

11-28-1992

The First Century of the Current Events Club of Gardiner, Maine 1892-1992

Margaret A. Harris

Gardiner Events Club Historical Research Committee

THE FIRST CENTURY
of the
CURRENT EVENTS CLUB
of
GARDINER, MAINE
1892 - 1992

MARGARET A. HARRIS
AND MEMBERS
OF THE
HISTORICAL RESEARCH COMMITTEE

ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON!

*Of Current Events I'm the Club!
Of Gardiner's wheel I'm the hub!*

*I beat on my drum
And the women all come
With shouts to my rub-dub-dub.*

*I'm now a full century old;
My wisdom can never be told;
My heart is so warm
That in winter's worst storm
I never have suffered from cold.*

*Then long may our fellowship last!
For the years that come hurrying fast,
I'll give you a toast!
May it still be our boast
That our future is proud as our past!*

In 1942 Laura E. Richards wrote a poem entitled "Fifty Years On!" to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Club. The zest and charm of this poem inspired us to take the liberty of updating it half a century later, changing only the title and line six, which originally read, "I'm half of a century old." We hope Mrs. Richards would approve.

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Edited by Mary A. Kyes

Gardiner, Maine
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In 1992 Lauri E. Richards wrote a poem entitled "Fifty Years On!" to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Club. The text and chorus of this poem inspired us to write this anniversary book.

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P.O. Box 1055, Gardiner, Maine 04345

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—Peg Harris, author and
member of the Historical Committee

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President Harriet Fernald
Vice President Barbara Temple
Treasurer Helen Matz
Secretary Doris Godfrey

LOVINGLY DEDICATED
to



LAURA ELIZABETH RICHARDS WIGGINS

February 12, 1886 - February 2, 1988

*"Our link with the past, our help in the present,
our example for the future."*

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MAINE FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS
Member of GFWC International



April 11, 1991

Current Events Club
President Harriet Fernald
34 Park Street
Farmingdale, Maine 04345

Re: One hundred years of service

Dear Current Events Club,

Congratulations on the celebration of your 100 years as an organized Women's Club in Gardiner, Maine.

As current President of the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs, I offer my sincere congratulations. I also applaud your many projects and community service that your dedicated, faithful members have done over this period.

Best wishes for continued success as you begin your second century of volunteer service. Maine Federation of Women's Club stands ready to assist in any way.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Brawn

Linda C. Brawn, President
Maine Federation of Women's Club

INTRODUCTION

CURRENT EVENTS CLUB CENTENNIAL

1892 - 1992

GARDINER, MAINE

Happy Birthday to you, Current Events Club!

With pride and gratitude for all you have been, and great hopes for what you will continue to be, we blow out the 100 candles on your birthday cake!

IT WASEARLY IN NOVEMBER, 1892, that nine members of Mr. Beeman's former history class decided to meet together to study and discuss the current issues of their day. Very shortly thereafter, November 18, they organized themselves into the Current Events Club, with a membership of 25 and a constitution, part of which is still in effect today.

Article II stated that the objects of this Club shall be the intellectual development of thought and discussion upon the current events of the day. These were remarkable women—a doctor, an author, a poet, an artist, teachers and homemakers—women of culture and refinement interested in their community and world, and willing to give their time and talents to understand and improve it.

Every week, from the first Monday in November until the first Monday in April, they accepted assignments for presenting in-depth papers in the following seven areas: 1. musical and dramatic; 2. artistic; 3. scientific; 4. foreign politics; 5. literary; 6. philanthropic and 7. American politics. If a member was tardy at a meeting, she was charged five cents; if she had three consecutive and unexplained absences, she forfeited her membership and her place was taken by someone on the waiting list.

We are fortunate to have the minutes of the Club meetings over the 100-year span, which we could research, and three histories written by Club members, which we are happy to edit and include in our 100th anniversary book. We include a verbatim set of minutes for each of the three chapters, each chapter being a 35-year segment of Current Events' history. These minutes speak for themselves of the Club's study and dedication, from its beginning to the present, when our still remarkable women continue to study and investigate the issues and events of the present day in order to improve our cultural, social and global family life.

“The object of this Club shall be the intellectual development of thought and discussion upon the current events of the day.”



Dr. Gertrude Heath, 1859 - 1935, first Club President

1

THE EARLY YEARS 1892 - 1925

We quote here from the original history of the Current Events Club given to the Club by Mrs. Lucy Clason in 1929. Although edited because of the demands of space, it gives us a glimpse of the busy, dedicated lives and interests of our first club members.

