

Genesis of the Business Women's Club

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THE LUNCH hour is directly responsible for the existence of clubs for business women.

"The object shall be to provide means of communication between business women; to secure the benefits resulting from organized effort; to open club rooms and a restaurant for the comfort and convenience of business women; to relieve sick and disabled members, and to have an employment exchange for competent business women."

So runs a clause in the constitution of a certain club for business women, but the all-important phrase is that which deals with the opening of a restaurant.

When a young woman takes a position "downtown," lunching at the restaurants frequented by her brother and other girls' brothers, possesses a singular fascination. She feels that at least she is launched upon a business career. But in due time she wearies of the clatter of heavy crockery and the noisy calls of scurrying waiters. She resents the fact that she is expected to swallow her meal whole in order to make way for other hungry mortals, impatiently standing in line. If she meets a friend with whom she would discuss the plays she has seen of late, the books she is reading, or the new silk waist she is about to purchase, the head-waiter glares at her for keeping another patron waiting, and, under the influence of that glare, she sallies forth and joins a club, and is seen no more in the noon-day haunts of men.

Directly a club is organized, it collects dues and hires a room in the heart of the commercial district. Here it installs some tables and chairs and a chef, a rubber plant and white curtains. The last two are essential. Then it is ready for business. And business comes. The lunch-room flourishes like the proverbial bay-tree.

These clubs for business women approach more closely the men's clubs than do any other organizations in which women are interested. They are broad, liberal and democratic. Dress does not count. A new member may make acquaintances or not as she pleases. She is free to avail herself of the physical conveniences placed at her disposal without indulging in social intercourse, or she may meet other members on the common level of good fellowship. The fact that her name passed the membership committee is all the social backing that she needs.

She may entertain her friends at luncheon or dinner, having a special table set aside for their use. She may spend her noon hour in the reading room, or curled up in a cosy corner of a dressing room. She may never see the inside of the club rooms save during the luncheon hour, or she may come back after her office is closed, dress for the theatre and dine at the club before joining her friends at the theatre.

In fact, she has most of the privileges of club men, at considerable less expense. Woman's passion for bargains and cut-prices does not desert her even in club-dom.

The largest club of this sort flourishes in Chicago, and is known as the Chicago Business Woman's club. It had its origin in the National Association of Women Stenographers, which was organized at the suggestion of Mrs. Potter Palmer in 1892. Its first president was Miss Elizabeth Merrill, now Mrs. George Bass, at that time official reporter of the board of lady managers of the Columbian Exposition. But as successful women in other branches of business life clamored for admission, in 1899 the National Association was reorganized as the National Association of Business Women, and its sphere of usefulness was enlarged accordingly, with active clubs in New York, Minneapolis, Buffalo and Detroit.

Barring the religious element, the Chicago club is conducted on lines similar to those followed by the Young Women's Christian association. Its members take active part in classes for the study of Spanish, French, physical culture, correct English, current topics, stenographic speed, domestic science, the use of a chafing dish, china painting and nature-study.

Miss Matae B. Cleveland, president of the national association, is an active worker in the Chicago branch. She is also manager of the local Business Woman's exchange, which acts as intermediary between employers and those seeking positions, and members of the club are entitled to its services without money and without price. This is but one of the many practical features supplied for the inexperienced women enrolled under the club's protecting banner.

The club is run successfully and without the shadow of debt on annual dues of \$4, with meals furnished at reasonable figures. The number of women availing themselves of its privileges is close to half a thousand, and the cosy club rooms in the heart of Chicago's business district will soon be too cramped. Even now the officers are talking of a clubhouse commensurate with the organization's growth and built by the club members.

While there are rest rooms, dressing rooms, writing rooms and a library, to say nothing of innumerable cosy corners for heart-to-heart chats, the interest of the outsider centers in the brilliantly lighted dining room. At noon it is crowded with trimly gowned business women, and in the



MISS LIZZIE WOODBURY LOW, SECOND PRESIDENT NEW YORK COUNCIL BUSINESS WOMAN'S ASSOCIATION.



