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Women’s Literary Organizations and the Formation of a
Progressive Southern City, 1884-1945**

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“MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN”:
HATTIESBURG WOMEN’S LITERARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE
FORMATION OF A PROGRESSIVE SOUTHERN CITY,
1884-1945

by
Daniella M. Kawa

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences,
the School of Humanities
and the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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May 2020

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2020

Published by the Graduate School



ABSTRACT

This study examines the activity and impact of white women's literary clubs in Hattiesburg, Mississippi between 1884 and the end of World War II in 1945. This project examines to what extent women adhered to or broke away from societal norms of the time by involving themselves in intellectually stimulating groups with other women, especially in response to rapidly changing standards of femininity and womanhood during the Progressive era. Women's literary clubs reveal patterns of women moving out of the home and into a public role, in addition to signifying the new ways in which women fit themselves into a society during a period of rapidly changing ideas about femininity and womanhood.

Club activity records show how organized Hattiesburg women fit into larger models of progressive womanhood while maintaining the decorum expected of them. These activities can also demonstrate if these clubs allowed southern women to participate in a larger feminist movement that may not have been widely accepted in the Deep South. The cultural and structural contributions of women's organizations in Hattiesburg are largely unrecognized in the literature, but the impact they had on the city has been long lasting. Women's literary clubs in Hattiesburg organized women and allowed them to have a deeply rooted, progressive influence on a growing city in a traditionally conservative state. This thesis argues that literary clubs empowered Hattiesburg women to better themselves and their communities, while putting pressure upon prescribed gender roles without breaking apart societal rules.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks go to my ever-patient advisors, committee members, and professors. I am endlessly grateful for the feedback and support throughout this process from my two wonderful advisors, Dr. Rebecca Tuuri and Dr. Bridget Hayden. Dr. Andrew Haley was always ready with insightful comments and inquiries; and Dr. Ed Jackson provided unwavering moral support. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Kyle Zelner and Dr. Marie Danforth for their support in organizing the confusion of the dual degree program. Lastly, I am grateful to Dr. Susannah Ural for her words of encouragement through the most difficult times.

Graduate school and the thesis writing process would have been unimaginable without my family and the friends I have gathered along the way. While I have made numerous lifelong friends over the past three years, Hayley Hasik and Kaitlin Harstine were confidants and cheerleaders from the beginning. I am grateful to them both for their friendship. Although my family lived more than 900 miles away, my parents, sister, aunts, and grandparents were always there to support me. I will always cherish our long Sunday morning phone calls. Lastly, thank you to my partner, Cameron Walker and our three rescue pets. All of the five and a half hour long drives between Tallahassee and Hattiesburg were worth it.

DEDICATION

This thesis would not have been possible without the committed women of Hattiesburg's literary clubs. I would like to give a special acknowledgement to the women involved in the Review Club, both past and present. These clubwomen, who have met for more than 100 years, have a deep veneration for the actions of the members who came before them. I am thankful that the women have dutifully preserved so much of their club history and have allowed researchers to also tell their story.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>GFWC</i>	General Federation of Women's Clubs
<i>MFWC</i>	Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs
<i>MLA</i>	McCain Library and Archives
<i>UDC</i>	United Daughters of Confederacy
<i>USM</i>	The University of Southern Mississippi
<i>YWCA</i>	Young Women's Christian Association

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

In April 1915, twenty-two of Hattiesburg's affluent women gathered for a joint meeting of the Woman's Club and Sowania Club. The get-together's hostesses, Mrs. J. M. Stevens and Miss Juliet Featherstun, decorated their home on College Street with "wild azalea, dogwood, yellow jasmine, and other woodland blossoms" and served guests fruit punch, ice cream, and cake.¹ While the clubwomen typically met separately during the week, this special gathering brought the two clubs together on a Saturday afternoon to listen to papers about Frances Hodgson Burnett, "The Beginning of American Art," and "Noted American Artists." Every aspect of this meeting – as with the women's standard gatherings – was meticulously planned and, ultimately, was designed to demonstrate the women's socioeconomic affluence and commitment to intellectualism.

Organized women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had the potential to exert tremendous influence over societal development, including areas such as education and social welfare, despite a lack of direct political power.² Women engaged with one another over national and local issues through membership in female-only groups. Inclusion in these women's groups helped challenge the long-held notion that women were helpless creatures whose place was firmly in the home and instead placed them into a position of power in their communities, and sometimes state.³ White

¹ "Social and Personal," *Hattiesburg News*, April 12, 1915.

² Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880–1930* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 5.

³ Janet L. Coryell, Anastatia Sims, Sandra Treadway, and Thomas Appleton, Jr., *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing With the Powers That Be* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

women's organizations were often justified by sociability and recreation, but women often aggregated into clubs focused on religiously based philanthropy, or were drawn together by a common interest in intellectualism and learning. Women established literary clubs as a means for self-betterment and these organizations provided an opportunity for further education for women in a time where opportunities remained limited for women's higher education.⁴ Literary clubs not only acted as educative spaces for their members, but also accommodated political dialogues. Clubs open exclusively to women were also the best way for society women to voice their opinions amongst peers and away from male scrutiny, making having political opinions more viable. Membership in a woman's club heightened the possibility of influence in their communities because there is, in fact, strength in numbers.

Voluntary associations grew most significantly between 1870 and 1920, largely due to effects of urbanization and industrialization.⁵ With population influx into cities, people's close community-based social networks fractured. The proliferation of organized groups was most significant and long lasting in the Midwest and West because voluntary organizations, including women's clubs, provided a space for individuals to recreate social bonds and reinforce relationships within small towns.⁶ This was a pattern that included Mississippi's newly settled lumber towns like Hattiesburg. In this context of upheaval, individuals sought "gender defined associational attachments outside the

⁴ For more information, see: <https://www.muw.edu/about-muw/our-history>.

⁵ Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam, "The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840-1940," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999), 529.

⁶ *Ibid*, 551.

home,” especially as city life posed new threats to traditional gender roles due to the aforementioned shifts in conventional social networks.⁷

In 1898, Mrs. J. C. Croly, the founder of one of the first recognized woman’s literary clubs, Sorosis, and the organizer of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, wrote a history of the woman’s club movement in the United States. She stated: “the philosophy of the great club movement is constructive and educational, and its methods of work are non-aggressive.”⁸ Despite being “non-aggressive,” the clubs and their members introduced significant social change for women, and provided a vehicle for women to expand their influence outside of the home in a time where society expected women to be subservient. Literary clubs in particular cultivated intellectual stimulation, aroused a sense of community amongst the women, and allowed women to push against societal expectations without employing radicalism.

This study examines the activity and impact of white women’s literary clubs in Hattiesburg, Mississippi between the city’s founding in 1884 and the end of World War II in 1945. This project seeks to determine to what extent women adhered to or broke away from societal norms of the time by involving themselves in intellectually stimulating groups with other women, especially in response to rapidly changing standards of femininity and womanhood occurring during the Progressive era. Although these literary organizations formed as a means for self betterment – meaning that the women viewed education as a way to improve themselves to solidify their position as a part of the elite community – the club members were doing a lot more than reading. They

⁷ Gamm and Putnam, “The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America,” 530.

⁸ Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen & Co., 1898).

were using their club work to grapple with ideas about what it meant to be a woman, and ultimately redefine their role in society through communal political action. Additionally, women's literary clubs reveal insights into patterns of women moving out of the home and into a more public role, in addition to signifying the new ways in which women fit themselves into a society with established gender ideals, such as that of a typical "southern lady."

Club activity records show how organized Hattiesburg women fit into larger models of progressive womanhood while maintaining the decorum that was expected of them. The cultural and structural contributions of women's organizations in Hattiesburg have largely gone unrecognized in the literature, but their impact on the city's infrastructure, including sanitation and education, has been long lasting. Paula Baker defines politics as "any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community."⁹ Based on Baker's broad definition of politics, this thesis argues that these literary clubs fostered an environment where women engaged in political activity despite the scholarly motivations of the clubs. Women's literary clubs in Hattiesburg organized women and allowed them to instill a deeply rooted, progressive influence on a growing city in a traditionally conservative state.

Otto Robertson's early history of Hattiesburg, published in 1898, was the first comprehensive history of the early years of Hattiesburg and gives insight into how residents saw themselves and how they wanted readers to view their town. In the booklet's introduction, Robertson writes that the people of Hattiesburg are "progressive

⁹ Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 622.

but not aggressive,” demonstrating that even in the early years of Hattiesburg, the city was considered a node of progressive thought.¹⁰ Benjamin Morris’s *Hattiesburg Mississippi*, a synthesis of archival material, provides a narrative of the development of Hattiesburg through accounts of events such as the impact of the establishment of the Southern Railway Company.¹¹ Though Morris, like Robertson, does not pay much attention to detailing any particular women’s organizations, he does make mention of them and points to their importance in the formation of the early town. Women’s literary clubs in Hattiesburg organized women into effectual groups and allowed them to have a deeply rooted, progressive influence on a growing city in a traditionally conservative state. This research demonstrates the degree to which women shaped local culture through their involvement in voluntary organizations. Despite a lack of direct political power during the early 1900s, organized women had the potential to exert tremendous influence over society’s development through their club-based actions. The women used their club membership as a platform to engage in social, philanthropic, political, and intellectual activities. By examining the ways in which Hattiesburg clubwomen exercised their collective thought and agency to transform their surroundings and bring about lasting cultural change, the present research serves to demonstrate another facet of southern women’s history and southern culture by focusing on the actions of one particular city’s literary clubwomen.

¹⁰ Otto Robertson, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi* (Hattiesburg: Progress Book and Job Print, 1898), 1.

¹¹ Benjamin Morris, *Hattiesburg Mississippi: A History of the Hub City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 56.

Historical scholarship has clearly demonstrated that women used club activities to expand their societal involvement and influence during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* confronts the previously held notion that southern women did nothing to challenge the limitations placed on them.¹² Scott, as well as Janet Sharistianian and Janet Coryell, address the impact of a public versus private dichotomy on women's lives and the ways in which women tested boundaries established by ideas of womanhood that traditionally tied them to the private sphere.¹³ Women's club activities reveal the actions that women took to push back against these cultural limitations of southern womanhood, without being aggressive in their reach for change. Jayne Morris-Crowther asserts that women used their historic roles in the household as a way to validate their work in society and to subsequently use their organization as a way to make their way into the political arena.¹⁴ Social aspects of women's everyday lives readily facilitated the movement of women into more political activities, such as canvassing neighborhoods and writing letters to implement civic change. Bringing women into focused groups allowed them to work together to incite change without trying to break apart gender roles completely.

¹² Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

¹³ Janet Sharistianian. *Beyond the Public/Domestic Dichotomy: Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Public Lives* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Janet L. Coryell, Thom H. Appleton, Jr., Anastatia Sims, and Sandra Gioia Treadway, eds. *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing With the Powers That Be* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Jayne Morris-Crowther, "Municipal Housekeeping: The Political Activities of the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1920s," *Michigan Historical Review* 30, no. 1 (2004): 31-57.

Clubs provided a means for women to enter into the public sphere by exploiting the societal expectations of women as moral superiors and domestic experts. By using these expectations to their advantage, Karen J. Blair argues that clubwomen embodied what she calls “Domestic Feminism, or the extension of woman’s domestically oriented traits into the public sphere” in order to extend her influence into a male-dominated society.¹⁵ Blair essentially argues that the clubwomen’s literary activities were a passive consumption of culture and knowledge.

Contrary to this idea that women were passive consumers, Anne Ruggles Gere’s *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920*, argues that literary “clubwomen helped create a broader view of culture,” meaning that the club environment allowed women to actively participate in the production and “dissemination of culture,” which challenged men’s traditional monopolization of so-called “high culture.”¹⁶ While men overwhelmingly controlled the “institutions of high culture,” clubwomen’s efforts toward self-education reclaimed some of the culture making attributed to men.¹⁷ This active repossession of culture-building came “through [the women’s] processes of deliberating about and constructing annual programs of study; reading, discussing, and writing about books [...]; establishing or raising funds for museums, symphonies, and scholarships for artists; and writing or producing their own plays and pageants.”¹⁸ Like Gere, sociologist Elizabeth Long asserts that Blair is

¹⁵ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as a Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), 117.

¹⁶ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 176.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 176.

incorrect about her assumptions regarding clubwomen and cultural knowledge and production. In her study, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, Long argues that women's club activities "brought them into the world of intellectual analysis, opinions held and defended, and confident self-expression."¹⁹

The proliferation of women's clubs in the early twentieth century happened alongside an improvement in access to education and these upper to middle class organizations focused on improvement of education as their "humanitarian duty."²⁰ Social clubs often included education for the ladies of the club in the form of reading groups and as well as lectures. The efficacy of change introduced by the club increased as these women improved their own education, particularly when they completed upper-level secondary schooling.²¹ Robert Taggart's article "Women's Clubs as Educative Agencies," delves into the work of women's clubs in Delaware and focuses on the impact of women's organizations on the implementation of universal education. First and foremost, the article demonstrates the pattern of women driving cultural change despite having little formal political power. Taggart lays out the full impact of these women in establishing compulsory education for children, as well as improving efficiency at the schools, including encouraging parent-teacher associations.²² Overall, Taggart's article neatly sets up a lens through which to study women's groups, particularly in their engagement with public education.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 44.

²⁰ Robert Taggart, "Women's Clubs as Educative Agencies: Wilmington, Delaware New Century Club, 1889-1920," *American Educational History Journal* 33, no. 5 (March 2006) 57-58.

²¹ Taggart, "Women's Clubs as Educative Agencies," 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 60.

Jayne Morris-Crowther's study on the political impact of clubs in 1920s Detroit demonstrates the breadth of influence of women's clubs had. Like Taggart, Morris-Crowther argues that these women used their historic roles in the household as a way to validate their work in society, and to subsequently use their organization as a way to make their way into the political arena.²³ Women's everyday lives readily facilitated the movement of women into more political activities, such as canvassing neighborhoods and writing letters to individuals in the community to implement civic change. "Municipal housekeeping" legitimized women's public work outside of their individual homes, and the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs helped to promote clubwomen's agendas within the city. Morris-Crowther's article details the involvement of women in a sprawling and dense city, and her article demonstrates the power that women have had in societal change in a growing city.

Much of the research that has been conducted on clubwomen during this period focuses on women's club activities in the northeastern United States, especially in areas with large cities. There are a multitude of studies of women's organizations in major cities, such as in Boston and New York.²⁴ Karen Blair's analysis in her study *The Clubwoman as a Feminist* primarily uses examples from the northeast to illustrate the clubwoman's role as a feminist; unfortunately her research leaves readers wondering if southern ladies also fit into this pattern of forward-thinking women.

²³ Jayne Morris-Crowther, "Municipal Housekeeping: The Political Activities of the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1920s," *Michigan Historical Review* 30, no. 1 (2004): 31-57.

²⁴ Kate Clifford Larson, "The Saturday Evening Girls: A Progressive Era Library Club and the Intellectual Life of Working Class and Immigrant Girls in Turn-of-the-Century Boston," *The Library Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (Apr., 2001): 195-230.

In the southern United States, work focusing on clubwomen is more limited. Several books address women's club activities in the South, including Anastatia Sims's *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, Joan Marie Johnson's *Southern Ladies, New Women*, and Elizabeth Hays Turner's *Women, Culture, and Community*. Each of these studies demonstrates the impact of southern women's clubs on their respective communities. Anastatia Sims constructs a wide-ranging overview of voluntary women's organizations in North Carolina between 1880 and 1930, within both white and African American communities.²⁵ The study examines a variety of heritage, suffrage, and literary organizations to argue that the women simultaneously challenged and perpetuated the ideal of southern womanhood through their club involvement. Although this source is focused in North Carolina, it can be useful in understanding the growth of women's organizations in the time period and to help determine the similarities and differences in the development of women's clubs through the South.