“THE CURRENT EVENTS CLUB OF GARDINER, Maine, held its first meeting Nov. 18, 1892. The constitutions of the Oakland and Portland clubs were used as models for its organization and some members from the Portland club were present to help start the Gardiner club on its way. In origin it was the transformation or evolution of the History Club which Mrs. Leverett Bradley had organized some years previously into a club devoted to the study of current topics of interest.

“The Club was federated in October, 1893, when the Maine Federation of Women’s Clubs met in Skowhegan, Mrs. Laura E. Richards and Miss Clara Robinson being delegates to this meeting. Mrs. Julia Ward Howe was one of the speakers at this meeting, her subject being ‘Clubs.’ This address was later repeated in Gardiner for the benefit of the Current Events Club and their friends. The Club was also indebted to Mrs. Howe for a number of other interesting talks at different times, one in 1894 being her reminiscences of a half-century acquaintance with Paris.

“The Club has also been favored with many a bright bit of verse from the pen of Mrs. Richards; many an interesting story of hers has been read to the Club in her pleasing manner. In the spring of 1896, she wrote a one-act play embodying the problems of the Venezuela Questions which was presented in character in the Club...

“The first president of the Club was Dr. Gertrude E. Heath. She was a member of the former History Club, and one of the ‘nine first members’ or founders of the Current Events Club. She was a supporter of all the Club’s activities and each year while she was president, she gave her annual report in verse. Her pen has also been much in demand when sorrow touched the Club, to express in her inimitably friendly and delicate way, by letter or resolution, the sympathy and grief of her fellow members.

“Other officers the first year of the Club were: Mrs. Frederic

*“Each year when
she was president,
Dr. Gertrude
Heath gave her
annual report in
verse.”*

“In the fall of 1895 six boxes of books...were put into circulation. It is believed that this was the first traveling library in the State of Maine.”

Dingley, vice president; Miss Mary W. Cooper, secretary and treasurer; Mrs. William Morrell, Miss Eleanor B. Stevens, Miss Clara Robinson and Mrs. D. C. Palmer, directors. Other members of the Club the first year of its existence were Mrs. Sarah Beeman, Miss Anna Collins, Mrs. J. W. Dana, Mrs. Frederic Danforth, Miss Harriet Dennis, Mrs. William G. Ellis, Mrs. Mary Haddock, Mrs. Daniel Longfellow, Mrs. E. W. Morrell, Dr. Huldah M. Potter, Mrs. Langdon Quimby, Miss Amy Richards, Mrs. Walter Robinson, Mrs. A. M. Spear, Mrs. Henry S. Webster... The membership of the Club has always been limited to twenty-five.

“The members have been instrumental in forming in Gardiner other associations for definite purposes... The Club loved books and did much to help others love them and gain a knowledge of literature. One of the early things that was done was to start a traveling library for the rural schools of Gardiner and the surrounding towns. In the fall of 1895 six boxes of books, called ‘The Neighborhood Book Shelf,’ were put into circulation. It is believed that this was the first traveling library in the State of Maine. This continued until 1900 when the books were sent to the Hallowell School for Girls.

“The Club gave away other books too: books to a town that had lost its library by fire; books to a family which had suffered a similar affliction; books to the Sea Coast Mission and to the Sanitarium of Oxford, Maine for ex-service men; books to the Gardiner Public Library on various occasions. The Club was also instrumental in placing in the Library the *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature*.

“Besides the raising of money at various times and in various ways for the Library, the Club had a reading committee to assist the directors of the Library in the selection of books. To stimulate the use of the Library in its early days, books were reviewed by members of the Club and the reviews were sent to the local paper for publication.

“In the matter of conservation probably the earliest project of the Club was an effort to save the song-birds and to save the birds whose plumage was used for millinery purposes. A paper entitled “A Plea for the Song Birds,” written by Miss Eleanor Stevens, was sent to the mid-winter meeting of the State Federation in 1896, urging the state organization to interest themselves and others in the matter. All the members of the Club signed a pledge promising personally not to wear hats bedecked with bird-wings, and this pledge was circulated among the girls at the High School.

“In the matter of philanthropy, the Club interested itself in the woes of Armenia in 1896; wrote the President of State Federation their views on the subject and urged that a petition be sent to our state’s representatives in Washington. A unique assistance to local philanthropy was brought about through the suggestion of Mrs. Laura E. Richards, who proposed to the Current Events Club and helped to bring about the union of all the women’s philanthropic organizations of the city, including the “ladies’ aids” and kindred organizations of the

churches. This was known as the Women's Philanthropic Union of Gardiner. The first meeting of the Union was early in 1896. . . . Much of the success of the Union, both philanthropically and socially, must be attributed to Mrs. Richards for her untiring efforts on its behalf and to her charm and graciousness as a presiding officer.

