BLONDES, was even more successful. Another quite different fundraiser followed in 1961 when the clubs sponsored a Centennial Civil War Forum presented in three different sections. No tickets were sold but patrons who donated funds to the Community Center received tickets to one of the sections. Included as a part of these presentations was a fashion show of costumes of the Civil War period modeled by club members. They also sold Centennial Auto Tags.

The Center became a reality through the efforts of the clubwomen, the support of the community, and the donation of land by Hubel Robins. Construction was undertaken by B. O. Williams. In the early years of Tri Club's history, this all-consuming interest produced a number of different fund-raising projects. There were Holiday Fairs, sales of ads in football game programs, bazaars, bake sales, a swap shop, and even a kitchen shower for the Center. Then on May 20 and 21, 1966, the four clubs' members once more put on their dancing shoes and produced MAY'S A POPPIN'. The West End Community Center which opened its doors on November 4, 1961, was free of debt four and a half years later following that final performance. The celebration ceremony held that month included the burning of the mortgage.

The West End Community Center had been issued a Certificate of Incorporation as West End Tri Club Community Center, Incorporated, on November 14, 1958. The Articles of Incorporation include among the major purposes "to provide and promote library facilities for Richmond, Virginia and Henrico, Virginia". This library was established in a separate room at the Center designed for that purpose. The shelves for the library were a gift from Tri Club. Books for the collection were donated by the Tuckahoe Public Library and by club members who were supplied with a list of classic books to guide them in their selections for gift giving. Book purchases were the responsibility of the library committee. By 1964 the collection included more than 1200 titles.

The library was staffed by volunteers from the member clubs and was open on a regular schedule beginning at two days a week, then expanding to three days a week for eleven months of the year. In 1968 when the Center went from volunteer to paid management, the oversight of the library was included in the duties of the manager. The building of two county library branches nearby has curtailed the use of our own library, but the sizable collection remains available for loan to the public and to our own members. The Henrico libraries and the Richmond City and Chesterfield County libraries have received gifts of books from Tri Club as well.

Tri Club members have established an identity for their club in many ways. In September of 1962 they chose club colors of gold and white. Those colors appear in the tablecloths and china, but most importantly in the gold and white satin cloth and banner that grace the officers' table and lectern at each meeting. The club's logo of three triangles appears on the banner and in the Yearbook and newsletters.

The Colony Cotillion began October 23, 1965, started at the suggestion of one member whose child had applied too late to another cotillion to be accepted. Through the dedicated leadership of many chairmen, and the participation of all Tri Club members, it has continued to be a success and now serves as the one all-member fundraiser for many philanthropic projects. Through the years these projects have included college scholarships, both to high school graduates and re-entry women, and camperships to Camp Easter Seal West and East. Other projects have varied from year to year according to the recommendations of chairmen or members. Nursing homes have been provided with bird feeders, tray favors, programs, a wheelchair, and a VCR. A TV was given to a veteran's hospital. Trees and flowers have been planted and an animal at Maymont was adopted. Contributions have been made to many Federation-sponsored projects, and high school sophomores have been sponsored to leadership events such as HOBY (Hugh O'Brian Youth Foundation Leadership Training Program).

Named individuals have become dear to our members through our involvement in helping them. The first of these was Miss Diggs, a teacher of the blind who was blind herself. Members furnished weekly transportation for her to her classes and provided, on one occasion, her expenses for a convention of the American Association of the Workers of the Blind.

Charlie Shearin, a very special veteran, was visited, sent cards, and honored by having a contribution to the restoration of the Carillon made in his name. Several of our scholarship recipients, particularly Ellen Rosen, have become friends through visiting the club and staying in touch.