Joan Marie Johnson's *Southern Ladies, New Women* moves geographically south to study women's clubs in South Carolina.²⁶ Like Sims's study, Johnson examines a wide variety of organizations to demonstrate clubwomen's reform-minded actions between 1890 and 1930. The study draws parallels between white and black clubwomen to show that both groups held similar ideas about womanhood and societal improvements. However, because of the ideologies of the Lost Cause and New Womanhood, each group had their own ideas about how to fit themselves into the changing social landscape.

²⁵ Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880–1930* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁶ Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

Elizabeth Hays Turner limits her research in *Women, Culture, and Community* specifically to women in Galveston, Texas, to interrogate themes of gender, race, and religion.²⁷ Each of these studies, however, seem extraordinarily broad as each author takes a city and examines all types of women's clubs: from social and patriotic, to religious and literary. Though these types of studies allow for a better understanding of the various ways in which women were interacting with their social environments, it is more difficult to glean how individual types of clubs, and particular niches of women, influenced the culture of their area.

Clubs united women in their drive to improve society and push the limitations of their societal involvement out of the home. Literary clubs in the South not only provided sociability and a sense of camaraderie, but it also allowed women a chance to invest in their own education and self-betterment through discussing intellectual culture by reading and reviewing literature and discussing history and current events. Women gathered at regularly scheduled meetings to converse over books, but they also engaged in a multitude of progressive initiatives, such as public education, and in these actions established themselves as culture-builders.²⁸ Betty Holland Wiesepape's *Lone Star Chapters: The Story of Texas Literary Clubs* is one of the few studies that explicitly examine southern women's literary clubs during the Progressive Era. Wiesepape, however, focuses on groups of women writers and the long-term effects of their workshop groups on Texan literature rather than examining literary organizations that

²⁷ Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸ Elizabeth Long, "Literature as a Spur to Collective Action: The Diverse Perspectives of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Reading Groups" *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 335-359; Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices*.

primarily read and reviewed texts.²⁹ Unfortunately, it appears that work on women's literary or culture clubs in the South is more limited than the research detailing southern clubwomen.

There seem to be no equivalent monographs to those by the aforementioned authors that focus on Mississippi clubwomen in the progressive period. Though there is a book detailing the history of the Mississippi Federation of Women's clubs from 1898 to 1998, there is little mention of the state's clubs elsewhere, especially analyzing the women's activities in a broader historical context.³⁰ Even Jane C. Croly's 1898 history of the women's club movement only includes one substantive mention Mississippi's clubs.³¹ Additionally, little research has been conducted on southern literary clubs at the turn of the twentieth century. In this way, the research in this thesis fills a gap in the body of scholarship related to southern women and progressivism by focusing on women's literary clubs in a self-defined progressive city. Examining literary clubs specifically is a way to observe the longitudinal impact of women's organizations on Hattiesburg's culture while also broadening history's understanding of southern womanhood.

The recent publication of William Sturkey's *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White* acts as an even greater justification for this thesis.³² While Sturkey eloquently addresses the impact of powerful white men on shaping Hattiesburg's culture, he almost

²⁹ Betty Holland Wiesepape, *Lone Star Chapters: The Story of Texas Literary Clubs* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

³⁰ Tommye Hogue Rosenbaum, *A History Of The Mississippi Federation of Women's Club 1898-1998* (GFWC Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, Inc., 1998).

³¹ Jane C. Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen & Co., 1898), 780.

³² William Sturkey. *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

entirely neglects white women's contributions to the city's formation. These women played a critical role in Hattiesburg's development and this thesis argues that their literary groups were more than a place to read and discuss books. The members not only used these organizations to further their own education and socialize with other women but the club meetings also served as a critical proving ground for political action and community organization.

Archival materials pertaining to women's clubs in Hattiesburg are scattered spatially at various historical repositories, but are also temporally fragmented. This research pulls together documents and newspapers from various archives and libraries to create a multi-faceted investigation of literary club history in the first sixty years after Hattiesburg's founding. The vast majority of the archival sources for this project come from the McCain Library and Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). Additional archival sources are housed in the Hattiesburg Area Historical Society. Other resources, particularly those pertaining to statewide women's organizations, are from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) in Jackson.

There are a handful of collections of literary club documents housed at the McCain Archives at USM. Founded in 1913 and 1916 respectively, the sizeable collections of the Review and Orpheus Clubs include the yearbooks and meeting minutes, newspaper clippings, and photos that provide information about the two clubs' members and activities.³³ The detail in the collections provide specific information about the membership and meetings, events, and public projects of each of the two clubs that can

³³ Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, McCain Library and Archives, Hattiesburg, Mississippi (henceforth MLA); Orpheus Club Records, 1918-1986, M409, MLA.

be cross-examined with the more fragmented records of other women's literary clubs in Hattiesburg between 1884 and 1945. By identifying and tracing trends through meeting minute logbooks and records of the club's governance and membership, this thesis attempts to characterize these literary clubs to determine their members' role in the establishment of the town's culture.

Additionally, there is a collection of Hattiesburg social and service club yearbooks and membership logs at the McCain Archives for at least six social and service clubs that date back as early as 1923.³⁴ Literary clubs within this particular collection include: the Study Club, Nautilus Club, and Iris Club. Along with the Review Club, Orpheus Club, and the Women's Club of Hattiesburg collections,³⁵ the yearbooks and membership records in this assemblage serve to help establish any cross-membership in clubs among women in the community and to determine the ways in which women were interacting with each other and their community.

Collections located at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History further the investigation into the degree of statewide involvement of the Hattiesburg ladies' groups. Connecting Hattiesburg clubwomen to ladies in the state helps to put the activities of Hattiesburg women into context. It also builds a sketch of the women's networks of interaction that demonstrate community building amongst themselves, and how they utilized collective action more widely to push progressive campaigns throughout the state. An examination of the convention programs for the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs (MFWC), to which many of the Hattiesburg literary clubs

³⁴ Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971, M531, MLA.

³⁵ Women's Club of Hattiesburg, 1920-1967, M163, MLA.

belonged, helps to show how clubs around the state interacted with one another.³⁶ An assortment of yearbooks from the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs is also available at the Mississippi Department of Archives, with one dating as early as 1906.³⁷ These yearbooks explain the goals of the MFWC and summarize the club programs and activities for a specific year.

Using Hattiesburg as a case study, this thesis builds a chronological story of the impact of women's literary clubs starting around the incorporation of the town in 1884. The second chapter, focuses on the period from 1884 to 1920, and sets the tone for women's work in a town established by the male-dominated lumber and railroad industries. Middle to upper class white women established literary clubs to build a sense of community amongst themselves and to foster academic growth through intellectual discussion. Ultimately, the women influenced the development of the town's culture through their club-based progressive action. Even in the city's origins, the fundamental role that women played in the creation of community is tangible and clubwomen's work in this period prophesized the impact of their efforts in the future. Clubwomen in Hattiesburg took action as World War I ravaged Europe and used traditional female roles to their advantage by sponsoring war relief programs. They used these activities as a platform for expansion of women's rights in a time where women continued to rethink both their role in the home and their place in society. Clubwomen used their domestic expertise during WWI to validate the expansion of their club activities from self-

³⁶ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs; Programme: annual convention, 1905, 367/M67p/8th, MDAH, Jackson, Mississippi.

³⁷ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1906, 367/M69y, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

improvement. After the conclusion of the war, women found that continuing their work within the community was possible and pushed to challenge prescribed roles by engaging with national movements, such as suffrage.

Literary clubs multiply in the third chapter, which covers Hattiesburg's history between 1920 and 1933. By 1930, there were more than twenty active literary clubs in the city, which each functioned to connect women through education, social service, and politics.³⁸ The Nineteenth Amendment, which was ratified at the beginning of the chronology of this chapter in 1920, gave women the right to vote and a new opportunity to influence their community. Clubs met to discuss topics included on ballots and encouraged women to take advantage of their right to vote, demonstrating the continued importance of club environment in fostering political discourse among the women. The philanthropic side of women's club initiatives in this period focused on community improvement, as well as poor relief during the intensification of economic distress. The lumber industry started to sputter in the 1920s, causing job opportunities to shrink tremendously, and Hattiesburg struggled even before the advent of the Great Depression. By utilizing their domestic skills to bring relief to the community, and exercising their newfound right to vote, this chapter shows how women stepped further out of their homes and confronted roles expected of southern ladies.

The fourth chapter picks up in 1933 at the height of the Great Depression and carries the narrative through the end of World War II, in 1945. Women continued their club activism in Hattiesburg throughout this period, as they did during WWI, by leading

³⁸ "21 Literary Clubs of Hub Promote Progress," *Hattiesburg American*, October 26, 1932.

relief efforts for the city during World War II. Through their work within the city, as well as at Camp Shelby, the clubwomen further expanded their sphere of influence outside of the home and established themselves firmly as strong leaders in their community.

Women's literary clubs were not passive entities: the women actively sought out opportunities for self-improvement by way of intellectual and social stimulation facilitated by club activities, and used their democratic organization to employ collective action to better their community as a whole.

CHAPTER II – “THE WORLD IS ADVANCING, ADVANCE WITH IT”:

1894-1920

Hattiesburg was founded as a result of the railroad and lumber industries that cut into the southern Mississippi in the late nineteenth century. Entrepreneurs came to the region to harness the vast natural resources found in the virtually untouched longleaf pine forests, including immense quantities of lumber and turpentine. The forests were still intact when land surveyor William H. Hardy came to the area in 1880 as part of a surveying mission for the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad through southeastern Mississippi.³⁹ After his work with the railroad was completed, Hardy returned to the area, purchased a plot of land, established a train depot and a station house, and began to lay out the present city, which he named Hattiesburg. The settlement grew steadily after it was incorporated in 1884, and by the time the ten-year anniversary of the city rolled around, business was booming, and several thousand people lived in town. With four rail lines converging in the city, Hattiesburg had quickly become the railroad center of southern Mississippi. After 1910, Mississippi’s population and wealth grew in a large part because of the phenomenal rise in the lumber industry in the southern part of the state.⁴⁰ Because of the abundance of coveted long-leaf yellow pine in the forests surrounding Hattiesburg, thousands of men flooded into the area searching for work in the following decades. Hattiesburg became a regional industry hub because of that

³⁹ William Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 27.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Morris, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi: A History of the Hub City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 64-5.

growth.⁴¹ In 1910, the population of Forrest County was 20,772, with 11,737 of those inhabitants concentrated within Hattiesburg's city limits.⁴²

The wives, sisters, and mothers of the city's entrepreneurs founded woman-only clubs to carve out a space where women could socialize with one another but also shape their community as they saw fit. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the women congregated into various literary clubs and hereditary organizations, including the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1900) and, later, a chapter of the National Society of the American Revolution (1936).⁴³ Some of the earliest women's literary clubs formed in Hattiesburg date back to the turn of the twentieth century, including the Wednesday Club (1902) and the Sowania Club (1906, but also listed under a different name dating back to 1899).⁴⁴ These literary clubs, and the multitude of others formed over the next few decades, served to expand the domestic sphere into the traditionally male dominated public domain. Women's organizations stood in contrast— and as a complement— to the male-dominated industry that characterized Hattiesburg, and their collective action helped establish the city as an important regional focal point.

By studying these clubs, the fundamental role that women played in the creation of a citywide community becomes clear: the clubwomen help set the foundation for the city's progressive trajectory by pushing for infrastructure and laws to make the city a

⁴¹ Alma Hickman, *Southern as I Knew It* (Hattiesburg: University of Southern Mississippi Press, 1966), 9.

⁴² "History: The First Ninety Years of Forrest County, Mississippi," Forrest County MS, accessed June 29, 2019, https://forrestcountymiss.us/?page_id=83; *Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory, 1921* (Memphis: R. L. Polk & Co., 1921).

⁴³ *The History of Forrest County Mississippi* (Hattiesburg: Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, 2000), 76-79.

⁴⁴ "21 Literary Clubs of Hub Promote Progress," *Hattiesburg American*, October 26, 1932.

better place to live, at least as far as they saw it. Throughout this period, women continued to rethink both their role in the home and their place in society, while creating a community of like-minded women and the literary clubs served as a woman-only space for intellectual discourse and camaraderie. Although literary clubwomen strove to better their own education and create a superior community to live in, prevailing ideas about the Lost Cause, segregation, and Southern womanhood influenced the women's ideas about what constituted "progress" and who was worthy of their philanthropy. Additionally, with evolving ideas about southern womanhood and the New Woman, Hattiesburg's literary clubwomen worked to "translate private domesticity into public housekeeping" to shape their community as they saw fit.⁴⁵

Creating a Sense of Community

Hattiesburg's literary clubwomen were overwhelmingly white, married, Christian women.⁴⁶ The clubwomen belonged to the middle to upper classes of Hattiesburg society and many were married to prominent men in the city. Some groups, such as the Sowania Club, were made up of all unmarried women who left the organization following marriage, while other groups, like the Pine Burr Club, were exclusively made up of married women. The political and ideological leanings of individual clubs remain unknown but it can be assumed that all of these elite clubwomen were interested in

⁴⁵ Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 3.

⁴⁶ This study focuses on affluent white women, but more research is needed to determine the impact of African American literary clubs in Hattiesburg. A co-ed African American literary club from Hattiesburg was mentioned in an Indianapolis newspaper from 1908. "Hattiesburg, Miss.," *The Freeman: Illustrated Colored Newspaper* (Indianapolis), March 7, 1908.

making their city a vibrant and safe place to live, which often meant reinforcing race and class structures. In other words, the women's sociocultural status "affected how they defined their agenda, according to their own experiences, as well as what they perceived to be community needs."⁴⁷ Equally important to their desire to implement progressive social change, local women established the literary clubs as a social space that created a sense of community amongst themselves that also expanded their access to intellectual dialogue. Because of the clubwomen's generally privileged social positions in a time of entrenched racism and segregation, the organizations' philanthropic activities benefitted those they deemed worthy of help, which largely excluded Hattiesburg's African American population.

While the clubs did often have contact with one another, especially for large-scale community projects, such as city cleanup initiatives, there were frequently class-based distinctions that dictated which clubs a woman could belong to. Each club capped their membership to between 15 and 30 women each year, and every new member had to be nominated by one of the existing members of the club. This induction process involved a nomination being submitted to the secretary of the club, which was then put to a vote in the following meeting. For example, according to the Woman's Club's by-laws, three negative votes for a potential member meant that she was denied membership and that she could not be nominated again for a year. Additionally, no member could submit more than one name for membership per club year.⁴⁸ The women curated their club membership to include members who fit the club's mission and goals, which

⁴⁷ Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 173.

⁴⁸ 1920-21 Yearbook, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg, M163, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

demonstrates the women's interactions and the ways in which they created communities within the larger social atmosphere. Building a reputation of exclusivity allowed the women to display their social position within the larger community, and to gain clout because of their association with other noteworthy women.

The Woman's Club included some of the most affluent ladies in the city, including the wives of doctors, prominent businessmen, and politicians. One of the prominent ladies involved with the early Woman's Club was Rebecca O'Neal Tatum. Rebecca was born and married in Tennessee and moved to Hattiesburg in 1893 with her husband and children.⁴⁹ Her husband, Mr. W. S. F. Tatum, started a lumber mill upon their arrival, co-founded the Bonhomie and Hattiesburg Southern Railroad, and served two terms as mayor of Hattiesburg in the 1920s and 30s.⁵⁰ Rebecca Tatum was a charter member of the Woman's Club, which was founded in 1909, but she also organized the First District of the Mississippi Club Federation and served for a number of years as an officer in the Mississippi State Federation of Women's Clubs.⁵¹ Rebecca's daughter-in-law, Minnie Thrash Tatum, was also an early member of the club. According to the 1929 city directory, Minnie's husband, W. O. Tatum served as the president of the Citizen's Bank and the vice-president of the Bonhomie and Hattiesburg Southern Railroad. These two women were married to exceptionally well-connected men, but many of the other ladies in the Woman's Club were also part of the upper tier of Hattiesburg society. As

⁴⁹ "Funeral Services Are Held For Mrs. W. S. F. Tatum," Rebecca O'Neal Tatum Personal Records, 1910-1940, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 553, Folder 22, MLA.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Morris, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi*, 62-3.