"The contributions of the Club to philanthropy have been many and varied, both at home and abroad. Records show that from 1910 to 1925 gifts and clothing were sent to the Sea Coast Mission. From 1906 to 1925 it helped the State Federation to educate Maine girls to become teachers. For two years, 1919-20, two French orphans were supported.

"One unusual method employed for raising money was the organization of a Loan Exhibit or temporary museum of articles historic, antique, quaint and interesting. This was first done in March, 1908, at the Gardiner Library and was repeated on January 15, 1920, with a three-day exhibit, admission 25 cents. Spectators came from miles around to see this really wonderful display of Gardiner's treasures. Proceeds were \$84.06 toward the new high school. A tea was held later to bring up the contribution to \$100.

"Current Events Club, early in its career, 1894, appointed a committee to visit the public schools and see in what way the Club could best work for their progress. Sometimes the committee remained in force for the whole season, sometimes a change was made from month to month. Records show that this constant visitation of the schools was kept up for a number of years.

"The sanitation of the schools was the first problem attacked, due, no doubt, to the influence of two medical members of the Club, Dr. Gertrude E. Heath and Dr. Huldah N. Potter. Public opinion was enlisted by the reports of the visiting committee which were published in the local paper, and it was not long before something was done by the authorities for better toilet facilities, general cleanliness, and improved disposal of rubbish. Better lighting of school rooms was also recommended but naturally this improvement came about more slowly.

"In 1898 the Club presented the first picture which was hung upon the school walls. Several times the pupils of the Senior and Junior High Schools have been invited to lectures on current events given under the auspices of the Club.

"To arouse interest in vocational training, the Club arranged for speakers on that subject and in 1915, it petitioned the city government to establish courses in manual training and domestic science,—which was done. The Club then bought material and made the uniforms worn



French orphans Marie-Louise and Genevieve

by the first pupils in these subjects. It also made contributions to the equipment of the domestic science room.

“In 1922, along with others, the Club petitioned the City government for an increase in teachers’ salaries, which was granted. But perhaps the greatest contribution to the cause of education, and one whose force is only beginning to be felt, was in helping organize a Parent-Teacher Association. This was through the suggestion of Mrs. Frank S. Maxcy, a member of the Club. On January 14, 1916, the first Parent-Teacher Association meeting was held, and Mrs. Maxcy became the first president of the association.

“The Club has not been a laggard in other civic interests. In 1907 it put on a play to raise money to aid the Board of Trade in building an addition to the shoe factory. In this year, too, (1907) the Club petitioned the Legislature to form a State Board of Charities and Corrections; and in 1913 it helped entertain the State Conference of Charities and Corrections which convened in Gardiner. In 1917, the Club sent a petition to the Legislature asking the State to assume the care of old cemeteries.

“In health work, other than in helping toward the better sanitation of school buildings and toward the establishment of a district nursing association as already mentioned, the Club had the honor of selling the first Christmas seals in Gardiner in the year of their first issue. From that time, the Club became an associated member of the Gardiner General Hospital Association.

“The future of the Club? Who can tell? Futures lie not in the province of the historian. “We know no way of judging the future but by the past” is a saying whose truth is not worn out by constant use. The Club has never been found wanting in seeing and doing its duty, so it is safe to predict that when new fields of usefulness appear, as they surely will appear, the Current Events Club of Gardiner will attack and conquer these new problems with perennial vigor and enthusiasm.”

*In 1907 the Club
petitioned the
Legislature to
form a State Board
of Charities and
Corrections.*

WE ARE PLEASED TO BRING YOU from our research of the Club's early life, verbatim minutes of the February 25, 1895, meeting on Woman's Suffrage. Our women, like women across the country, were struggling to understand and evaluate this subject. What would our ladies have thought if they could have foreseen women not only voting, but in business and politics in both local and national arenas?

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 25, 1895

(Verbatim—Book 1, CEC Minutes, page 185)

Feb. 25th

"The Club met as usual at the house of Mrs. Danforth, 19 members being present.

"Miss Stevens presided in the absence of Mrs. Dana.

"Several members of the Current Events Club of Hallowell were present as guests.

"The subject for the evening was Woman's Suffrage.

"The first paper by Mrs. Morrell reviewed the changes in the condition of woman, noting the advance in her relation to the work of the world, due to her superior opportunities for education. Woman's inequality in the eye of the law was mentioned. Some changes for the better in this respect were spoken of and it was claimed that only as she is enabled to help form laws can she hope for the recognition of her equality. The value of her opinions and experience in relation to schools, questions of morality and reform was urged as a reason why she could succeed where men have failed. The idea was advanced that the children of a time not distant will accept Woman's Suffrage as much a matter of course as those of the present day accept the freedom of the colored race.