Our adopted child in India, Gnanasekar Mookaian, has received financial support and cards and small gifts as well. But perhaps closest of all to members' hearts was Billy Shakespeare, a young cerebral palsy victim, who received several of our campership gifts, a head pointer, a motorized wheelchair, and gifts of clothing. The wheelchair was a surprise Christmas gift at a club meeting, a moment long remembered by those who were there. The head pointer enabled Billy to use a typewriter and a paintbrush, and his paintings were displayed at a club meeting. It also enabled him to design greeting cards for sale, and club members supported him in this effort. He and his friend, Tim Miles, with their families, were treated to a circus performance. Billy's name appears with Tri Club's name on the Love Wall at Camp Easter Seal East.

When Tri Club was still a dream in a few minds, the name was chosen to represent the three Junior Clubs whose members would eventually form the club. The committee who organized the first luncheon meeting worked with those clubs to invite not only their graduating members, but the graduates of the previous five years. Tri Club's charter members all came from the Junior Clubs, but in the fall of 1961 provision was made to also consider for membership other women in the community who were not affiliated with those clubs. Orientation and membership activities have enabled these women to feel like family in this club of more than 100 members.

The first Yearbook appeared the year the club was organized; a monthly newsletter has long been a tradition; and a club photo directory enables members to more quickly associate names and faces. A Gourmet Group and Bridge Round Robin have been fellowship opportunities throughout the years. An Investment Club has been organized, and from time to time other groups have flourished; they have included Tennis, Weight Consciousness, Slimnastics, Public Speaking, French Lessons, and many varied arts and crafts learning groups. Members have taken overnight trips to New York and North Carolina; they have visited many places in Virginia and Washington, including the GFWC Headquarters.

Tri Club members have contributed their own gifts of time, talent, money and goods as well as club funds to many causes, among them the Henrico Christmas Mother, the Shelter for Battered Women, the Bon Air Diagnostic Center, Meals on Wheels, Henrico Doctor's Hospital, Swine Flu Inoculations, Save the Children, eye screenings, various nursing homes and needy families. They have written in support of, or protest of, various media and corporate actions. For a number of years they participated in the Channel 23 Auctions. They have worked for or against legislative action within the guidelines of the Virginia Federation, and have expressed an interest in the legislative process by attending General Assembly Sessions each year.

The creativity of these women has enabled them to devise effective ways to raise money for special philanthropic projects or for operating funds. Brown bag auctions, silent auctions, sales of gift items, yard sales, raffles, and recycling newspapers have been among those efforts. They have served as hostesses at a grocery store, a department store, and several open houses. A "Quilt of All Seasons" was created by some 20 members, each contributing a square of her own design, and raffled off providing a \$600 contribution to Camp Easter Seal East. A Bicentennial House Tour 1776-1976 was another special fundraiser of the club. Those proceeds, \$550, were donated to a fund to buy and equip the first neo-natal ambulance in the Richmond area. "The Tri Club Goody Book" as published and sold contained recipes from most of Tri Club's good cooks.

Tri Club began at a luncheon meeting and the tradition has continued. Good food and hospitality are important ingredients in their time together. Their hospitality extends to finding ways for their husbands and special guests to relax together and get to know one another at an annual special function.

Tri Club's monthly programs have encompassed all subjects, having included book reviews, movie reviews, and travelogues, media panels, a Lady General, politicians and politicians' wives, civic leaders, health specialists, educators, historians, antique appraisers, artists, craftsmen, jewelers, singers, musicians, cooks, seers and mediums, astrologers and astronomers, morticians, and wine tastings, too. From time to time there have been fashion shows, some displaying the members' own talents with yarn and fabric, for costumes have been part of the club's history, too. It all began with the skimpy costumes of the follies. It progressed through the modeling of costumes of the Civil War period to creating authentic reproductions of colonial dresses (under the guidance of the Valentine Museum) which were worn when members served as hostesses at the candlelight dinners at the Kennedy Center in Washington during the second inauguration of President Richard M. Nixon in 1973. In more recent years the creative costuming has been done with draped sheets and scarves when the Tri Club Players, a drama group, presented, not only to the club but to several other community organizations, a program with a series of tableaux depicting scenes from the life of Christ.