⁵¹ Rebecca O'Neal Tatum Personal Records, 1910-1940, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 553, Folder 22, MLA.

previously mentioned, a club often tied women together based on their economic class and social standing.

Though ladies' literary organizations were formed as an educative and social space, as well as an extension of the domestic sphere, the women took the meetings seriously and club meetings were tightly structured. Each club wrote a constitution and strictly adhered to parliamentary procedures, like taking roll and electing club officials, which mirrored the formal political proceedings that were customarily off-limits to women.⁵² By imitating these practices the women hoped to imbue legitimacy into their meetings and separate the literary groups from separated their work “from more informal women’s social groups.”⁵³ Typically, the club year ran from early fall through the late spring, with a break in meetings from Christmastime through the New Year. The meetings occurred on a set weeknight every other week and were hosted by one of the club members at her home. The hostess customarily served light refreshments of her choosing, while another member led the ladies in a discussion of the assigned topic for that meeting. These topics were most often literary in nature but they could also be focused on history, current events, or a specific geographic location. The women read new books and discussed worldly matters in a group setting to share ideas and learn from one another, and by doing so the women restructured how culture was created.

In addition to their educative goals, the women's clubs were formed in part as a space to interact with other women, but despite the sociability the members were

⁵² Elizabeth Long, “Literature as a Spur to Collective Action: The Diverse Perspectives of Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Reading Groups,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 337-338.

⁵³ Long, “Literature as a Spur to Collective Action,” 338.

committed to running the club efficiently. Each club had a distinct objective or mission statement that spoke to the club's goals and focus. These usually sounded something like the Nautilus Club's mission: "The object of this club shall be the mutual improvement of its members, through the cultivation of the highest social ideals and through the improvement of its literary taste," in addition to a statement regarding a dedication to civic improvement, or "community betterment."⁵⁴ The mission statements, in combination with the women's dedication to philanthropy, show that not only were the women joining in the clubs to better themselves, but they also had a stake in bettering their community as a whole. Especially with Hattiesburg being a new city, women's club activities proceeded to shape the town as it grew.

Each club published an annual "yearbook" that contained the organization's constitution, by-laws, and that year's officers. The constitutions and by-laws included the objective of the group, duties of the officers, and membership guidelines. In a democratic fashion, by-laws could only be amended by a majority vote. In addition to regular literary meetings and a social meeting or two throughout the club year, where the women were free to socialize amongst themselves without a structured discussion or lecture, the clubs also typically held two business meetings. During these meetings, the women voted on new officers, who each held their position for one year, and conducted formal business that would not be addressed in the weekly meetings. If a member missed a meeting for any reason and did not alert the hostess ahead of time, she would incur a fee, set typically

⁵⁴ 1923-24 Nautilus Club Yearbook, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971: M531, Box 1, Folder 6, MLA; 1929-30 Yearbook, Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 13, MLA.

at five cents per missed meeting.⁵⁵ Penalizing members for not attending meetings, as well as the strict protocol for bringing new members into the club, demonstrates that the clubwomen strove to maintain high operating standards for their clubs so that the women would be taken seriously in their community rather than being dismissed as a frivolous .

In addition, the yearbook typically named the year's program, including the theme for the year's study, and listed each meeting's date and the topic, pointed out who would be responsible for leading the day's discussion, and named the lady who would host the meeting. The yearly theme spanned topics, including "Modern Fiction," or "Fine Arts," to "A Study of the Development of the Drama," "Immigration," or "Prehistoric America." Discussion topics fostered conversation about matters relevant to the period, such as a Progressive era concern with immigration or a fascination with evolution. Each meeting the ladies discussed a different book or focus with one to three women talking to the group about the chosen pieces. Often the books featured a strong female lead or grappled with broad moral questions. The Orpheus Club, for instance, read "Barren Ground" by Ellen Glasgow, a novel narrating the life of a young, independent, and intelligent Virginia woman who is trying to find her purpose in life.⁵⁶ A focus on strong female lead characters was a common phenomenon in the literature chosen for the clubs' reading lists. Typically, the books were reviewed by the woman leading the meeting, and were then followed by questions, sometimes regarding the character of the characters, including sacrifice and strength, but the ladies also discussed broad– and often potentially polarizing – questions, such as "should women serve on a criminal court jury?" even

⁵⁵ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

⁵⁶ 1926-27 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records, 1926-1986, M409, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

though women in Mississippi were not permitted to serve on criminal court juries until 1968.⁵⁷ It is clear that the ladies were interested in making themselves as knowledgeable as possible because they were not just reading stereotypically “feminine” novels. They were reading about art, literature, politics, and social reform, and they often wove in discussions about political topics and current events into their meetings. The clubwomen’s attention to politics and current events, as well as their interest in reading literature that featured impactful women demonstrates that the clubs acted as a space for the women to develop political opinions.

The literary clubs served to establish a sense of community and camaraderie amongst local women, but they also connected Hattiesburg ladies with other clubwomen in the state and nation. In 1890, Jane Cunningham Croly founded the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) in New York City to unite clubwomen nationwide. Her intention was to garner strength from a united group of clubwomen.⁵⁸ The national organization quickly gained a “fashionable, society-like reputation” that enticed individual clubs, literary and otherwise, and state federations to join in the attempt to “collaborate, cooperate, avoid duplication of efforts, and [...] coordinate civic projects.”⁵⁹ By 1906, there were around 500,000 woman members across the United States who significantly altered the national social landscape, as well as their local communities, through their dedication to health, education, and public memory projects.⁶⁰ While the

⁵⁷ 1925-26 Nautilus Club Yearbook, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971: M531, Box 1, Folder 6, MLA.

⁵⁸ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as a Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), 93.

⁵⁹ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as a Feminist*, 95-96.

⁶⁰ Sarah S. Platt Decker, “The Meaning of the Woman’s Club Movement,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 28, (September, 1906), 2.

women involved in the GFWC did not share all of the same goals, the General Federation established a community of reform-minded women from throughout the country whose voices were magnified because of their camaraderie.

Contemporaneous with the founding of the General Federation, there was a trend nationwide for women's clubs to organize into state and regional groups to drive the clubwomen's goals. The Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs (MFWC) was organized in 1898 and aimed to give more strength to progressive initiatives through the collectivization of women's efforts.⁶¹ Two Hattiesburg organizations were listed in the 1911-1912 yearbook of the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs: the Sowania Club and the Hattiesburg Woman's Club.⁶² That number grew as women founded more groups in the city, and, by 1920, when other states ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, a network connected like-minded, progressive women throughout the state. Women used their membership in these state and national federations to further challenge the notion that a woman's place was in the home and expand their sphere of influence in society by connecting them to the world outside of their immediate community.

Progressive Initiatives

In addition to the promotion of social, literary, and educational endeavors for the individuals within the group, clubwomen aimed to better their community as a whole and contribute to assisting the needy. In doing so, the middle-class women who established Hattiesburg's literary clubs, mirrored and perpetuated many of the progressive initiatives

⁶¹ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971: M531, Box 2, Folder 6, MLA.

⁶² *Ibid.*

pushed by reformers nationwide while helping to build their new city from the ground up.

The Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs included a quote in their 1911-1912

yearbook regarding the goals of clubwomen throughout the state. The statement, from Dr.

Mary Wooley, read:

We club women have pledged ourselves to use our united strength to make better homes, better schools, better surroundings and better lives. To work together for civic health and civic righteousness, to preserve our heritage, the forest and the natural beauties of the land; to procure for our children an education which fits them for life, the training of the hand and the heart as well as the head; to protect the children, not our own, who are deprived of the birthright of natural childhood; to obtain right conditions and proper safeguards for the women who toil.⁶³

Dr. Wooley's statement reaffirmed the goals of various types of clubwomen – literary, heritage, and patriotic – throughout the state that aimed to make their individual communities reflect their own ideal values. The MFWC served to pull the women together into a statewide organization, and to drive progressive civic improvement for the state as a whole. Hattiesburg's clubwomen actively participated in this matrix, and the local women organized themselves to form a city-based federation to modify their environment more effectively.

Some of Hattiesburg's organized women pressed for county sanitation proposals, such as the establishment of a county tuberculosis camp, as well as other civic improvements. Other clubs instead concentrated their efforts on educational sponsorship through support of local children. Others focused to provide opportunities for higher education for women, who, despite widespread progressive education initiatives, still

⁶³ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971: AM 92-37, folder 6, MLA.

stood “in a tenuous relationship to the institutions of learning.”⁶⁴ The initiatives of Hattiesburg’s first literary clubwomen significantly contributed to the early city’s progressive atmosphere, expanded acceptable roles for women outside of the home, while binding the ladies together through common goals of societal uplift – although ideas of uplift often involved racist and classist ideologies.

One of the foci of many women’s clubs in this early period was public health and civic improvement. Tuberculosis, also known as consumption or wasting disease, posed a significant risk to public health and became a priority for Progressive-era reformers because of its prevalence throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁵ There was a nationwide campaign to raise money for sanatoriums and hospitals to treat tuberculosis patients by the sale of Christmas seals. The Review Club went a step further when it joined with local doctors to press local administrators to establish a tuberculosis camp in Forrest County in 1913.⁶⁶ Apparently, this endeavor was successful: in 1922, the Review Club donated \$10 to furnish a room in the Community Tuberculosis Hospital.⁶⁷ Several of the club’s members additionally went to the tuberculosis hospital on Monday, April 17, 1922 to tidy the room in preparation for a patient later that week. In pushing for a TB hospital by engaging with state administrators and doctors, the Review Club’s

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Long, “Literature as a Spur to Collective Action,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 336.

⁶⁵ “Fifty Years of the Tuberculosis Movement,” *American Journal of Public Health* 44, no. 5 (May 1954), 665-6; Michael E Teller, *The Tuberculosis Movement: A Public Health Campaign in the Progressive Era* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

⁶⁶ “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

members demonstrate the club's efficacy in bringing about reform through political engagement.

Clubwomen aimed to use their femininity to rationalize their efforts to "become defenders of the helpless," which included the sick and the mentally ill.⁶⁸ On February 20, 1918, a professor at Mississippi Normal College, Dr. May Jones, spoke at a meeting of the Hattiesburg Review Club about the conditions at the Mississippi State Insane Asylum. Dr. Jones's address informed the women about the state of Mississippi's asylum, which had been established in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of earlier progressive reforms. The meeting ended in a vote to support a bill to have a female physician installed at the institution, presumably to care for female patients.⁶⁹ Dr. Jones was a member of the Hattiesburg Woman's Club, and the Review Club elected her as President of their club in April of 1919. She spoke in at least those two clubs about various healthcare initiatives, including public sanitation and hygiene.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the club's records are unclear as to whether or not the institution installed a female physician during this period, but the clubwomen were certainly dedicated to doing so.

The women's interest in the state of the mental health institution demonstrates a widespread movement during this period of caring for the ill but also the women's devotion to improving their community's wellbeing. The Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, an organization primarily aimed to giving women a vote, also pushed to

⁶⁸ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971, M531, folder 6, MLA.

⁶⁹ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

⁷⁰ "Report of Review Club, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, October 1918-1919," Yearly Reports, M449, Box 1, Folder 10, MLA.

bring a female physician into the state's asylums. This statewide organization's interest in ensuring "the needs of the most helpless of all dependent classes," shows that the political work of Hattiesburg's clubwomen aligned with that of other women in the state and demonstrates the political nature of the literary clubs.⁷¹ Mental health initiatives were yet another facet of the clubwomen's efforts to develop social welfare programs to care for children, elderly, and ill to improve the "physical, mental, and moral healthfulness" of their communities.⁷² These labors often only benefitted those the women deemed "worthy," which overwhelmingly consisted of white individuals.

Women used their domestic expertise to engage in civic improvements, which included club projects, such as city beautification. In these projects, women took the lead to bring men, women, and businesses together throughout the area to take part in initiatives, such as city cleanup projects, which demonstrates the integral role that clubwomen played in organizing the early city. The Hattiesburg Review Club sponsored a city cleanup initiative in 1914 to make "Hattiesburg a city beautiful."⁷³ While it is unclear to what extent the community participated in the 1914 cleanup, the Woman's Club led another city cleanup in April 1915 that involved help from throughout the community. At least in this second instance, the city's clubwomen, under the City Federation of Women's Clubs, worked in conjunction with more than a dozen local

⁷¹ Nellie Nugent Somerville, "How Mississippi Women Work for the Vote," Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, University of Mississippi Libraries, Oxford, Mississippi. (digital <http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/suffrage/id/117/rec/10>)

⁷² Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 115.

⁷³ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

businesses to make Hattiesburg the “cleanest and most sanitary city in the state.”⁷⁴ These cleanups were encouraged by the state board of health to promote “health and beauty,” and, at least in 1915, more than thirty towns across Mississippi competed in a sanitary-health contest- including Hattiesburg.⁷⁵

The woman-led cleanup became a citywide crusade; businesses and individuals were all expected to do their part to tidy up Hattiesburg. The local newspaper announced that several prominent businesses in the city, including McNair & Company and the Hattiesburg Hardware Company, were to close on the final day of the cleanup, which was scheduled for Tuesday, April 13, 1915.⁷⁶ The City Federation of Women’s Clubs, under the direction of Mrs. J. S. Conner, introduced a petition to encourage Hattiesburg businesses to close at noon on the day of the cleanup. The organizers expected that “practically every commercial establishment in Hattiesburg’s name” was going to be included by the Saturday before the cleanup.⁷⁷ As the date approached, more businesses announced their closure for that Tuesday afternoon, despite potentially severe interruptions to production and profits. Some of the largest corporations could not afford to shut down completely for the event. However, representatives from J. J. Newman Lumber Company and from the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad announced that they planned to “do everything possible to assist in the movement” and to encourage

⁷⁴ “Entire City Falls Into Line in the Clean-Up Campaign,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 6, 1915.

⁷⁵ “Business Men Are Signing Petition for Half Holiday,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 7, 1915.

⁷⁶ “Entire City Falls Into Line in the Clean-Up Campaign,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 6, 1915.

⁷⁷ “Business Men Are Signing Petition for Half Holiday,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 7, 1915.

each of their employees to clean up their personal property, as well as the businesses' lands.⁷⁸

All community members were expected to tidy their yards, both front and back, and the organizers asked the City Commissioners “for the use of their street cleaning wagons [...] with which to remove the collected debris.”⁷⁹ The cleanup initiative also reached African American communities in Hattiesburg, and while the extent of participation in the city remains unknown, in some towns, white and African American women’s organizations worked together to organize city cleanups “for the common good.”⁸⁰ In the city, African American schools closed for a half school day on April 15 so that students could help with cleaning.⁸¹ Hattiesburg’s newspaper reported that the African American residents joined the cleanup movement “with heart and soul.”⁸² The city’s constituents believed that ensuring the overall city’s cleanliness and sanitation would lead to the city’s growth and prosperity. An editorialist observed that Memphis, Tennessee pulled itself out of bankruptcy by overhauling the city’s sanitation, which improved property values and led to it being “one of the leading and prosperous cities of the South.”⁸³ The *Hattiesburg News* pointed out that a freshly painted house with a clean yard and neighborhood is infinitely more attractive to a potential buyer. An untidy home “makes anybody think the man who owns it is just as shabby and careless as the home he

⁷⁸ “Entire City Falls Into Line in the Clean-Up Campaign,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 6, 1915.

⁷⁹ “Clean Back Yards As Well As Front Ones,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 9, 1915.

⁸⁰ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 110.

⁸¹ “Clean Back Yards As Well As Front Ones,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 9, 1915.