"Miss Pinkham in the second paper, brought arguments against the granting of the right of suffrage to women. The pleas that the responsibility and duty it carries with it will become obligatory and that woman, by her limitations, is not ready for it and dreads it; that instead of her presence at the polls purifying and elevating, she will lose some of her refinement and become contaminated by the peculiar methods of politics; that the demand upon her time and energy would be too great, and the drain upon her system too exhausting; that woman's true sphere is in the home, in church, school and hospital work and that art, poetry and literature are more fitting for her than business and politics.

"The great addition to the number of voters would be of no benefit to the State and her claim for representation is met by the fact that her interests are identical with those of her husband, brother, or father. Several instances when the privilege as exercised has not seemed a success were cited and claimed to be more convincing than theories."

"The idea was advanced that the children of a time not distant will accept Woman's Suffrage as much a matter of course as those of the present day accept the freedom of the colored race."

*There was a
Russian
Christmas, a
Japanese New
Year, a Fancy
Dress Party and
Colonial parties,
all enthusiastically
entered into by the
members in
costume.*

In their weekly in-depth studies of the events of the day, our Current Events Club women focused on such subjects as their study of photography in medicine (X-ray arriving on the scene); or the prediction that the flying machine and not the balloon was to be the coming vehicle for aerial locomotion; and the actions of contemporary friends and acquaintances, some of whom were world figures and whom we regard as historical geniuses. Gounod had just died; Verdi just written "Falstaff"; Melba was entrancing visitors to the Metropolitan Grand Opera; Robert Louis Stevenson, Brett Hart, Bismark, Gladstone (just resigned as England's Prime Minister), Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton were each earning their stars on the road to international repute. Many of these well-known people were personal friends of our Club members.

In the field of American federal politics, there was much study and discussion regarding the annexation of Florida and later the purchase of Alaska as to their being of benefit to the United States.

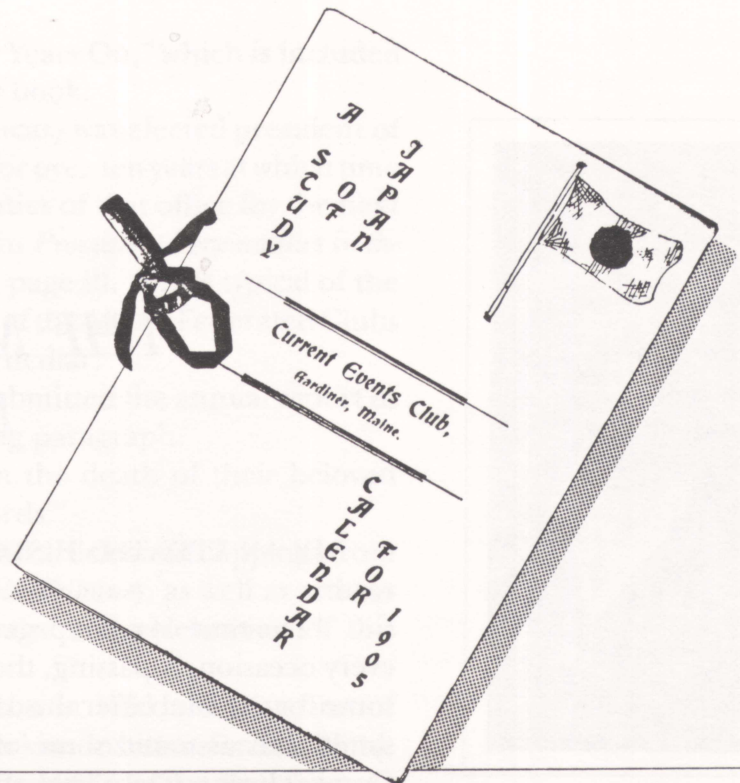
Not only did our early members study hard together, they partied and entertained with zest also, so that their social activities were very special events in the Club's life. At the last meeting of the Club's second year, 70 members and guests were entertained by an original story called "The Verona" written by Mrs. Richards and made doubly attractive by Mrs. Richard's reading.

On one occasion there were 60 present at a supper meeting at the Hotel Brunswick, with vocal and instrumental music by various members, poetry and readings by other members and "a social hour closing with the Virginia Reel." There was a Russian Christmas, a Japanese New Year, a Fancy Dress Party and Colonial parties, all enthusiastically entered into by the members in costume. There were picnics and spelling bees and one time when everyone came dressed as part of a deck of cards.

A history of the Club by Miss Clara Robinson written in 1922, closes with these sentences:

"To some of us it has meant work we felt beyond us, but we have taken out more than we put in. It has opened windows into many beautiful vistas and given a larger comprehension of the vital things of life...It is a fine experience to be a part of this body and we all must feel it an honor and a privilege to have been and to be a member of the Current Events Club of Gardiner. May its life continue long and successful."