MISS CLEORA E. SWIFT, WHO WAS THE NEW YORK PIONEER IN FORMING A BUSINESS WOMEN'S CLUB AND FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

evening these same women are transformed into charming hostesses in frocks that suggest anything but the work-a-day world.

Lawyers, doctors, bookkeepers, confidential secretaries, stenographers, importers, manufacturers, editors, heads of departments—petticoated every one of them—gather here in the most democratic of fashion. Here, too, they entertain friends and business acquaintances. The business woman is an important factor in the commercial life of Chicago, and under the shade of some sheltering rubber plant, many a "deal" is pushed to completion.

In glancing over the annual reports of the Chicago club, it is interesting to note that despite pedestrian skirts, square-toed boots and "the same salaries that men receive," the eternal feminine will not down even in a club for successful business women.

One report tells of the opening of the winter season by a progressive dinner at 35 cents a plate. There were speeches by this officer and that, outlines for class work, and other cut-and-dried features inevitable with an organization banquet, after which the recorder adds: "The decorations for this affair were in yellow, golden rod being used in quantities about the rooms and on the tables."

The menu for this dinner was truly remarkable, and no chef save one employed by a woman's club could have evolved it. To a real business woman and her chef all things are possible.

Another dinner was marked by the appearance of a brilliant jurist, the only Adam in this bevy of Eves, and for this occasion everything was in brilliant crimson, from lamp shades to roses, a subtle compliment to the guest of honor, insinuating that his presence was a red-letter occasion for the club. A third event was notable for the appearance of Jane Addams, famed for her Hull House work, and appropriately for this most optimistic of workers for women, the color scheme was rose-colored.

Let the pessimistic borrowers of trouble concerning the unsexing of women through contact with the business world ponder on these few excerpts from reports. So long as women permit their thoughts to wander in the direction of lampshades and rose bowls, the domestic instinct is not dead, but flourishing.

The Chicago clubrooms are most happily located, not only for the midday convenience of members, but for theater going. A considerable source of income is the dinner given in the evening. In this one privilege alone, the members feel that they stand on a level with their men friends who are addicted to club life, and they take solid comfort in this mode of entertaining. The cost of dinners is regulated by the wishes of the individual hostess, who has her room or table set aside, her decorations arranged and her menu served quite independently of other diners.

The New York council of the National Association of Business Women is a close second to the Chicago club. It has rooms on the top floor of a big office building at 108 Fulton street, close to the financial district in which most of its members are employed or independently engaged in business.

When Miss Cleora E. Swift, a successful and ambitious business woman, started the movement in 1900, New York women were not as ready to accept the suggestion as their more optimistic sisters in Chicago. But Miss Swift was not to be discouraged, and she interested in her work two most efficient helpers, Miss Virginia Potter and Miss Grace H. Dodge, whose philanthropy

and vital interest in women's work were well known throughout the business district. With a charter membership of nineteen, the workers furnished simply but comfortably the quarters they had selected, and opened the lunch room, which instantly proved to be an efficient missionary. Today the membership is nearly 200, the debt is paid and the club is entirely self-supporting.

The initiation fee is \$3, with dues of 50 cents monthly. With this income and the moneys derived from the sale of luncheons and occasional dinners, the executive committee meets every expense. The only salaried officer is the cashier, and the working force in dining room and kitchen is composed entirely of women. Members are served a table d'hote lunch for 20 cents, but a slight premium is charged nonmembers who frequently find their way to the rooms. An a la carte service has also been established, and the entire menu is simple and homelike.

The dining room is exceedingly simple, its chief charm being its outlook. On all sides it is lined with great windows, overlooking the North and East rivers and the bay. A day must be gloomy, indeed, when it sheds no light in this room.

The reading room is more pretentious, being decorated in dull green, rose and Flemish oak. The piano stands invitingly open. There is a fair-sized library, including all the current periodicals, and a desk supplied with club stationery.