⁸² “Cleaning Up,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 10, 1915.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

occupies.”⁸⁴ By cleaning, the women sought to make their city a more beautiful and healthy space, but tidying also “meshed with local boosterism” to make the area “more appealing for the commerce of the New South.”⁸⁵

Though Hattiesburg did not place in the statewide cleanup competition, the widespread participation throughout the city demonstrates the community’s profound respect for the clubwomen who organized the event.⁸⁶ Mrs. Conner stated: “Those who are regarding [the cleanup] as a mere woman’s movement have missed its true significance and are likely to miss the lasting good a state-wide move toward higher standards of cleanliness will bring.”⁸⁷ In organizing the city cleanup initiative, the women played into an ideal of women as keepers of domesticity, but they viewed their work to be “the prerequisite for other urban reforms.”⁸⁸ Health and sanitation were a mark of “high-class citizenship” and “intelligent progressiveness” in the Progressive era and Hattiesburg’s clubwomen worked to ensure that the city and all its citizens upheld those standards.⁸⁹ According to an article from the *Hattiesburg News*, physicians and other professionals recommended a city cleanup each spring to clean the city of the build-up of garbage during the winter months, which would prevent the spread of disease.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ “Clean Back Yards As Well As Front Ones,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 9, 1915.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 147.

⁸⁶ “‘Finish Cleaning the City of You’ll be Dropped From the Contest,’ Official Warns,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 22, 1915

⁸⁷ “Business Men Are Signing Petition for Half Holiday,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 7, 1915.

⁸⁸ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 111.

⁸⁹ “Business Men Are Signing Petition for Half Holiday,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 7, 1915.

⁹⁰ “Business Will Be At a Standstill Tuesday Afternoon,” *Hattiesburg News*, April 8, 1915.

Organizing beautification projects of the city's park served as another facet to the preoccupation with health and hygiene during this early period. Sarah S. Platt Decker, President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, stressed the "need of legislation and work for the protection of these necessary adjuncts to civilization and happiness- the woods and forests."⁹¹ Establishing and maintaining green spaces in the city ensured the physical and moral health of the area's inhabitants. Ensuring access to nature's beauty, according to the women, "soothed and uplifted" the city and "indicated a community's good taste and refinement."⁹² Clean city parks, like Hattiesburg's Kamper Park, stood as symbols of morality and the city's vitality and the clubwomen were keen to maintain the spaces to improve the community as a whole. Organized women throughout the South, including organizations like the UDC, worked to establish and maintain parks and playgrounds as part of their plans to drive improvement in their cities. Hattiesburg's clubwomen also used these preoccupations with health and morality to advance their position as "public housekeepers" and contribute to what they viewed as the common good.⁹³

Women faced severely limited access to higher education throughout this period; however, Mississippi Normal College was founded in Hattiesburg as the state's first state-supported teacher-training school, with 227 students enrolled in 1912.⁹⁴ The college – now The University of Southern Mississippi – provided a place in the state where women could pursue postsecondary education. Hattiesburg's college focused on

⁹¹ Decker, "The Meaning of the Woman's Club Movement," 4.

⁹² Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 113.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 111.

⁹⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 67.

professionally training teachers in order to uplift Mississippi's depressed educational system.⁹⁵ However, Mississippi Normal was not the first university for women in the area: the Industrial Institute and College- now known as Mississippi University for Women- was founded in 1884 in Columbus, Mississippi and served as the first public women's college in the nation. Founded twenty-six years before Mississippi Normal, the school sought to provide accessible college-level education for Mississippi women, as well as vocational training.⁹⁶ The school's founding occurred during a nationwide crusade for equitable access to higher education for women. In its first year of operation, 341 young women enrolled at the Industrial Institute and College.⁹⁷ Both colleges provided a chance for young women's higher education; however, opportunities for women remained limited, especially for those who could not afford college without external monetary support.

Mirroring the nationwide crusade to found women's colleges, Hattiesburg clubwomen supported young women by sponsoring academic scholarships throughout the United States. The Hattiesburg Woman's Club sent five dollars to the Mississippi Federation of Women's Club Scholarship Fund in 1911.⁹⁸ Ultimately, the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs collected \$400.00 in scholarship funds to send to the Teacher's College at Columbia University in New York, which used a combination of scientifically driven programs in education, health, and psychology to teach future

⁹⁵ Chester M. Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 16.

⁹⁶ "History of the W.," Mississippi University for Women, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.muw.edu/about-muw/our-history>.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971, M531, Box 2, Folder 6, MLA.

educators about learning in order to prepare the women to teach kindergarten through 12th grade.⁹⁹ This suggests both their Progressive-era emphasis on the importance of training and education and their national connections with top programs around the country. That same year, clubwomen from throughout the state also pulled together \$350.00 to add to the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs' loan program, which lent money to women attending the State College.¹⁰⁰ Hattiesburg's literary clubs also contributed funds to support women's education independently from the statewide organization. In 1914, one year after the Review Club's organization, the clubwomen sponsored a female student at the Mississippi Woman's College and gave her forty dollars to go toward her education.¹⁰¹ These instances of giving exemplify the clubwomen's dedication to learning and promoting education, particularly to help provide opportunities for other women.

Women's literary clubs played a critical role in establishing approximately 75% of public libraries nationwide, and Hattiesburg's clubwomen were no exception to this trend.¹⁰² The Review Club nurtured literacy and reading throughout the Hattiesburg community by donating books and supplies to local primary schools and libraries. The ladies formed a committee in early 1916 to decide which books to donate to the Hattiesburg library and later that year they worked with another literary club to purchase

⁹⁹ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971: M531, Box 2, Folder 6, MLA, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; "A History of Anticipating- and Shaping- the Future," Teacher's College Columbia University, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/about/history/>.

¹⁰⁰ Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1911-1912, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, 1923-1971, M531, Box 2, Folder 6, MLA.

¹⁰¹ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁰² Long, "Literature as a Spur to Collective Action," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 343.

a subscription for the library to the woman's magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. The following year, the clubwomen donated five cases of books to an unnamed rural school library.¹⁰³ The women actively worked to bring "Culture" to the city through access to schooling and educational materials, a hallmark of Progressive club activities through this period.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the clubs' work in Hattiesburg only benefitted the white community, as black Hattiesburgers were actively excluded from taking advantage of public library facilities or from attending the local universities throughout this period.¹⁰⁵

Not only did the women donate funds, books, and time to local schools and libraries, but the literary clubs also took direct political action by lobbying their local representatives to push for better education. The Hattiesburg Woman's Club wrote Mississippi's State Superintendent of Education in 1910, pushing him to include kindergarten education in the state's education plan for children between five and seven years old.¹⁰⁶ This demonstrates that not only were the women attending to the immediate needs of the local schoolchildren, but they also aimed to influence their representatives to inspire systematic change. In writing the superintendent, the women of the Woman's Club used their collective strength and their social role as women and mothers to shape the world around them. Later, in 1918, the clubwomen petitioned for a compulsory education bill in the state.

¹⁰³ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁰⁴ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 179.

¹⁰⁶ Correspondence from the Hattiesburg Woman's Club to Hon. J. N. Powers, January 14, 1910, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

Before white women gained the right to vote, clubwomen throughout the state used state and local club federations to maintain contact with one another about important statewide issues and initiatives, including those aimed to improve Mississippi's schools. In 1919, Mrs. Rebecca O'Neal Tatum, who was the President of the Hattiesburg Woman's Club, received a letter from a Mrs. Watkins, the Acting President of Federated Clubs, who requested the Woman's Club's support for the Better Schools Campaign. The statewide undertaking aimed to guarantee quality education for children, hire qualified teachers, and to pay those capable teachers "retaining salaries." Mrs. Watkins informed Mrs. Tatum that the Teachers' Association, the Medical Association, and the Bankers' Association – among others – endorsed the campaign, which demonstrated the worthiness of the cause. The letter pressed Rebecca Tatum to do two things. First, to "urge the county superintendent or city principal to employ only qualified, experienced teachers." Secondly, she should encourage her "husband or brother or father or friend" to vote for taxes to support better schools, and for candidates who supported educational improvements.¹⁰⁷ Though the women had yet to gain the right to vote, they listened to lectures and engaged in discourse with one another to educate themselves politically, which allowed them to influence the broader political conversation around them, both with education and suffrage.

Women's literary clubs in Hattiesburg worked with state and national woman's suffrage groups to push for the vote to expand women's rights. Suffragists thought that electoral politics were necessary and would benefit from women's participation, but other

¹⁰⁷ Correspondence from Mrs. Watkins of the Federated Clubs to Mrs. Tatum, July 25, 1919, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

women thought that women's departure from their particular sphere would cause more problems than it was worth, especially because that would mean women abandoning their position as a "moral arbiter and enforcer."¹⁰⁸ A majority of southerners vehemently opposed woman's suffrage because of a fundamental desire to preserve the status quo, especially regarding Southern womanhood.¹⁰⁹ Supporting woman's suffrage potentially meant toppling the established social order, threatening the hegemony of white supremacy in the southern states, and introducing Northern culture threatened the South's "superior" culture.¹¹⁰ Despite these mindsets, at least some clubwomen in Hattiesburg saw merit in women gaining the right to vote, including the members of the Woman's Club and the Review Club. Records kept by Rebecca Tatum of the Hattiesburg Woman's Club demonstrate the political involvement of the city's literary clubs and document the club's involvement in the push for women's suffrage on both the local and state levels.

Correspondence from December 1919 between Rebecca Tatum of the Hattiesburg Woman's Club and the Chairman of the Ratification Committee of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, Mrs. B. F. Saunders (Janice) demonstrates that at least some of the women were in conversation with leaders of the suffrage movement in the state. The Ratification Committee pressed Mississippi legislators to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment and sought support from women across the state. The Chairman requested the names of prominent women from Perry and Lamar Counties who could interview the county legislators about their stances on suffrage. Mrs. Tatum responded to Mrs.

¹⁰⁸ Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 620.

¹⁰⁹ Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

Saunders with the names of six women in addition to the names of several women whose stances on woman's rights were unknown.¹¹¹ In late 1919, the Review Club hosted local college professor, Miss Alma Hickman, to talk to the ladies about how to promote a push for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, and the club subsequently donated money totaling \$9.00 to a "related fund."¹¹² In January of the following year, the club discussed ratification again and sent letters and signatures from the Review Club's members to their state Representative and Senator to lobby them in favor of ratification.¹¹³ Despite lacking legal enfranchisement, the women drew on their collective voice to reaching out to their representatives as a club, and by doing so the women actively reached for constitutional rights.

The women also contacted and worked with one another to garner support for the cause. Miss Blanche Rogers, the Recording Secretary for the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, wrote to Mrs. Rebecca Tatum in late 1919 to inquire about bringing ladies together from throughout Hattiesburg for a meeting to discuss suffrage. Miss Rogers explained that if Mrs. Tatum agreed to assemble the women, the "Association" would send a speaker from New York as part of a canvass to reach as many of the large towns in the state as possible, which suggests the cooperation of a meaningful network of

¹¹¹ Letter from Mrs. B. F. (Janice) Saunders of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association to Mrs. W. S. F. (Rebecca) Tatum, December 17, 1919, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA; Letter from Mrs. W. S. F. (Rebecca) Tatum to Mrs. B. F. (Janice) Saunders, December 22, 1919, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

¹¹² "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹¹³ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

well-connected progressive women.¹¹⁴ Rebecca Tatum quickly replied to Blanche Rogers to confirm that a meeting would be of interest to the ladies in the community, stating that she had begun preparations for the assembly to be held in the Red Circle Auditorium, and that “everything [seemed] to be very encouraging for a good attendance.”¹¹⁵ According to later correspondence, the lecturer’s train was cancelled and she did not arrive in Hattiesburg as planned but instead spoke in Jackson, Mississippi.¹¹⁶ Despite urging from Mrs. Saunders, Rebecca Tatum was unable to attend the event in Jackson; Mrs. Tatum contacted several other women in the community and they promised to attend the gathering. Unfortunately, the ladies’ efforts to push for suffrage were not enough, as Mississippi voted against ratification in March of 1920; however, the clubwomen clearly made a concerted effort to gain support for the legal expansion of women’s rights.

Literary Clubs & World War I

In November 1917, with the United States’ attention fully turned to the turmoil abroad, the Review Club decided to abandon the coming year’s program to concentrate their attentions on philanthropy, both to help the community and the larger war effort, rather than on the members’ literary education. The goal of the club shifted to focus on aiding the Red Cross and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), as well as local social work, including raising money for local libraries and schools. In the first

¹¹⁴ Letter from Mrs. Blanche Rogers, Recording Secretary for the Mississippi Federation of Women’s Clubs, to Mrs. W. S. F. (Rebecca) Tatum, December 1, 1919, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Mrs. W. S. F. (Rebecca) Tatum to Miss Blanche Rogers, December 3, 1919, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Mrs. W. S. F. (Rebecca) Tatum to Mrs. Hardy, December 12, 1919, M316, Box 553, Folder 8, MLA.

meeting of the year, in late October 1917, each member of the Review Club pledged \$1.00 to the library and the women decided to host “a supper of some kind to raise more money for the library fund.”¹¹⁷ This seems to be the last significant push in the club’s educational endeavors for that year. In November, the club members met to plan how they were going to donate their time to help the Red Cross, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and the military hospital at Camp Shelby.

For the remainder of the year, instead of regular meetings many of the city’s literary clubwomen organized sewing, cooking, and knitting events for the war effort, focusing primarily on supporting the soldiers based just south of Hattiesburg at Camp Shelby. Camp Shelby served as a training camp during the Great War, accommodating nearly forty-five thousand troops and employees during that time. Hattiesburg’s women were not necessarily volunteering to help men from Hattiesburg, but were serving as a support system for young soldiers who were coming in to Camp Shelby to engage in military training or who were staying in the Camp’s hospital.

The women spent the time that they would have ordinarily spent discussing literature to sew comfort pillows and knit socks for the Red Cross and Camp Shelby Hospital patients.¹¹⁸ They gathered to make and roll bandages for the Red Cross every few weeks through the height of the war relief effort, sometimes congregating at Hotel Hattiesburg, a popular public meeting location downtown, to “work on” the bandages.¹¹⁹ Rolling bandages, knitting socks and sweaters, and putting together “comfort kits” for

¹¹⁷ “Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹¹⁸ “Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

soldiers were all common wartime activities for clubwomen. Seemingly, these activities did not directly contribute to advancing the women's political discourse, especially because this type of work traditionally fell under a woman's purview, but this did not cause the city's women to slide into obscurity as clubwomen throughout the nation "carefully guarded ground gained before the war."¹²⁰ Meaning that although the women had to put their normal meetings and charity work on hold during the war, they were eager to rekindle their pre-war literary studies and reform work when they saw the opportunity to do so as consuming war work simmered down.

The women often pulled together money and food donated by the clubs' members both to support the home front effort and to send abroad. The Review Club appointed a committee to visit one of the Regimental Hospitals to determine what the club could do to help the facility and its patients. That November, the Review Club hosted a "Jelly Shower" and donated the collected food to the Camp Hospital, presumably to lift the spirits of the patients.¹²¹ In December of 1917, the Review Club sent Christmas presents to the men at the Camp Shelby Hospital. Even after the war ended, the women visited the hospital to provide entertainment to the patients and to bring them cake, candy, and sandwiches.¹²² Each member was tasked with preparing three packages for the patients, which were to be delivered by a committee made up of Dr. May Jones, Mrs. George Calhoun (Susie), and Mrs. Ben Foster. Though this home front aid was not blatantly political, this wartime work allowed the clubwomen to contribute money and time where

¹²⁰ Sims, *Power of Femininity in the New South*, 151.

¹²¹ "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹²² "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

they deemed important. The women spearheaded drives and organized fundraisers to shape the wartime support work in and around Hattiesburg.