To which we all echo a hearty "Amen!"



Club members, in costumes of the past, serving as hostesses for a loan exhibit, 1920.

Front row: Mrs. Edwin Lucas, Mrs. Frank S. Maxcy, Mrs. S. O. Clason, Mrs. Alice I. Ellis, Mrs. Daniel Longfellow, Miss Rosalind Richards, Mrs. Henry Richards.

Second row: Mrs. Frederick Danforth, Mrs. Clarence S. Jackson, Mrs. Langdon Quimby, Mrs. Thos. C. Chaffee, Mrs. Bickford, Miss Annie G. Bailey, Mrs. A. T. Reynolds.

Third row: Mrs. A. G. Chase, Dr. G. E. Heath.

THE MIDDLE YEARS 1926-1959

IN AN UPDATED HISTORY of Current Events Club (1929), we read:

“The time of great pageants, exhibits, wonderful poems for most every occasion, is passing, though Dr. Heath and Mrs. Richards wrote some for the Club after this 1929 date. But now the city and the school system has assumed some of the activities started in earlier days by Current Events Club. They still sponsored every good movement, kept up with current events and their papers were on the most pertinent subjects of the day.”

The programs ranged through all the categories of art, music, literature, drama, science, and politics, both national and local, domestic and foreign. Many of our ladies were great travellers and the reports they made on their trips ranged from “bus to California” to “strato-cruiser to Hawaii.” There were also visits to the Canadian Northwest, to Italy, England and to other countries of Europe, much enjoyed by the stay-at-homers!

Dr. Hill gave a memorable meeting on the hard of hearing, and a donation was made towards his work.

One meeting was on “Authors of Gardiner,” covering such local figures as Laura Richards, Dr. Gertrude Heath, Caroline Swan, Kate Vannah, and Edwin Arlington Robinson. A remarkable number of talented published writers from one small geographic area.

At one meeting a member and teacher, Jessie White, who had been to the Audubon Summer Camp, reported on her experience in such glowing terms that the Club voted an immediate donation. This began our Club’s support and still continuing interest in Audubon and the natural out-door societies and programs of today.

At another meeting, it was voted to plant a tree on the Gardiner Common in honor of George Washington’s Bicentennial. This was accomplished when before the next meeting, a hemlock was planted on the Common.

During this period, the Club celebrated its 50th Anniversary with an updated history of the Club and a poem written in honor of the

Many of our ladies were great travellers and the reports they made on their trips ranged from “bus to California” to “strato-cruiser to Hawaii.”

occasion by Mrs. Richards entitled "Fifty Years On," which is included in updated form on the first page of our book.

In 1941 Ellen Lucas (Mrs. Edwin Lucas) was elected president of Current Events Club, a position she held for over ten years at which time she became secretary and fulfilled the duties of that office for the next eighteen years. Mrs. Lucas is written up in *Prominent Personalities in the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs*, Vol. II, page 111. She is typical of the many devoted and dependable members of the Maine Federated Clubs and our own Current Events Club in particular.

In March, 1943, Mrs. H. Danforth submitted the annual report of the secretary in which we find this moving paragraph:

"The Club sustained a great loss in the death of their beloved charter member, the late Laura E. Richards."

In existing records of the Club, we find articles and clippings from Boston and New York papers (*N.Y. Herald Tribune*), as well as articles and eulogies from Maine papers, in praise and celebration of this remarkable woman's life and influence.

Laura E. Richards was born in Boston in 1851, the daughter of Samuel Gridley Howe, founder of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, and Julia Ward Howe, author of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. At 17 she made an extensive Grand Tour of Europe which awakened her great interest in the arts and humanities and a life-long dedication to learning.

She married Henry Richards of Boston and they came to live in Gardiner in 1876 and in the Yellow House in 1878. From that union, seven children were born, one of whom (Maud) died in infancy and "the noble six" all of whom grew up to be fine men and women. There followed a seventy-one year marriage, a full family life, many books authored for both children and adults, one a two-volume biography of Julia Ward Howe. This was the first biography ever to win a Pulitzer Prize.

She was a community citizen of rare dedication and courage. She was founder of the Gardiner Public Library Association; friend of world-renowned celebrities (Alexander Woolcott, Ogden Nash, President Theodore Roosevelt) and people in all walks of life.

Mrs. Richards died just a few weeks before her 93rd birthday. She left a legacy of triumphant living and an example of loving, creative womanliness for generations to follow. A typical tribute to her from one of the remarkable editorials at the time of her death is quoted herewith:

LAURA E. RICHARDS

"In the death of Mrs. Laura E. Richards, Maine has lost one of its most conspicuous figures in the world of literature, and a citizen who for attainments and for both beauty and force of character was one of its choicest spirits. Recognition of her powers was by no means local



Ellen Lucas, 1878 - 1977

"Ellen Lucas... is typical of the devoted and dependable members of the Maine Federated Clubs and our own Current Events Club in particular."