But perhaps the feature which appeals most strongly to many of the members is the convenience and comfort of the small rest or dressing rooms, each supplied with a couch and pillows a-plenty, toilet articles of all sorts and a medicine chest containing all the simpler remedies. These rooms, furnished daintily in delft blue and white, with immaculate curtains and down pillows, are a veritable boon to women employed in office buildings where practically no conveniences or comforts are supplied for women clerks.

Owing to the fact that the club rooms are located far from the residence and theater districts, the rooms are open at night only on stated occasions, such as club dinners, receptions and entertainments of a more or less formal nature. On these occasions dinner is served for a nominal sum, so that members may not be obliged to hurry home to dress for the evening function. The rooms are always open late enough for a suburban member to change her frock and enjoy a little rest should she plan on remaining in town for the theater.

In other words, a representative business woman's club is formed and managed solely for the comfort and convenience of its members. It does not aim to ride a literary hobby or raise the intellectual standard of its members. It has no "mission." If it has classes on its calendar, it is because the members demand classes. It does not pose as an employment agency, though it promulgates the doctrine of "hanging together." It does not even force sociability upon its members. They come and go as they like, and barring the weed and the bottle, it is a clever imitation of its prototype, the man's club.

In both the New York club and the Chicago club stenographers predominate on the membership roll. This is not true, however, of the club movement in Minneapolis, Detroit and Buffalo, where doctors, dentists and other professional women are in the majority. In New York the club rooms are the favorite gathering place for the insurance women, who write some of the heaviest policies taken out.

Those who have studied the situation and visited many cities say that the New York women are the most businesslike in their club life, availing themselves of its conveniences, but not entering very heartily into the spirit of camaraderie. On the other hand, while Chicago business women fully appreciate the privileges and comforts of the rooms, they exhibit a keener interest in the social life, as shown in the informal evening gatherings.

He Will Not Smile Again

Nine-year-old Bobby Irwin, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Irwin of Anderson, Ind., can never smile again, according to the conclusion of physicians and surgeons who examined the boy's face and lips to ascertain why the expression of his face has not changed since he met with a recent accident. The doctors found the muscles of the face partially paralyzed, especially those controlling the lips. Otherwise the lad has practically recovered from two fractures of the skull, to the amazement of the physicians and surgeons. Young Irwin fell ten feet from a hay mow to a cement pavement and his forehead was crushed over one eye and the base of the skull almost shattered. For nearly a week there was no hope of his recovery.

That was a month ago. The other day the boy walked to his doctor's office and was as bright as ever save for his inability to smile. He can enjoy anything funny enough to create a smile or laughter, and his laughter can be heard, but there is no change of expression about the lips or cheeks.

She Picked Wrong Man

An amusing story is told by the New York Press of the wearing of miniatures. A newly rich woman, who had seen her friends exploiting great-grandmothers and grand-aunts on ivory, blossomed forth with an amazing portrait, surrounded by emeralds and pearls, and dangled her new found ancestor at the end of a costly chain. Mrs. Suddendough glibly informed her friends that the man with the inspired eyes and the shock of glowing red hair was her paternal great-great-grandfather. Her pretensions passed unchallenged. One day she was in a gathering in Boston and exultingly displayed the portrait, telling the old story. One bespectacled dame stared and, after Mrs. Suddendough's departure, she of the glasses said, "What do you think of that? It was Patrick Henry's portrait, and he was a bachelor!"

Cold Storage Art

The plans for the St. Louis World's Fair include a refrigerating "arts" building, to cost, with the apparatus, \$1,000,000. It is to be about 320 by 210 feet and 50 feet high, and will furnish cold storage, ice water, cool air for the theaters and other buildings, and ice for the largest ice skating rink in the world. Within the building will be exhibited each day real "old-fashioned" snowstorms.

An Eviction

Cassidy—Phwat are ye climbin' up there fur, man alive?
Casey—O'll tear down that birdhouse from me wall if Oi break me neck fur it.
Cassidy—Would ye ruin the poor birds' bit av a home?
Casey—'Sh! 'Tis sparrows that's in it, an' it's jist now Oi'm learnin' that they're English.—New York Times.