Charitable work also extended to efforts abroad. Rather than bringing orphaned children to the United States to be adopted by American families, American organizations paid a yearly sum to support French children in their home country as a measure of support for the war effort.¹²³ In December 1917, the women of the Review Club “adopted” a French war orphan named Clotilde Boney through the American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans. The women sponsored the ten-year-old child’s care at a cost of \$36.50 for the year. The following January, Mrs. W. S. Temple (Jennie), Mrs. A. H. Corneil, Mrs. J. E. Bufkin (Nellie T.), Mrs. F. B. Ryan (May Belle), and Mrs. W. W. Adams each contributed an extra dollar and Mrs. Victor Scanlan (Kate) gave an additional five dollars to the fund supporting the French girl.¹²⁴ Monetary support for orphans also came from national organizations: the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored more than a thousand children by 1918 through the “Fatherless Children of France,” a branch of the American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans.¹²⁵ Sponsorship provided relief for the French government by paying for the children’s care, including their clothes, school, and food.¹²⁶ The financial support of national organizations far surpassed any contributions made by local clubs; however, the

¹²³ Joy O’Donnell, “Tales From the Archives: Aiding the Fatherless Children of France in WWI,” Daughters of the American Revolution, June 2, 2017, <https://blog.dar.org/tales-archives-aiding-fatherless-children-france-wwi>.

¹²⁴ “Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹²⁵ Joy O’Donnell, “Tales From the Archives: Aiding the Fatherless Children of France in WWI.”

¹²⁶ *The California Alumni Fortnightly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Berkeley: Alumni Association of the University of California, 1917), 91.

Hattiesburg women's efforts to raise money for relief funds demonstrates that they deemed their donations valuable, no matter how small the amount. Literary clubs allowed the women to collectivize their work and make a more significant impact both locally and abroad.

Some clubs continued to come together for regular literary meetings through the war years, but the meetings generally shifted to programs focused on global issues and war-related activities. For example, the Woman's Club focused their program in 1915-16 on "European Countries at War" and in 1918-19 to "Current Events- War Work."¹²⁷ A focus on current events and European affairs demonstrates the women's interest in educating themselves about both local and international politics. Involvement in these literary clubs afforded the women of Hattiesburg an opportunity to engage with politics through lectures and self-led discussions. In 1917, Review Club members attended a lecture given by Mr. George Hurst, a teacher at the State Teacher's College, to "all clubs" on women and politics, revealing the women's continued interest in expanding their minds and keeping up with current events in order to stay relevant in their political and philanthropic endeavors.¹²⁸

Though World War I officially ended in November of 1918, Hattiesburg's literary clubs patriotically supported the war's memorialization and relief efforts immediately following the end of the conflict. In early summer 1919, the Review Club hosted a "Queen's Flower Day," which raised money to help alleviate the effects of war on

¹²⁷ Yearbook, 1920-1921, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg Yearbooks, 1920-1930, M163, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹²⁸ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

orphaned Belgian children.¹²⁹ The women raised an astonishing \$194.64 during the event to send abroad.¹³⁰ The women also continued visiting the hospital at Camp Shelby to lift the spirits of the men confined there. Their actions in the immediate post-war period confirm that the ladies were dedicated to the patriotism expected of them as women, but they were eager to resume their club work.

At the close of World War I, clubs resumed their standard club activities. The Review Club members chose to pick up their regular literary programs in January 1919, but they also turned their attention back toward civic work.¹³¹ The women found varying causes to support in addition to their literary endeavors, including raising money for charities and supporting progressive education and sanitation initiatives, as they had before the war. In May of the following year, the club donated a sum of \$2.00 to the Longfellow Memorial Association.¹³² Unfortunately, the club's records do not contain any further details about the donation, but presumably the ladies sent the money to support the erection of a statue dedicated to the author Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had died in 1882. Dedicating statues to significant figures stood was common during this period, especially in organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy that erected statues memorializing the Confederacy. Supporting literary undertakings outside of the club's own philanthropic work paired neatly with the women's bookish studies

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹³¹ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

¹³² Ibid.

throughout the club year, and also demonstrates the women's desire to engage with high-culture.¹³³

As previously discussed, the women made their most significant contributions to woman's suffrage after the war's end by donating money to support the cause and sending letters and telegrams to their state representatives. Mrs. Noland, a member of Mississippi's Ratification Committee, reported to the club regarding the state of the suffrage amendment after visiting Jackson.¹³⁴ In response to Mrs. Noland's account, the clubwomen sent letters to their Representative, Senator, and the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. During the 1919-1920 club year, the Review Club donated a total of \$11.00 directly to the cause and contributed more time and money sending correspondences to the state capitol to make their voices heard.¹³⁵ Again, the women engaged with other politically-minded women through their club networks, which shows that the literary clubs acted as a space to organize politically, as well as socially.

Politically, the club also continued pushing for reforms in education and sanitation in Mississippi after the war's end. In 1918 Mississippi became the last state in the country to pass a compulsory education bill, but attendance laws were not strongly enforced.¹³⁶ In April of 1919, the women of the Review Club attended two presentations that argued for stricter enforcement of compulsory school education. University professor

¹³³ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 196.

¹³⁴ "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹³⁵ "Yearly Report, October 1919-1920," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 10, MLA.

¹³⁶ Michael S. Katz, *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*, (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976), 6.

Dr. May Jones met with the club and requested that the ladies write to their representatives in Jackson to urge their support for stronger legislation to require school attendance for elementary-aged children. Generally, those who supported universal education in this period believed that “better schooling would improve the opportunities of the poor and the minorities and enhance the quality of society.”¹³⁷ Not only were the women interested in bettering their own education so they could improve their social position, but mandatory school attendance ensured that children would become better citizens through education as well.

Public sanitation initiatives also aimed at improving the community’s moral and physical health. That fall, Dr. Jones also gave a lecture to the Review Club titled, “Aids for Improving Public Health,” and a club member, Mrs. Denham, read a paper called “Red Cross First Aid Courses in School.”¹³⁸ These two addresses presumably opened the meeting to discussion among the clubwomen about what they could do to advocate for better sanitation initiatives in Hattiesburg. Much like the interest in abating the effects of tuberculosis earlier in this period, women continued to make their community a place where the members could thrive. Additionally, the women’s meetings created information about local interests, a necessary political activity required to implement reform. Pressing for better education and continued attention to improving public sanitation stood as central principles of these women’s organizations through the early twentieth century.

¹³⁷ Katz, *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*, 8.

¹³⁸ “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

These early iterations of Hattiesburg's literary organizations carved out a space for women to be active politically and socially in a growing city. Not only did these clubs act as a place for political development, but they also served as a space in which to foster education and learning in a time where most women did not have access to higher learning. During this period, the women participated in war relief efforts that were often viewed as an extension of women's domestic capabilities, but these activities did not stifle the clubwomen's work moving forward. If anything, the women emerged from the wartime period ready to tackle significant social, political, and economic issues, including campaigning for suffrage and implementing more extensive civic reforms. This early period ultimately foreshadows the women's activity in the years to come: Hattiesburg's literary clubwomen continued to shape the development of their community through their involvement within their organizations.

CHAPTER III - “NO STEP BACKWARD”: 1920-1933

Business in Hattiesburg was thriving at the dawn of the 1920s but difficulty loomed around the corner. Dozens of lumber mills operated in the area around the city and threatened to strip all of the trees from southern Mississippi’s seemingly endless Piney Woods.¹³⁹ By the middle of the decade, the lumbermen’s negligence toward conservation caused the industry to falter. It was too late to replenish the virgin forests and lumber mills started shutting down shifts, or closing their doors completely. Devastatingly, thousands of men relied on work from the sawmills to support their families but the mill jobs became less secure as the crisis intensified.¹⁴⁰ By the first couple of decades of the 1930s, the economic crisis affected the entirety of Mississippi; the predicament peaked in the fall of 1932.¹⁴¹ People of all classes and backgrounds suffered while economic issues developed in Hattiesburg.

As secure laboring jobs disappeared and poverty threatened the city’s working classes, Hattiesburg’s officials scrambled to draw new sources of employment into the area. Because the dense virgin forests had been all but decimated, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce – a group of affluent men, including mogul and mayor W.S.F. Tatum and businessman Louis Faulkner – courted companies seeking new locations in the South. The Hercules Powder Company, a chemical manufacturer from Delaware, established a factory in Hattiesburg in 1923 to produce turpentine, a pine derivative.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ William Sturkey. *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 107.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 111.

The factory employed around 400 workers during the economic turmoil of the 1930s.¹⁴³ Drawing the Hercules Powder Company into the city added a significant number of jobs to the struggling city's economy, but it still did not provide sufficient positions to alleviate the employment crisis. Hattiesburg's population continued growing during the 1920s because sawmills throughout the region shut down and the newly unemployed men sought opportunities in the Hub City.¹⁴⁴ The Chamber of Commerce strove to secure another large contract for the city but, unfortunately, the history of racial violence in Mississippi drove many national companies away from establishing holdings in the state. Ultimately, the Chamber's desperate attempts to bring industry into the city failed until 1932.

Representatives of Reliance Manufacturing Company, a Chicago-based clothing business, contacted the Chamber of Commerce in early fall 1932 about establishing a factory in the city. Seeing immense economic potential in Reliance choosing the city as a new site, the Chamber of Commerce leapt into action to enhance the city's appeal: they established a Reliance Welcoming Committee and Hattiesburgers were directed to tidy their properties and to warmly welcome the visitors.¹⁴⁵ Attracting Reliance Manufacturing became a citywide endeavor and Hattiesburg's clubwomen stepped in to take an active role in securing the business contract. As part of the pre-contractual agreement, Reliance required Hattiesburg to raise the funds to construct a building to

¹⁴³ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 149.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

house the factory, which would amount to approximately \$75,000, and to ensure there would be “a sufficient number of laborers.”¹⁴⁶

The businessmen associated with the Chamber of Commerce, including W.S.F. Tatum, pledged the majority of the money for the building fund. The remaining funds were small contributions raised through “smaller investments, local bonds, and a mortgage with the First National Bank of Hattiesburg.”¹⁴⁷ The Hattiesburg Review Club promised a sum of \$100 to the building fund to bring Reliance to the city. Clubwomen like Mrs. Ogden worried about the city’s economic survival and used their club membership to take an active part in shaping the city’s development, even if they were not being visibly recognized for their efforts. These relatively well-off clubwomen generally would not have worked, much less in a factory setting like Reliance, regardless of their marital status. Because of this, Mrs. H. Ogden and another unnamed woman canvassed on the club’s behalf to procure signatures from young women in the city to “register their willingness to work in the factory.”¹⁴⁸ This targeted group would have been local white, unmarried women who were socially permitted to work. Deploying upper class women into poor neighborhoods seemed to be an exercise of class power that signaled that the affluent women gave their “permission” to the lower class women to work.

Fortunately, the city’s effort to bring the Reliance Manufacturing Company into Hattiesburg was successful. City officials signed the final paperwork to establish the

¹⁴⁶ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 154.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.; “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁴⁸ “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

factory in the spring of 1933.¹⁴⁹ While the factory established jobs for hundreds of individuals, they were exclusively reserved for white workers.¹⁵⁰ While the employment restrictions were devastating for the African American community in Hattiesburg, the deal with Reliance executives concluded a long series of failed attempts to coax investors into the city. Finally, Hattiesburg's seemingly unyielding economic misfortune eased and residents saw some hope for the future.

Despite the economic depression that plagued Hattiesburg throughout the period encompassed by this chapter, literary clubwomen remained active in their scholarly, political, social, and philanthropic endeavors. According to a Hattiesburg American article from 1932, there were twenty-one literary clubs "promoting progress" in the city as of that year, eleven of which had been organized between 1920 and 1932, demonstrating the proliferation of clubs during this period.¹⁵¹ Participating in organized groups continued to provide women with an opportunity to learn together and cultivate "self culture."¹⁵² Club work also strengthened their authority within the city because they saw their "distinctively female perspective on public policy" as a valuable asset in building up their community, and joining clubs collectivized their efforts.¹⁵³ In 1929, Mrs. E. H. Walker, a woman's club member from Leakesville, Mississippi wrote: "We join a club because a club can accomplish for a community what an individual never

¹⁴⁹ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 154.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁵¹ "21 Literary Clubs of Hub Promote Progress," *Hattiesburg American*, October 26, 1932.

¹⁵² Long, "Literature as a Spur to Collective Action," 337.

¹⁵³ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 83.

can.”¹⁵⁴ The belief in the power of numbers articulated by Mrs. Walker drew women into all-female organizations and contributed to their success in educating themselves and successfully implementing reforms that the women viewed as important. Therefore, despite this long period of economic hardship in Hattiesburg, the city’s literary clubs remained energetic in their various undertakings.

As previously mentioned, the literary clubs printed a program for its members each year that listed the year’s topic of study, meeting dates, and discussion leaders. Each meeting focused on a subject that complimented the year’s broad topic and often included a combination of readings, discussions, and papers about related literature, music, and current events. Through this tenuous decade in Hattiesburg’s history, the women remained dedicated to their clubs’ organization and continued to publish yearly programs that established structure for the women. The sustained devotion to order demonstrates that the ladies strove to maintain high standards for their organizations and continue their long-established literary and philanthropic traditions that “separated their work from more informal women’s social groups.”¹⁵⁵

Literature

Literature acted as the glue that bound the clubwomen together. The women discussed novels, poetry, travel accounts, operas, and plays. While many of the programs focused on analyzing works of classical literature, the programs also heavily featured

¹⁵⁴ The Mississippi Woman's Magazine: official publication, Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, 1924-36, 367.05/W84m, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹⁵⁵ Long, “Literature as a Spur to Collective Action,” 337-38.

recently published books, revealing the women's desire to broadly expand their literary comprehension. For example, the Woman's Club committed three of its meetings in spring 1933 to discussing the previous year's Pulitzer Prize winners in drama, poetry, and fiction.¹⁵⁶ Discussing various types of texts encouraged critical thinking and analytical skills. The women also ventured into art and music as part of their scholarly deliberations, which expanded the members' cultural knowledge.

The women analyzed the mechanics and structure of literature, discussed musical genres, and contemplated foreign cultures. The Nautilus Club, for example, spent both of their November meetings in 1931 musing about "mechanical construction," variation in plots, and the character development in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."¹⁵⁷ An in-depth analysis of Shakespeare demonstrates that the women were interested in more than simply saying that they had read the text, but instead that they truly understood the piece. By interrogating texts in this manner, the women actively created cultural knowledge independently from the male-dominated intellectual system.¹⁵⁸

Orpheus Club members dedicated a meeting in 1928 to conversing about black and Native American music.¹⁵⁹ In the first part of the meeting, the women, led by Myra Hickman, deliberated about "Negro work songs as a treasure house of race character" and

¹⁵⁶ 1932-33 Yearbook, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg, 1920-1967 M163, Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

¹⁵⁷ 1931-32 Nautilus Club Yearbook, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, M531, Box 1, Folder 7, MLA.

¹⁵⁸ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 180.

¹⁵⁹ 1927-28 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records (1926-1986), M409, Box 1, Folder 3, MLA.

spoke about “the origin of the Blues and Spirituals.” In the second portion, the women pondered the topic of “Indian music as the true folk lore of America,” and discussed Charles Wakefield Cadman’s 1924 operatic cantata *The Sunset Trail*, a piece that explores “Struggles of the American Indians Against the Edict of the United States Government Restricting Them to Prescribed Reservations.”¹⁶⁰ The last section of their meeting, like the first, interrogated questions concerning African American music. The women asked “have we abused the Negro spiritual,” and “who is Roland Hayes and of what value has he been to his race.”¹⁶¹

Though it is difficult to interpret the women’s intent, especially based on the handful of vague questions or themes listed in the club’s yearbook, the women considered questions of race and culture, albeit through their own limited lens, during this May meeting. According to Joan Marie Johnson’s study of black and white clubwomen in South Carolina during the same period, white women’s club discussions about African American culture often perpetuated racialized stereotypes. In discussing questions about African American music, the women likely regarded “black culture as harmless entertainment.”¹⁶² Ultimately, these discussions about race probably reinforced stereotypes because Jim Crow ideology was so deeply entrenched in southern worldviews that racial relations were “as natural as the sunrise.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 124-5.