“People like Mrs. Richards...live on in the better world they have helped create; they are an incalculable inspiration in the lives they have touched; they ennoble human life itself.”

only; for a generation or two she had been the prized friend of many of our national figures. Her home was a mecca. Both old and young fell under her spell and paid homage to her wit and charm. During her long life of almost 93 years, she had nobly discharged her obligations under noblesse oblige; the daughter of the highest type of Americans, themselves immortals, she carried on the traditions of her family as she established her own secure place while the decades passed.

“The Country will mourn for her. Maine will mourn for her. Gardiner, her community, will never be able to fill the gap that her passing opens. But her countless friends everywhere will continue to discover how much they have profited from her serenity, power and influence. People like Mrs. Richards never really die; they live on in the better world they have helped create; they are an incalculable inspiration in the lives that they have touched; they ennoble human life itself. Maine would have kept Mrs. Richards, if it could have kept her, forever. Since it could not keep her in the flesh, it will keep her in fond memory, glad that it had known her, in all her gentleness and wisdom, her grace and charm. She has created her own monument in the lives and thinking of a multitude.”

In 1950, Evelin Grover (Mrs. Harry Grover), an active member of Current Events Club, was elected Regional Director of District 10, Maine Federation of Women’s Clubs. She is written up in *Prominent Personalities in the MFWC*, Vol. II, pg. 110.

In 1953, we find the Club making a change in its pattern of meetings. For sixty years it had met every week beginning in November, with two weeks off at Christmas, having its last meeting of the year usually the first Monday in April. At this time the Club began to meet every two weeks, November through April, with the annual meeting usually the first Monday in May. It might also be noted that while about half of the meetings were in-depth papers by its members on subjects of interest to the Club, there was a great increase in the number of meetings given by invited speakers and professionals in specific areas. In 1955, for example, of the ten meetings, five were outside speakers and five were by members. Also the use of colored slides and slide-illustrated presentations became very popular.

Mrs. Calnan, librarian of the Gardiner Public Library, continued the close affection and cooperation between the Club and the Library, giving a yearly book-review program. This fine custom continues to this day when Glenna Nowell, the present friendly and very capable librarian, presents a yearly program of the latest books and library business to the present Current Events Club.

In 1956, a letter was sent to Governor Muskie expressing the desire of the Club that space be made available for the State Museum in the new State Building being constructed, “thus providing a worthwhile means of education and interest to young and old residents of the State,



LAURA E. RICHARDS:
Ave Atque Vale

On April 5, 1926, Mrs. Laura Richards resigning from active membership in the Club wrote this poem for the occasion:

AVE ATQUE VALE

*Some five and thirty years ago,
 How glad I joined the Current,
 Speeding down its sparkling flow
 Fast as Events would warrant.*

*The world was not too wide for us,
 The stream was not too rapid;
 We dashed along with shout and song,
 A company intrepid.*

*Each distant harbor we explored,
 Called at each port and station;
 Whate'er might hap, with one accord,
 We made investigation.*

*Each monarch must account to us
 For every royal action;
 Each president say what he meant,
 To give us satisfaction.*

*In short, the world, through ether hurled,
 Still turning on its axis,
 To us must bow, explaining how
 It lived and paid its taxes.*

*But now, alas! whate'er the cause
 The tide seems flowing faster!
 My dory is not what it was
 I somehow fear disaster.*

*And when the Monday evening comes,
 Instead of glad desire
 To dash down stream, - I nurse a dream,
 And stir my evening fire.*

*But still, dear friends, though herewith ends
 My voyaging down the river,
 My thoughts will glide along the tide
 In friendly feeling ever.*

*Good luck! goodbye! and far or nigh,
 Circumference or centre,
 Be sure my heart still bears its part,
 Still beats a "Current Eventer."*

*The March 5,
1957 minutes of
the Club meeting
show our ladies
to have been
interested and
concerned about
the “drug scene”
in our society even
at that time...*

as well as visitors to the Maine Capitol.” The Governor replied with a personal letter, thanking the Club for its interest in the State Museum and expressing his own interest and support.

The March 5, 1957, minutes of the Club meeting show our ladies to have been interested and concerned about the “drug scene” in our society even at that time, when Mrs. Robert Dunn gave an exceedingly good paper on New Drugs. She focused especially on the tranquilizers “whose rise in use is meteoric.” She traced the use of tranquilizing drugs from “snake root brew” in India, moldy bread in Italy, which was the forerunner of penicillin, and certain mushrooms and poppy seeds in the East used to calm and sedate patients.