This group began in a much less serious vein when it performed a series of skits in the life a clubwoman, not only for the club members, but for Lee District and for 500 clubwomen attending the VFWC Conference. A choral group has provided a special music and narration for club programs and, in addition, has brought joy to residents of health care facilities. On other occasions the talent of Tri Club's own members has been apparent as they have presented skits, readings, book reviews, lectures, and special music for club programs.

The combined talents of a large number of these members created an original musical revue of the history of GFWC in celebration of its Centennial in 1990. Writing, musicianship, directing, and acting endeavors were supported by those members who shared their sewing and artistic abilities. Through the characters of Jennie June, Charlotte Emerson Brown, Ella Dietz Clymer, and Ann, and other contemporary clubwomen, the story was told in dialogue, song, and dance.

Stars in the Sky, titled from an excerpt of a quotation from Jennie June herself, provided lighthearted entertainment as well as an overall picture of a century of achievement. In April 1990, the production was presented at the Alice Kyle Banquet at the VFWC Convention in Arlington.

Since the very beginning, Tri Club has been a member of the Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs, Lee District, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Even the very first budget provided for contributions to Federation projects and funds for Convention attendance. Federation projects have always been supported and programs have been tailored to fit the club's interests and the needs of the community. A number of our members have served as hostesses at the Governor's Mansion. Tri Club has a long history of winning awards at higher levels in the Federation. Individual members have received awards for artistic achievement, and the club has been recognized in many of the other areas throughout the years. One area of consistent awards has been leadership, and Tri Club has produced many leaders, not only in Federation work, but in other areas of community service and employment.

Tri Club has participated in various ways in planning and hosting District Meetings, Conferences, and Conventions, and has provided table arrangements, special gifts, and dinners as well. Members who have served at higher levels in the federation have been honored with teas, receptions, and gifts.

The Virginia Federation Headquarters, located in Richmond, has been supported by Tri Club. The first gift to Headquarters was a handsome Stieff pewter tray engraved with Tri Club's name. Later a shower was held which provided needed kitchen items, and most recently, a solid cherry Pembroke table which extends to form a 81-inch Conference Table was presented. On a brass plate the gift is identified as having been given "In honor of Mrs. James M. Minor, VFWC President, 1986-88".

Few clubs can have the honor of having a VFWC President come from their midst; we are glad she is one of us. Fran Minor was among the Westwood Juniors involved from the beginning in the planning and fund raising for the West End Community Center. The Center remains a chief priority of the club. When it began, there were upwards of 230 Juniors involved; in 1959 there were 18 Tri Club members to assist. The founders of Tri Club who planned ahead for a club that would be a major support group for the Center were wise indeed.

Tri Club's membership today (1990) is approximately equal to the combined membership of the three Junior Clubs. Each year part of the budget is designated as a gift to the Center, but from time to time additional funds or gifts have been given. Those have ranged from unglamorous roof repairs to the major part of the redecorating costs, from air conditioning to a movie screen, from a kitchen floor covering to a beautiful painting and flower arrangement. The Center is Tri Club's home. A Board of Directors oversees the management of the Center and is made up of representatives from the four clubs who fill the offices on a rotating basis. The president of each club also serves on the board and additionally appoints a representative from her club to the House and Grounds Committee. The four clubs have worked together on fund-raising projects which have been financially successful as well as enabling us to know each other better.

Its members will always refer to their club as "Tri Club" as they have since it was organized; but in March of 1987, to more clearly identify its purpose in the community, its official name became "The Tri Club Woman's Club".

No history of a club can ever be contained in these few pages. The real history is in the minutes of the Board and Club meetings, in the Scrapbooks in the Archives or in the hands of each of the past presidents, and, even more importantly, in the memories of the members who have lived this story. We are all historians preserving traditions for those who follow us.

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Editor's note:

*This second edition of **The History of The Tri Club Woman's Club** was written by Jonnie Smith, who continues to be a member of Tri Club.. The first edition was written by Jean Goodykoontz, who is now a resident of Cedarfield. July 24, 2010.*