¹⁶¹ 1927-28 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records (1926-1986), M409, Box 1, Folder 3, MLA.

¹⁶² Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 64.

¹⁶³ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 178.

Brief announcements in the *Hattiesburg American*'s daily "Society" section chronicled meeting details, such as which foods the hosts served at meetings, notable décor choices, and any attendees, including non-member visitors. In October 1920, for example, the ladies of the Review Club met at the home of Mrs. James W. Spencer at 317 Walnut Street. According to the "Society" column, Mrs. Spencer, with the help of fellow Review Club member Mrs. L. M. Noland, hosted a particularly dazzling meeting. The ladies decorated the Walnut Street house with an abundance of yellow cosmos and chrysanthemums, served "chicken a la king, potato chips, nut bread sandwiches, olives, and crackers," in addition to coffee and fruit salad.¹⁶⁴ Although the hosts exerted a significant amount of energy into perfecting the décor and providing nourishment, as was highlighted in the newspaper announcement, the seventeen club members discussed study subjects and club business during the gathering. The ladies addressed the subjects of Mexico and Verdi for the first meeting in the yearlong program of study, "Latin America and Makers of Modern Opera."¹⁶⁵ Expanding upon the previous meeting's discussion of "The Spanish Conquest of Mexico" headed by Mrs. M. E. Adams (Ada), Mrs. Howard S. Williams (Emma) led the discussion and presented a paper titled "Mexican Character and Customs." Mrs. Williams based much of her talk on personal experience because after her marriage she and her husband had "resided in Mexico for a number of years."¹⁶⁶ Mrs. J. K. Denham (Alice) switched the meeting's direction with her paper addressing Verdi's

¹⁶⁴ "Newspaper Clipping, October 30, 1920," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 26, MLA.

¹⁶⁵ 1920-21 Yearbook, Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 13, MLA.

¹⁶⁶ "Newspaper Clippings (1920, 1921, 1926, 1927)," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 26, MLA; "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

life and works. At other points, several of the ladies took turns playing the piano and singing to entertain the group, and Mrs. Howard Williams (Emma) and Mrs. Munson, who had been elected in a prior meeting to attend a meeting of the District Federation of Women's Clubs in nearby Laurel reported about the conference.¹⁶⁷

The Review Club's early October meeting exemplifies the high value that the women placed on educating themselves, but also the usefulness of the gatherings' sociability. When the members found meetings particularly attractive or engaging, the officers published the details in the local newspaper. The details of this meeting also reveal the women's commitment to the educative aspect of the club's purpose. In particular, the women learned from one another by engaging in intellectual discussions and listening to papers given by their fellow members. Emma Williams, for example, shared her firsthand familiarity with Mexico with the club ladies, which broadened the women's collective understanding of another country's people, culture, and environment. Discussing distant cultures, especially when one of the members had firsthand experiences to share, added to variations in definitions of culture, and broadened the clubwomen's – often limited – understandings of the world.¹⁶⁸

Womanhood became a central theme of study, especially after 1920. Talks concentrated on women's nature and ethical dilemmas related to womanhood were common among women's literary groups throughout the South, particularly in conversation with classical literature.¹⁶⁹ At first glance, the Review Club's program in

¹⁶⁷ "Ledger, Minutes Oct 31, 1917 to May 14, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 9, MLA.

¹⁶⁸ Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 181; Long, *Book Clubs*, 44.

¹⁶⁹ Long, "Literature as a Spur to Collective Action," 340.

1921-22 appears scattered, however, upon closer inspection the program highlights influential women through Western history. The year's program of study opened with discussions of "Women of the Bible" and "Women of Greece and Rome," followed by those about Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth before the program turned to more modern British women, with topics including "English Women Novelists" and "English Women Poets: George Eliot." Meetings about American presidents' wives and Frances Willard wrapped up the yearlong program.¹⁷⁰ Topics, such as those detailed above, exemplify how clubs combined literary and political interests to create a holistic education for the members, but also how the women independently created knowledge and culture. Studying significant women, including several authors, through time became commonplace in women's literary organizations in the early 1920s. Contemplating changing ideas about womanhood was particularly significant because of the momentous legal changes occurring during this period. The clubwomen's deliberations about women over time are an example of their interactions with "new ideologies of womanhood."¹⁷¹

During this period, feminism became a common theme as well. In 1927, the Orpheus Club reviewed the life of Edna St. Vincent Millay, an American Pulitzer Prize winning poet, ardent pacifist, and well-known feminist activist.¹⁷² Then, they read excerpts of "The King's Henchman," an opera composed by Deems Taylor and written by Millay that was then published as a book in 1927. In discussing her life, the women very well could have opened up discussion on the state of feminism during this time.

¹⁷⁰ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁷¹ Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 139.

¹⁷² 1927-28 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records (1926-1986), M409, Box 1, Folder 3, MLA.

Alone, this could merely be an instance to ponder but with further cases of feminist readings an inference can be made on the women's recognition of the movement's significance.

In 1929, the Orpheus Club discussed Rabindranath Tagore during their yearlong program about Nobel Prize winners in literature.¹⁷³ According to the club's meeting agenda, Tagore was a "Hindu feminist," but they interrogated his "place in Bengali literature."¹⁷⁴ Although the women did not dedicate an entire meeting to his life and work as they did with some of the other authors studied during that year, they indicated his feminist philosophy in their yearbook, despite also being renown for his place in the Indian nationalist movement. Pulling this information specifically shows the women's particular interest in the feminist aspect of his biography.¹⁷⁵ While the club ladies did not openly self-identify as feminists in the archival record, the inclusion of feminist individuals in their programs of study suggest that regardless of whether or not they agreed with the rhetoric, the women engaged in feminist dialogue during their meetings.

Politics

Hattiesburg's women made their entrance into formal politics in the first years of the century by engaging with local legislators and state representatives engaging in philanthropic work to improve society according to their specifications. However, the women's voices became even stronger when they gained the constitutional right to vote

¹⁷³ 1929-30 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records (1926-1986), M409, Box 1, Folder 5, MLA.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Rabindranath Tagore- Biographical," The Nobel Prize, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/biographical/>.

in August 1920.¹⁷⁶ Having the vote allowed Hattiesburg's clubwomen to formally engage with policymaking at the state and local level and made the political character of their clubs even more important. The clubwomen made a point to discuss current events and politics as a regular part of their agendas. The women no longer simply listened to lectures – as the Review Club did in 1917 when Mr. George Hurst, a faculty member from Mississippi Normal College, talked to the women about women and politics. Nor did the ladies need to spend time convincing their husbands, fathers, and sons to vote on their behalf.¹⁷⁷ Finally, the women were granted the ability to vote independently and increasingly, the clubs became a space for political discourse so that the women could become confident, fully engaged citizens.

Engagement in politics crucially happened during club meetings. The women used these semi-private gatherings to discuss past political topics and ruminate on current affairs. From 1920 to 1923, the Woman's Club dedicated two club years to conversing about "American Reconstruction Problems." However, the women not only discussed Reconstruction and the Civil War, but also topics related to colonial history, presidential and party politics, immigration, and American diplomacy, finances, and politics.¹⁷⁸ These topics pushed the women to grapple with the history and trajectory of American policies so they could be more informed citizens.

¹⁷⁶ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 160.

¹⁷⁷ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁷⁸ 1922-23 Yearbook, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg, 1920-1967, M163, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

Most of the Review Club “members voted to attend the series of lectures on ‘Citizenship’” held in Hattiesburg in early 1922.¹⁷⁹ While it is not clear what topics these lectures specifically addressed, the speakers likely talked about voting and politics. In 1929, the club directly addressed citizenship in a meeting dedicated to the subject.¹⁸⁰ During the session, Mrs. E. B. Conn (Myrtle) led a discussion about “what it means to be an American,” and Mrs. Fred Cunningham (Edna) asked the women about “what is a good citizen.” Mrs. D. T. Currie (Effie) implored the women to consider “the woman of today and her new citizenship.” These questions derived from changing ideas about women’s roles as a citizen. Before achieving suffrage, women’s role as citizen was viewed as being different and distinct from their male counterparts. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, women were socially expected to teach civics to their children from home, rather than engage in politics directly.¹⁸¹ Literary clubwomen bucked this expectation and leapt into informally educating themselves about political matters of all sorts, including re-evaluating their role as female citizens. In response to their changing political lives, the women attended lectures, and “citizenship schools” emerged to offer women more in-depth information about voting and political theory.¹⁸² By being connected to a space that fostered dialogue, even those who doubted the efficacy of women’s suffrage could engage in discussions “without alienating dear friends.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ “Newspaper Clipping, September 23, 1921,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 26, MLA.

¹⁸⁰ 1929-30 Yearbook, Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 19, MLA.

¹⁸¹ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 128-29.

¹⁸² Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 187.

¹⁸³ Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 146.

The Nautilus Club dedicated the meeting on April 2, 1924 to “America’s Twelve Greatest Women,” a list of important women selected by the National League of Women Voters.¹⁸⁴ Led by Mrs. E. J. Doran, the program included “a short sketch of the life of Minnie Maddern Fiske, and the reasons why she is the greatest living actress” given by Mrs. L. L. Ijams and an overview of the life and work of Edith Wharton by Mrs. R. A. Gray. The hostess, Mrs. Doran, gave the members a summary of the other ten women: Jane Addams (philanthropy), Cecelia Beaux (painting), Anna Jump Cannon (astronomy), Carrie Chapman Catt (politics), Anna Botsford Comstock (natural history), Louise Homer (music), Julia Lathrop (child welfare), Florence Rena Sabin (anatomy), M. Carey Thomas (education), and Martha Van Rensselaer (home economics). The women’s inclusion of this program shows a connection between the Nautilus Club and the National League of Women Voters, which further demonstrates literary clubs’ place in connecting local women to national organizations and politics, as well as the women’s goal of nurturing dialogues about suffrage and politics within the club space.

Philanthropy

Since the women were granted the full rights of citizenship, they not only lobbied their representatives but also used their newfound political standing to push social reform efforts. In a continuation of their work from the past decades, Hattiesburg’s literary organizations engaged in philanthropic endeavors throughout the 1920s and early 1930s with a focus on supporting women and children, as well as continuing social reform

¹⁸⁴ 1923-24 Nautilus Club Yearbook, Hattiesburg Social and Service Club Yearbooks, M531, Box 1, Folder 7, MLA.

efforts. The women combined political investment with direct charitable action to solve social issues, such as caring for disadvantaged women and children.

In late 1920, the French Widows and Orphan's League asked the Review Club to raise money for their cause by selling red poppies for ten cents. The club decided that it would pull ten cents from the treasury to purchase a poppy for each member.

Additionally, the ladies agreed to sell 500 poppies to Hattiesburg's residents "to be worn on May 30th," the day the French Widows and Orphans League had requested as a day of remembrance.¹⁸⁵ Though the war ended nearly two years prior, at this point the club ladies remained devoted to the well-being of less fortunate women and children. When the French Widows and Orphans League reached out again in 1922, the clubwomen voted not to sell poppies because the "war has been over for some time and people should be on their feet."¹⁸⁶ At this point, national concern for Europe had diminished, and the economic depression in Hattiesburg was becoming increasingly apparent. These two factors directed the women's decision to discontinue collecting funds for the foreign aid organization.

Women's charity work continued to concentrate on improving the health and well being of children and sick people within Mississippi. The Review Club supported the children at the Mississippi Industrial and Training Institute (also known as the Industrial Home at Columbia) for several years, especially around the Christmas season. The school, which opened in 1918 as a place for troubled white children, was the "first reform

¹⁸⁵ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁸⁶ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

school established in the state of Mississippi.”¹⁸⁷ Delinquent children – both boys and girls – lived at the school and the club’s members often donated gifts to the children around the holidays. In 1920, for example, the club sent a gift to each child at the Industrial Home for Christmas. In the following years, the ladies continued the tradition of helping to provide presents for the children by donating money to “gather a Christmas box” with gifts.¹⁸⁸ Sending care packages to the children at the Industrial Home fits into broader patterns of supporting social services, especially those supporting “those who could not help themselves.”¹⁸⁹ The club’s support for institutions like the one in Columbia also shows the women’s continued investment in mental and physical health initiatives in Mississippi. However, white women in this period disproportionately assisted white children, who “they believed to be morally fit but simply needing another chance in life.”¹⁹⁰

Similarly to their support for a Sanitarium in the previous decades, the Review Club openly supported the establishment of a “Home for Feebleminded” in Ellisville, Mississippi.¹⁹¹ In the early twentieth century, people believed that institutionalization of “feeble-minded” individuals improved society because of an allegedly scientifically proven link between “lower intelligence and deviant behavior.”¹⁹² Supposedly, removing

¹⁸⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Superintendent’s Home at Columbia Training School, Columbia, Marion County, Mississippi, National Register # 950007S7.

¹⁸⁸ “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁸⁹ Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*, 114.

¹⁹⁰ Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 176.

¹⁹¹ “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

¹⁹² Stephen Noll, “The Public Face of Southern Institutions for the ‘Feeble Minded,’” *The Public Historian* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2005), 27.

these “inferior” individuals and forcing them into an institution would cleanse and protect the moral fabric of society.¹⁹³ The clubwomen’s support existed within a vast Progressive trend of state-run institutions of this kind that aimed to “train the individuals committed there for a productive life outside the institution walls.”¹⁹⁴ The facility in Ellisville, originally called the Mississippi School & Colony for the Feeble-Minded and then renamed the Ellisville State School, opened its doors in 1922 and housed more than 100 white male residents by the following year.¹⁹⁵

While support for the institution’s creation came from throughout the state, the Review Club’s members openly showed their support and engaged in the discourse that ultimately led to the facility’s establishment. The women reached out to their state representatives to urge them to vote in favor of the Home for Feeble-minded. Representative George W. Boone and Senator Mark Love each sent responses to the women to assure them of their support for the institution.¹⁹⁶ Reformers, including Hattiesburg’s clubwomen, thought that by housing and training those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, they could implement social reform that would lower delinquency and improve society as a whole, despite the overall dreadful treatment of patients living at the facility.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

¹⁹⁴ Noll, “The Public Face of Southern Institutions for the ‘Feeble Minded,’” 28; “History of Ellisville State School,” Ellisville State School, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.ess.ms.gov/Pages/History.aspx>.

¹⁹⁵ Noll, “The Public Face of Southern Institutions for the ‘Feeble Minded,’” 29.

¹⁹⁶ “Meeting Minutes 1922,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 20, MLA.

¹⁹⁷ Noll, “The Public Face of Southern Institutions for the ‘Feeble Minded,’” 27.

The Review Club maintained a lasting connection with the Hattiesburg Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Each year, the club donated \$10.00 to aid the non-profit's support of Hattiesburg's young women and girls. During a business meeting in September 1922, the Review Club's members voted to help the city's chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association "in every way possible."¹⁹⁸ Tragically, the rented building that temporarily accommodated the Hattiesburg's YWCA burned in the early 1920s. In January 1923, the Review Club sponsored a benefit performance for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) building fund, which was to be used toward constructing a new YWCA building in Hattiesburg. Ultimately, the performance by the University of Alabama Glee Club raised \$105.95 for the Hattiesburg YWCA.¹⁹⁹ The Hattiesburg YWCA did not have a building of its own until 1927 when construction finished at the organization's new location at 315 Hemphill Street. Through the 1920s, the literary clubwomen recognized the importance in supporting the organization because of the resources and opportunities the YWCA provided to young women in the area.²⁰⁰ Moving into a permanent building provided young women in the community with a space to meet because the new space included "a large auditorium/gym, equipped with a stage and basketball court; two big meeting rooms, ...and a large, well-equipped kitchen and dining area."²⁰¹ In addition to being a dedicated space for the city's young women to

¹⁹⁸ "Newspaper Clipping, September 23, 1921," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 26, MLA.