Modern drugs are based on some of the ingredients of those ancient brews and doses. She explained that while “anxieties are normal for everyone, some people have not the power to adjust themselves to them” and many turned to drugs to help cope with life. Abuses were rampant. For example “Milltown” was discovered and used in 1950 and three years later *30 billion* tablets were used in one year. Drugs should not be sold over the counter. “In the stress of present day life, the desire for freedom from fear has become a new philosophy.” Drugs used under medical supervision have done much good in mental illness but need to be carefully administered and not abused by easy acquisition and self-dosage.

In 1958, during the presidency of Maxine Lamb (Mrs. Phillip), the oak gavel which was originally given to the Club by Julia Ward Howe in 1892 was banded in silver and suitably inscribed through the generosity of Mrs. David Bowie, the former Club president. The gavel is still used with nostalgia and pride for each Current Events Club meeting.

Katherine Fassett, who for many years was a professional Counselor, gave a program on Student Counseling at the high school and college levels. She explained the process, problems and successes of helping young people straighten out their lives, and answered many questions from the Club members when her formal presentation was over. The minutes of that meeting end with the succinct statement: “It was a truly worthwhile evening.”

True to its continuing interest in education, the Club invited Mr. Norman Gardner to speak at its final meeting of the year, 1959, on the conditions and needs of Gardiner schools and the significance and purpose of the Sinclair Act, passed by the Legislature, to help fund new school construction. As this was a great change in the school system, from independence of each city’s schools to interdependence with and among the schools of neighboring towns, there was great interest in the subject, with feelings running high, both pro and con. We quote from the minutes of April 6, 1959, page 75.

“On April 6th, the Annual Meeting of the Current Events Club was held at the home of Mrs. Bull....Mrs. Lamb who presided said the

business meeting would be deferred and turned the meeting over to Mrs. Paul Rowe who introduced Mr. Norman Gardner, a member of the Gardiner School Board whose topic was the present School situation in Gardiner.

“He referred to the Sinclair Act which is intended to alleviate the need for larger schools, better and more liberal training which is growing more and more necessary due to increased population and increased demands for more highly trained students. He gave statistics to show that it was necessary to provide *these things* in order to obtain the state subsidy which presented foundation program of \$140 per elementary pupil and \$200 or \$240 for Secondary. If this amount is not spent the subsidy is 10% less. The subsidy for Gardiner is 41% and for Pittston 61%.

“An administrative Committee must be elected for a term of five years. The State will help if two or more towns combine under one School Board, and each community will have representation. A four town area is better to work than a six town area. If a Board issue is made, it must have the vote of the people by a referendum. At the present time no town or district in the Gardiner area is able to provide an adequate Junior High School program. The present High School Building would serve that purpose. At least \$1,400,000 is needed. If Gardiner goes it alone, it will have no help construction-wise from the State and the Junior High School program will still be inadequate. The present High School was built for 400 and soon there will be 800 students. If enlarged the offices, facilities, locker rooms, etc. will have to be enlarged or reconstructed. The expense will be very great and then not so satisfying as a new location. Space is the great need both inside and out. The report of the recent survey made commendations, recommendations and requirements. Mr. Gardner urgently begged every one to vote on April 20th on all three requirements.

“If these are approved, then there will be an election of directors of the Board to serve 1, 2, or 3 years, rotating every three years.

“Questions were asked by members. The question of transportation was brought up. Pittston students will have the longest distance, about 12 miles. Six new classrooms and an entirely new furnace are to be added to the Central Street School this summer. It was agreed that more publicity was needed to acquaint people of the real facts and needs of Gardiner Schools and pupils. It will be costly in any case and the need seems to be imperative. The members appreciated Mr. Gardner’s talk, which clarified so many points....”

It should be recorded that Gardiner, Pittston, Randolph and West Gardiner did vote to form a district—MSAD 11 which has been a successful blending of the educational needs and teaching skills of the four-town area. A new high school was built and a new Junior High School; many improvements were made in the various elementary

“The members appreciated Mr. Gardner’s talk, which clarified so many points...”

During these years many happy social occasions were held, such as the annual party at various members' homes. Picnics were a common form of celebration...

schools, the libraries and the athletic fields in the area. Cooperation and improvements are an on-going reality.

During these years many happy social occasions were held, such as the annual party at various members' homes. Picnics were a common form of celebration, and several field trips to special areas of interest were taken. Especially enjoyed was a summer outing at Chechaka House in Damariscotta followed by a trip to the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland and then home by way of Camden. Another memorable trip was a picnic together at Brunswick, followed by a tour of the Bowdoin campus.