¹⁹⁹ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

²⁰⁰ Hattiesburg YWCA Records, M274, MLA.

²⁰¹ *The History of Forrest County Mississippi* (Hattiesburg: Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, 2000), 81-2.

congregate, this new structure also accommodated literary club meetings and some of the groups' larger socials.

Charity work of this kind closely resembled the philanthropy from the previous decades; however, in this period the women were also engaging in more direct political action. Evidence of social service reform and implementation grew drastically into the early 1930s, particularly following the economic collapse in 1929. Women took part in implementing the reforms by rallying together to appeal for legislation to care for the sick and needy.²⁰² Clubs, like those described in this thesis, formed a crucial base for organizing women into powerful groups. Hattiesburg's literary clubwomen connected with others in southern Mississippi namely by participating in the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs (MFWC). Federations of women's clubs, like the MFWC, helped to mediate between the women's clubs and the state government and to unify women's voices.²⁰³ State federations operated with the same strict parliamentary procedures as the clubs that joined, and their actions included holding regular meetings, establishing a constitution, electing a governing body, and organizing committees.²⁰⁴ Clubs who cared to join the state federation paid a yearly fee, and could send members to serve as representatives in the amalgamated body.

By 1921, there were 133 clubs and approximately 4,500 women involved in the MFWC.²⁰⁵ Although the only two clubs listed from Hattiesburg in the *Official Register of*

²⁰² Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 187.

²⁰³ Jayne Morris-Crowther, "Municipal Housekeeping: The Political Activities of the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1920s," *Michigan Historical Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring, 2004), 32-3.

²⁰⁴ Morris-Crowther, "Municipal Housekeeping," 34.

²⁰⁵ *Official Register and Directory of Women's Clubs in America*, vol 22, (Shirley, MA: Hellen M. Winslow, 1921), 113.

Women's Clubs were the Galaxy Club and the Review Club, there were certainly more operating in the city at that time, including the Woman's and Nautilus Clubs. That year, Mrs. W. S. F. Tatum (Rebecca) served as the Second Vice-President of the MFWC in addition to serving as the President of the Woman's Club in Hattiesburg.²⁰⁶ Rebecca Tatum remained active in the MFWC for a number of years after she served as an officer. In April 1929, Rebecca Tatum attended the thirty-first annual MFWC convention in Meridian.²⁰⁷ The following spring, in May 1930, Rosabel S. Foresman, the President of the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, wrote Mrs. Tatum to ask her to serve on the Committee on State Institutions.²⁰⁸ Based on these interactions, it is clear that several of Hattiesburg's literary clubs maintained a strong working relationship with the MFWC and regularly interacted with other clubwomen in the state.

Social

Hattiesburg's literary clubwomen also used their club involvement to socialize with literary clubwomen, including those from nearby Mississippi cities by hosting joint meetings and parties. Hattiesburg's Orpheus Club, for example, seemed to have a relationship with a local literary club of unmarried women, the Pine Burr Club, as well as the Ever-Ready Club from Richton. The groups organized a meeting with all three at least once a year.²⁰⁹ Additionally, the Woman's Club jointly met with the Sowania Club,

²⁰⁶ *Official Register and Directory of Women's Clubs in America*, 114.

²⁰⁷ 1929 Convention program for the Mississippi State Federation of Women's Clubs, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 613, Folder 8, MLA.

²⁰⁸ Correspondence from Mrs. Rosabel Foresman to Rebecca Tatum, May 12, 1930, Tatum Family Business Records, M316, Box 613, Folder 8, MLA.

²⁰⁹ 1926-27 Yearbook, Orpheus Club Records (1926-1986), M409, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

which is significant because the latter club exclusively consisted of unmarried women.²¹⁰ It is, therefore, likely that relationships such as those mentioned between groups of married and unmarried women represented a mentor/mentee status between the paired clubs. Cultivating social connections between women's groups helped to strengthen the clubwomen's authority in their political endeavors.

Women socialized with one another within individual clubs, but they also often attended events with other women's clubs from the city, or hosted events where members could invite other women to join. A "railroad company" hosted a travel lecture about Yellowstone National Park in April 1923. Women's clubs from throughout Hattiesburg planned to attend and the ladies were encouraged to bring friends to the event.²¹¹ These types of gatherings served to expand the clubwomen's social network to include women outside of the club complex, which strengthened the women's visibility in the community.

Perhaps most importantly, literary clubs created a social network within Hattiesburg and reinforced bonds between likeminded women. In addition to the light luncheons women had at their regular meetings, they also held dedicated social meetings where it was made clear no business was to be discussed. Typically held at the end of each club year, social meetings permitted the women to socialize with one another without the weight of learning, business, or charity work. Often, the social meetings were at a member's home, but sometimes the clubs organized more formal events in a rented or borrowed space using club money set aside specifically for the gathering. For example,

²¹⁰ "Social and Personal," *Hattiesburg News*, April 15, 1915.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

the Review Club hosted their annual social meeting at the Hattiesburg Country Club in May of 1922, a social at the YWCA in March 1923, and a picnic at Rawls Springs in 1925.²¹² In 1926, however, The Review Club voted to “dispense with” the annual social meeting in favor of supporting a charitable cause. Instead, the women donated the \$25 associated with the gathering to the YWCA, to be used for “a larger purpose than merely entertaining ourselves.”²¹³ Although the women valued the social associations that the clubs facilitated, the women evidently cherished their ability to make significant contributions to their community.

This period in Hattiesburg’s history wrought profound changes for the city’s literary clubwomen. The women’s reactions to political changes, and therefore changes to their perceptions of womanhood, are exemplified in their programs and philanthropic endeavors. By actively learning about and engaging in politics, the clubwomen redefined culture in their community. When Hattiesburg’s economy faltered, the clubwomen solicited support from other women in the community to bring Reliance’s business into the area. And despite the economic troubles that persisted well into the 1930s, the women maintained a fervent dedication to self-education.

²¹² “Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

²¹³ “Review Club Summary History,” Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449 Box 1, Folder 2, MLA.

CHAPTER IV – “WHAT WE OUGHT TO BE WE ARE NOW BECOMING”:
1933 TO 1945

New Deal

White Hattiesburgers were keen to have the federal government put more energy into relieving the economic crisis, and nearly 92% of voters cast their ballots for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1932 election.²¹⁴ Although Hattiesburg’s residents successfully courted Reliance Manufacturing Company, which opened a factory in the city in April 1933, jobs remained scarce. Because the city so desperately needed jobs, the city welcomed New Deal programs, including the introduction of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and National Recovery Administration.²¹⁵ These programs sponsored building projects in Hattiesburg; reforestation efforts in the once-dense forests surrounding the city; and the rehabilitation of facilities at Camp Shelby, which had been abandoned after WWI. By the late 1930s, “approximately one-third of Hattiesburg’s labor force was either unemployed, partially employed, or employed by federal New Deal programs.”²¹⁶ Unfortunately, like jobs created by the construction of the Reliance factory, the New Deal programs almost exclusively benefitted white male residents, as city officials purposefully excluded the city’s African American residents from jobs and aid programs.²¹⁷

Hattiesburg’s literary clubwomen were largely composed of married, middle- to upper-class women who did not work. Generally, these women occupied a privileged

²¹⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 156-7.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

position in society and likely escaped most of the effects of the Great Depression. Although the women did not need to find employment to support their families, everyone in the city felt the effects of the economic depression. As domestic authorities, women were expected to practice frugality in their home and live by the motto: “Use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without.”²¹⁸ Federal government aid almost exclusively helped provide support to white families in the city because Hattiesburg’s city officials who were in charge of aid distribution influentially limited help to white families.²¹⁹ The Hattiesburg branch of the Red Cross received a federal grant in 1931 and was soon inundated with applications from locals requesting help. Forrest County officials, including Mayor W. S. F. Tatum, attempted to strong-arm the Red Cross into complying with segregationist policies. When the Red Cross refused to comply because of its national non-discrimination policy, the organization was forced out of the city.²²⁰ Losing aid provided by the Red Cross proved detrimental to the city, but the city obviously valued maintaining the racial status quo over all else.

Throughout the thirties, the women discussed New Deal programs, especially concerning their effects on Mississippi and Hattiesburg, and the potential for the outbreak of global war in the near future. The women strove to educate themselves about United States politics and global affairs and clubs provided a structured and serious space for the women to discuss these topics and organize their charitable work. The group setting of club meetings fostered intellectual discourse; being in a group encouraged the women to

²¹⁸ Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 2.

²¹⁹ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 151.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

keep up with current affairs so that they were able to engage in topical conversations with their fellow club members.

The Presidential election fell just as the Depression hit a nationwide peak through the winter of 1932 and 1933.²²¹ That year, the Woman's Club chose not to adhere to one particular theme of study but instead compiled a series of topics about American politics, literature, and home economics.²²² Mrs. D. P. Cameron (Mary Pierce) hosted the women's first meeting about "World Affairs Today" on September 28, 1932. In the following meeting, members profiled each of the presidential candidates running in that year's election: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, John Garner, and Charles Curtis. Hoover espoused "federal grants to corporations to get industrial production moving again," but left unemployed individuals with no direct support from the federal government.²²³ Roosevelt easily won the election despite his vague promises to provide relief. Later in October, Mrs. P. A. Carter (Rebecca Cook) hosted the ladies in a meeting to discuss "Some Other Americans of Affairs Today." Attention to political actors and trends demonstrates that the women took their civic duties earnestly. The women scheduled meetings pertaining to candidates and politics early in the club year as to educate themselves about options before the election. Hattiesburgers waited eagerly cast their ballots for Roosevelt in the 1932 election.²²⁴

In the New Year, Mrs. W. O. Tatum (Minnie Thrash) led the club in a discussion titled "Practical Home Making," which probably included guidelines about running a

²²¹ Ware, *Holding Their Own*, xiii.

²²² 1932-33 Yearbook, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg Yearbooks, 1920-1930, M163, Folder 1, McCain Library and Archives.

²²³ Ware, *Holding Their Own*, xiii-xiv.

²²⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 155.

frugal household during the height of the Depression. Some of the most affluent white Hattiesburgers belonged to the Woman's Club, but the fact that these well-off women discussed home matters shows the wide-reaching effects of the economic crash. Because women largely handled the finances required for running the household, which often amounted to more than 80% of the family's yearly income, discussions about how to cut costs for living became increasingly relevant in the early 1930s.²²⁵ Cutting down on household costs, including food and clothing, could significantly affect a family's financial well-being during this period.

Discussing Culture and Politics

Club discussions during the 1930s often concentrated on societal issues in addition to political ones, including race, gender, and the South. In the fall of 1934, the Review Club presented topics titled "proposals and efforts to harmonize racial relations," "problems of the Indians," and "Japanese in the U.S." Two weeks later, the club listened to a lecture on "Negro Education in the South."²²⁶ Like the Orpheus Club's discussion about African American music several years before, the Review Club's conversations about race in the United States shows that these Southern women discussed pertinent issues about race and ethnicity during their club meetings. Knowledge about these topics was especially appropriate during this period of racial tension. The minorities discussed in the ladies' club meetings faced systemic racial oppression throughout this period. People of Japanese descent were imprisoned in internment camps, the federal government

²²⁵ Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 3.

²²⁶ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

neglected Native American groups, and African Americans faced widespread violence and repression. While the particulars of the women's thoughts about these topics remain unknown, there was clearly dialogue among the club members about such matters.

The Orpheus Club's topic of study in 1936-7 included discussions about "The Old South."²²⁷ At a January meeting, Mabel Donovan led a discussion about Robert E. Lee, which was subtitled in the program as a "gentleman and a hero."²²⁸ Later that month, Mary Kate Komp hosted the club for a lecture by Dr. B. I. Wiley about "The Old South." Unfortunately, the details of that lecture remain unknown. Then, Mary Kate Komp presented a book review of *Gone With the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell as part of the ladies' discussion about Southern literature on February 13, 1937.²²⁹ The Pulitzer Prize winning bestselling novel, which was then adapted into a hugely popular film in 1939, portrayed a highly romanticized version of the Civil War era South through an upper class, white woman's perspective. Described as "gripping," "tragic," and "masterful," if not a bit long-winded, *Gone With the Wind* flew off shelves and it is unsurprising to find it among the titles in the Orpheus Club program.²³⁰ According to Drew Gilpin Faust, the novel is in many ways "at odds with both the prevailing national and southern mythologies of the war," and denies changes wrought by the conflict, especially regarding race, gender, and notions of freedom.²³¹ Regardless of what the

²²⁷ 1936-37 Orpheus Club Yearbook, Philharmonia and Orpheus Club, Box 1, Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. (Hereafter HAHS)

²²⁸ 1936-37 Orpheus Club Yearbook, Philharmonia and Orpheus Club, Box 1, HAHS.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Walter Barlow, "Gone With the Wind, by Margaret Mitchell," Review of *Gone With the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell, *Sketch* 3, no. 2, article 1 (1939): 31, *Iowa State University Digital Press*, Iowa State University.

²³¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, "Clutching the Chains That Bind: Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*," *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 6.

clubwomen thought of the book's portrayal of the Deep South, Mitchell's volume surely fostered conversation among the ladies.

The Woman's Club similarly hosted a literary meeting about Southern life ways during the 1936-7 club year. For two meetings, the ladies considered histories of various southern states and cities, including New Orleans, Mobile, Little Rock, Nashville, and Asheville. Additionally, the women discussed "Paducah, Gateway to Dixie," "Atlanta, Crossroads of the Old South," and "Memphis, The South's Half-Way House." Topics also included the Texas centennial and Sam Houston, "Pioneer Government Maker." Interestingly, Mrs. Walter Dreyfus (Cecile) led a discussion titled "Oklahoma, Last Home of First American."²³² Later in the year, the ladies profiled political southern women, including Stella Akin, a Georgia lawyer who served in Franklin Roosevelt's presidential cabinet; Judge Camille Kelley who worked in Tennessee's juvenile court system; Ellen Sullivan Woodward, Mississippi politician who served under Roosevelt as the head of the Woman's Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Lastly, the women read *Culture in the South* (1934), edited by W. T. Couch, which included chapters by thirty-one authors that painted a descriptive picture of "the states of the 'Old South' (and Texas)."²³³ While the book was argued to be a good reference for anyone studying the south, several of the chapters included explicitly racist or segregationist rhetoric, including Couch's own argument that "African Americans preferred to live in segregated

²³² Yearbook, 1935-36, Woman's Club of Hattiesburg Yearbooks, 1920-1930, M163, Folder 1, MLA.

²³³ Floyd N. House, "Culture in the South. W. T. Couch," *American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 4 (Jan., 1935), 525.

communities.”²³⁴ The clubwomen’s investigation of the south and its various personalities gives nuance how the women understood the culture of their region. They primarily learned about prominent white women, and the group read texts with racist ideology; at the same time, the women’s clubs still served as a place for the members to discuss these weighty themes and to educate themselves, no matter the women’s particular political or racial ideologies.

The Philharmonia Club discussed Jonathan Daniels’ *A Southerner Discovers the South* in January 1939.²³⁵ Daniels’ best-selling book was well received by both blacks and whites in the South even though the book “[mildly criticized] racism and [called] for expanded New Deal programs.”²³⁶ Readers generally regarded Daniels as rather progressive, despite his sedate opinions about racial politics in the book and rare meetings with African Americans during his travels through the South for research. Daniels distinctly called for “expanded federal aid and attention to the South,” which would have appealed to Hattiesburg’s women, who had so recently emerged from deep economic hardships.²³⁷ Deliberations about *A Southerner Discovers the South* may have highlighted themes of race and economics and led to broader discussions that then informed the women’s political opinions.

²³⁴ Orvin Lee Shiflett, *William Terry Couch and the Politics of Academic Publishing: An Editor’s Career as Lightning Rod of Controversy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), 50.

²³⁵ Philharmonia Club’s 1938-39 Yearbook, Mentor Club and Philharmonia Club, Box 1, HAHS.

²³⁶ Jennifer Ritterhouse, “Dixie Destinations: Rereading Jonathan Daniels’s *A Southerner Discovers the South*,” *Southern Spaces*, May 20, 2010, accessed February 20, 2020. <https://southernspaces.org/2010/dixie-destinations-rereading-jonathan-danielss-southerner-discovers-south/>

²³⁷ Jennifer Ritterhouse, “Dixie Destinations: Rereading Jonathan Daniels’s *A Southerner Discovers the South*.”

In fall 1942, both the Orpheus and the Philharmonia Clubs read *Tap Roots* (1942) by James Howell Street, a journalist who grew up in southeast Mississippi and lived in Hattiesburg for a brief time as a young man.²³⁸ Street's highly popular book told a fictionalized story about a renegade pro-Union family living in Jones County during the Civil War.²³⁹ Street deliberately wrote *Tap Roots* to counter stereotypes built by Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, which the Orpheus Club read in a February 1937 meeting. In tearing apart the romanticized Old South version of Mississippi portrayed in Mitchell's novel, Street "discussed not only race relations but also the class origins and political backgrounds of Piney Woods settlers."²⁴⁰ The women read *Tap Roots* the year of its publication and were likely interested in the story it told of the Piney Woods' residents and how the book portrayed racial relations in the area following the Civil War. It is likely that the novel would have been of particular interest to two clubs' members because they were residents of southeastern Mississippi's during the height of the Civil Rights movement. Both *Tap Roots* and *A Southerner Discovers the South* would have invited discourse about social issues in the South.

In the mid-1930s, clubs began discussing the state of politics in Europe and the possibility for impending war. During the 1935-36 club year, the Orpheus Club held several meetings dedicated to discussing modern European politics. In October, Grace Smith hosted the ladies for a three-part meeting about "Abyssinia," a term used in reference to Ethiopia.²⁴¹ In the first portion of the gathering, Louise Ross presented a

²³⁸ 1942-43 Orpheus Club Yearbook, Philharmonia and Orpheus Club, Box 1, HAHS.

²³⁹ Victoria Bynum, *Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 2.

²⁴⁰ Bynum, *Free State of Jones*, 12.

²⁴¹ 1935-36 Orpheus Club Yearbook, Philharmonia and Orpheus Club, Box 1, HAHS.

book review on *Beyond the Utmost Purple Rim* (1925) by E. Alexander Powell. The book accounts Powell's travels through parts of Africa, namely his time in colonial Ethiopia. The club likely chose this book because it gave the women some history from which to spark discussions about colonialism, especially regarding the implications of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Following the review of Powell's work, Mildred Culpepper led the ladies in a discussion about "why Mussolini wants war," and Frances Davis wrapped up the meeting by addressing "differences of British and French attitudes toward Italy in Ethiopia." The last two parts of the meeting encouraged the women to consider international affairs and colonial relationships, especially in a time of international political tensions. Myra Hickman led a chat in a later meeting about the "latest developments in Germany."²⁴² The women's selection of these topics demonstrates the women's interest in educating themselves about global diplomacy, which was becoming increasingly strained because of German antagonism.

In fall of 1936, the Orpheus Club's women continued political discussions, but shifted to focus on American matters, which also reflects a growing American isolationist ideology. In early October 1936, Alyce Busby hosted a meeting about "National Affairs."²⁴³ Again split into three parts, the meeting's first presentation by Josephine Sullivan addressed "What the president does." Understanding the president's role was especially prudent in this period of federal government expansion and increasingly complicated international politics. Eva Ward's presentation, "Mississippi and the New Deal," addressed politics in Mississippi specifically. Before the New Deal,

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ 1936-37 Orpheus Club Yearbook, Philharmonia and Orpheus Club, Box 1, HAHS.

Mississippians were largely “anti-statist” and rejected federal intervention in state and local affairs.²⁴⁴ However, Hattiesburgers welcomed the New Deal programs in the wake of the Great Depression that alleviated economic hardships. The final part of the meeting addressed “Third Party Activity – Platform and Personalities,” which was particularly apt because 1936 was an election year. This attentiveness to current politics shows that although Roosevelt swept the election nationally, the women educated themselves about that year’s ballot, as they had in preparation for the 1932 election.

World War II

America initiated preparations for war in the summer of 1940 as tensions in Europe and Asia reached a fever pitch – though the country did not officially enter the war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.²⁴⁵ The looming advent of war in Europe brought renewed economic prosperity to the Hattiesburg area as the federal government decided to restore Camp Shelby as a full-scale military establishment starting in September 1940. The government expended approximately \$22 million to revive the site, which included paying wages for the nearly twelve thousand laborers who worked on building infrastructure. The revitalization of Camp Shelby brought a new wave of economic prosperity into the Hattiesburg area by providing thousands of jobs and wages not only in construction sectors, but also in entertainment, housing, and shopping.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 157.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-2.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

When the mobilization project concluded, Camp Shelby could house more than fifty thousand troops and employed thousands of local workers.²⁴⁷

A housing crisis arose fairly early in the mobilization effort because of the vast numbers of troops, workers, and their families migrating into the Piney Woods area. While the city diligently worked to secure funding to build affordable housing developments, Hattiesburg's women strove to support new arrivals, particularly military families. The Young Women's Christian Association provided services to families of servicemen, such as helping "wives of servicemen in locating living quarters."²⁴⁸ The Review Club, which worked closely with the YWCA, likely helped to support this cause, though no concrete evidence of this remains.

The advent of another major war changed the primary direction of literary groups; once again the clubwomen shifted their principal efforts away from literature and toward war relief work. Women put their organizational expertise to work when putting together sewing meetings and charity events. Clubs dedicated meetings to sewing or making surgical dressings for the Red Cross, with some, including the Mentor and Philharmonia Clubs, committing up to every other meeting to charity work.²⁴⁹ Late in the war, the Philharmonia Club spent their meeting time sewing for the Red Cross up to once per month.²⁵⁰ The Woman's Club dedicated half of their program in 1942-43 to "Life,

²⁴⁷ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 191.

²⁴⁸ *The History of Forrest County Mississippi* (Hattiesburg: Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, 2000), 82.

²⁴⁹ Mentor Club's 1943-44 Yearbook, Mentor Club and Philharmonia Club, Box 1, HAHS; Lori Dees and Jeanne Hunt, *Review Club 100 Year Anniversary*, June 2013, HAHS.

²⁵⁰ Philharmonia Club's 1942-43 Yearbook, Mentor Club and Philharmonia Club, Box 1, HAHS.

Literature, and Music Today” and half to “Red Cross and Defense Work.”²⁵¹ The club also formed committees of three women devoted to both the Red Cross and defense work; the women set aside three meetings out of the fourteen scheduled for the year specifically for a Red Cross meeting.²⁵² The following year’s program was similarly structured, but the women dedicated even more time to Red Cross meetings and conferring about the various fronts of the war, including the European, Pacific, Asiatic, and home fronts. It seemed that by the last year of the war, the women dedicated a significant amount of time that would have otherwise been spent discussing literature to keeping themselves informed about the intense war.

Incorporating war work into regular club activities, such as creating committees and organizing benefit events, became standard for literary clubs through this period. Some fundraising efforts were designed to double as social events for the clubwomen. For example, the Mentor Club organized two War Bond Benefit Bridge Parties: one in October 1943 and another in November of that same year. The game parties took the place of one of the nine official meetings during the club year, demonstrating the women’s intense dedication to the war effort, but also their desire for social events like those they would have held before the war.²⁵³

Like their colleagues who created committees to tend to Red Cross and defense work, the ladies of the Review Club formed a committee of members who worked to

²⁵¹ 1943-44 Yearbook, Woman’s Club of Hattiesburg Yearbooks, 1920-1930, M163, Folder 1, MLA.

²⁵² 1944-45 Yearbook, Woman’s Club of Hattiesburg, 1920-1930, M163, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

²⁵³ 1943-44 Mentor Club Yearbook, Mentor Club and Philharmonia Club, Box 1, HAHS.

organize the sale of war bonds and Defense Stamps.²⁵⁴ Members volunteered to sell the bonds and stamps at Mississippi Power Company and at Eisman's Department Store.²⁵⁵ Frugality and diminishing waste took a similar form during the war years as it did during the Depression. Clubwomen used club meetings to disseminate information about war rationing and to organize charitable work and donations. Review Club members took a pledge in February 1942 that stated: "I will buy carefully, I will take good care of the things I have. I will waste nothing."²⁵⁶ Based on this philosophy of minimizing waste, the women used scraps of fabric during the winter of 1943 to sew a quilt for the Red Cross.²⁵⁷ The group combined war-related charitable work, like making wreaths to raise soldiers' spirits at Camp Shelby around Christmastime, and home front charities that the women contributed to before the war, such as donating to the State School for the Feeble Minded and donating gifts to the Old Ladies' Home in Jackson. Additionally, the women donated money to the Red Cross, War Fund, and the Blood Plasma Fund. Lastly, in adherence with their literary goals, the club ladies donated a subscription to Reader's Digest to the soldiers at Shelby, and gave books to the Victory Book Campaign, which sent books to soldiers.²⁵⁸

When the women did gather for regular meetings during the war years, they often focused on topics associated with current affairs and international politics. The Philharmonia Club only reserved ten of their meetings that year for literature, with three

²⁵⁴ Lori Dees and Jeanne Hunt, *Review Club 100 Year Anniversary*, June 2013, HAHS.

²⁵⁵ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

²⁵⁶ Lori Dees and Jeanne Hunt, *Review Club 100 Year Anniversary*, June 2013, HAHS.

²⁵⁷ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

dedicated to Red Cross sewing; one for a benefit gathering; two set aside for business meetings; and two for socials. The club read war-related books in four of the literary meetings. In one of these meetings, the women discussed *Year of the Wild Boar* by Helen Mears, which tells about the author's experiences in pre-war Japan and likely complicated the women's assessments about the controversial nation. For example, the Philharmonia Club read *How War Came: An American White Paper; From the Fall of France to Pearl Harbor* as a literary program in February 1943.²⁵⁹ The book written by Forrest Davis and Earnest K. Lindley tells the story of how war came about and fit neatly into the women's earlier discussions about politics and the war's impending arrival. Discussions about the war's causes exemplify the literary clubs' integral role as a political space and their constant desire to attain more information about foreign nations shows that the women aimed to formulate their own views about politics, specifically in a setting where they could converse with other women.

Despite the prolonged effects of depression and the outbreak of war, clubs organized social gatherings as they did during the previous decades' economic hardships. The Review Club held an annual gathering at the Sunken Garden at the State Teachers College (now the location of McLemore Hall at USM), which was "built in 1932 as a jobs project during the early part of the depression."²⁶⁰ These annual gatherings were quite sizeable: at the gathering in May 1935, the women paid 50 cents and "could invite 10 guests."²⁶¹ Typically, the club listed around thirty women on the roster, meaning that

²⁵⁹ 1942-43 Philharmonia Club Yearbook, Mentor Club and Philharmonia Club, Box 1, HAHS.

²⁶⁰ Lori Dees and Jeanne Hunt, *Review Club 100 Year Anniversary*, June 2013, HAHS.

²⁶¹ "Summary Notes from Minutes, 1913-1976," Hattiesburg Review Club, 1913-2013, M449, Box 1, Folder 1, MLA.

there may have been upwards of 300 people invited to the event. The ladies hosted the formal party again the following year on May 13 at 8:00 pm. Group events like these Sunken Garden parties provided the women with an opportunity to socialize with others in their community and make connections outside of the club group. This socializing was important because it allowed the women to strengthen and expand their networks of influence within the city.

Sometimes the clubs hosted social gatherings as a way to raise money for their organization. Each year the Review Club donated between \$5 and \$10 to the YWCA and budgeted \$15 to print their yearbooks. In addition to these promised sums, the club had also pledged a total of \$100 to bring the Reliance Company to Hattiesburg in 1933, to be paid in thirty monthly installments of \$3.34. Unfortunately, the \$40.08 owed to Reliance that year pushed the club to the top of its annual budget and the ladies voted to host a “silver tea” to raise the additional funds.²⁶² Instead of wavering on their financial obligations and foregoing donations to charitable causes, the women planned the benefit tea to raise extra money. During this period of tight finances, the Review Club was not part of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, but it planned to rejoin the Federation “when it was financially possible.”²⁶³ Ultimately, the club did not rejoin the Federation until fall 1936.²⁶⁴ Although the women prized the social aspect of their clubs, the women arguably placed a higher value on their ability to contribute to charitable causes.

Although the proliferation of women’s organizations peaked in the 1920s, a significant number of literary clubs remained active through the period between

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Lori Dees and Jeanne Hunt, *Review Club 100 Year Anniversary*, June 2013, HAHS.

approximately 1933 and 1945. The clubs remained a center for self-education and political organization despite the economic and political upheaval marking this period. Above all, the women remained dedicated to their literary objectives, even if the war increasingly occupied their time. The clubs gave the women a place to exchange ideas and information with others in their social position, especially about topics such as race and gender.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Women’s literary organizations in the twentieth century offered women an opportunity for self-betterment through education, “rather than the ‘true, womanly’ altruism that had characterized earlier woman’s organizations.”²⁶⁵ Although philanthropy was one facet of clubs’ missions, the main goal of these organizations was to regularly gather together to participate in intellectual discourse. Discussing literature, current events, and culture, however, was far from a “passive” engagement with preconceived ideas. Instead, by reading and engaging with one another, the women actively created and disseminated culture, although this culture often acted to reinforce race and class based structures.

In her book, *Book Clubs: Women and the Everyday Uses of Reading*, Elizabeth Long explores the role of women’s nineteenth and twentieth-century women’s reading groups in defining notions of womanhood, identity, and “sociocultural order.”²⁶⁶ Throughout the early twentieth century, reading groups served to empower women to reassess their position in society and engage in social reform.²⁶⁷ Reading books, operas, and plays in a group setting allowed individuals outside of the traditional intellectual realm to engage with so-called “high culture” and formulate their own interpretations about the literature at hand. Additionally, the collective nature of the club environment

²⁶⁵ Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Everyday Uses of Reading* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), 21.

²⁶⁶ Long, *Book Clubs*, xvi.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-3.

encouraged the women to reach for and participate in formal political activities, such as supporting the national campaign for woman's suffrage.

The desire for knowledge that drew women together in the late nineteenth century bound the women's clubs at least through the Second World War. In fact, the Hattiesburg Review Club celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2013. However, the literary club members did not only read: the women used their organizations as a platform for sociability, philanthropy, politics, and intellectualism. Well before women gained a constitutional right to vote or had reliable access to secondary education, the literary club setting encouraged members to engage in politics and learning. War disrupted club's scholarly activities and the women stepped up to organize sewing, cooking, and knitting events to benefit the Red Cross and the base hospital at nearby Camp Shelby. Throughout this period, Hattiesburg's clubwomen also worked to push progressive social reforms to improve sanitation and education by organizing citywide cleanups and donating to rural libraries.

These affluent white southern women adhered to and perpetuated the racial status quo, as well as Progressive-era ideas about eugenics and progress, especially when they chose to exclude African Americans from benefitting from improvement campaigns. The clubwomen's philanthropic, political, and intellectual activities were also propelled by a desire to consolidate and control class power. The social component of the clubs also reflected how the organizations reinforced race and class structures. Membership criteria were often strict and were largely based on class standing. As members of a New South town, Hattiesburg's clubwomen sought to prove their cultural worth by engaging with "high-culture" and progressive ideology.

While this thesis only offers a small glimpse into twentieth century literary groups in the Deep South, the research presented within adds to Hattiesburg's history by bringing these clubwomen's undertakings to light. However, this thesis is far from representative of women's experiences in Hattiesburg during the first half of the twentieth century. Future work should focus on gathering information about African American women's literary organizations in Hattiesburg. Weaving together the histories of black and white women's clubs in the city would create a more cohesive representation of women's club-based activities, and Hattiesburg's women's lives in general.

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