Each year donations were voted to the "usual charities." The "usual charities" were Grenfell Orphanage, Public Health Nurse Association for a needy family, Sea Coast Mission, New England Home for Little Wanderers, Gardiner Public Library—especially the Childrens' Room, Red Cross, and the Gardiner High School Library. Special contributions were given for the restoration of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Togus Carnival and Canteen, Cancer Control, and Girl Scouts, as well as gifts given yearly at Christmas time to the patients at Augusta State Hospital.

We find our Club members investigating the new techniques of modern science and medicine; appreciating the arts, music and books of which they are so fond; serving their community; and enjoying their fellowship together. The loss of old friends is cushioned by the addition of new members who will become good friends, and so the years bring growth and joy to the Current Events Club as it continues on its hundred-year journey.

3

THE MODERN YEARS 1960 -1992

WE CONTINUE TO THRIVE in spite of the faster-paced living and the changing social and moral climate of our era. We have lived through the turmoil and trauma of the 60's and 70's. There are changes in the role of women. There are great opportunities to serve our families and communities in the educational, economic, and political areas of our lives. Indeed, one of our Club members, Esther Shaw, was the first woman in Kennebec County to serve in the Legislature, having served in the 100-101 sessions.

There have been changes in our Club's structure. Where we met for many years—and happily so!—in private homes, and still occasionally do, we now have many meetings at the Library or some other public meeting place so that twenty-five members or more can be present. There is no longer a membership limited to twenty-five. Meetings are held in the afternoon, the first Tuesday of the month during the months of September through June. We do not meet, however, during the hazardous months of January and February. Several of our members are Snow Birds in the south during that time.

There were many fine meetings during these three decades in all the areas the Club mandated for study.

In the field of Art, there were programs from Inca archeology to contemporary architecture; on early American wall painters and stenciling; on the real world of Andrew Wyeth; and a fine meeting on Women in Art presented by Louise Hathaway.

In the field of literature, there was "standing-room-only" at the many book reviews given yearly by Betty Wiggins; and when Betty was no longer giving them, Glenna Nowell kept us up to date on the recent publications. Poets and authors were studied and discussed. A play *An Afternoon Tea* was written by Peg Harris about the history of the Club which was so well received, it was presented a second time and is included in this booklet.

Wonderful travelogues were given. Our members are great travellers and have been in all parts of the world—the Holy Land, South America, Hawaii, Italy, Eastern Europe, England, Scotland, Ethiopia, around the world. Guest speaker Molly Fleck took us, with the aid of

...one of our Club members, Esther Shaw, was the first woman in Kennebec County to serve in the Legislature...

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The Club has been active in supporting young Exchange students. The students often came to a meeting to discuss their country...

slides, on memorable trips to Australia and New Zealand. Ellen Skehan introduced us to the joys of "tripping on a tramp freighter." Esther Shaw took us on a marvelous trip to Sri Lanka which she and her husband visited as guests of U. S. Ambassador to that country, our former governor John Reed. Mrs. Arthur Smith showed us slides and talked of her daughter Samantha's trip with her mother and father to the Soviet Union—that special trip of a happy time that opened up communication between young American and young Russian children.

One of our members, Helene Sippel, was a delegate in 1977 to the White House Conference for the Handicapped and gave us a fine overview of the Conference.

There were many pleasant musicales at the homes of our members often at Christmas time, to add to the joys of the Season. Mrs. Kassay gave an especially fine paper on Great Music of the Churches and, over the years, many papers on musical subjects were presented and enjoyed.

The Club has been active in supporting young Exchange Students. The students often came to a meeting to discuss their country, its culture and its customs and their experiences in this experiment of international friendships. They have been fine young people and good ambassadors of their native countries.

Various District Directors of District 10, MSFW, visited Current Events Club over the years. These visits were often during the Annual Meeting—the supper meeting and the last event of the year—and were very popular.

One meeting at the home of Mrs. John Lane, was cancelled the night of February 10, 1964, when Mrs. Fred Freeman suffered a "shock" in Mrs. Lane's front yard. This is the only meeting recorded in the history of the Club as cancelled because of the illness of one of our members. We have been very fortunate.

Several trips were taken by the Club which were both instructive and enjoyable. There were visits to the State Museum, housed in its own building in which the members have long been interested; to the new Junior High School Library; to check out gems at the Chickadee Rock Shop in Augusta; to the Hinckley School at Hinckley, Maine, to explore the campus and the Library and have tea with the librarian, Rachael Craig, a former Gardiner woman; and to the Alzheimer Care Unit of Kennebec Valley in Gardiner, the first residential unit of its kind in the country.

For several years the Club has participated in the Annual Art Show, sponsored by the Maine Federated Women's Clubs for high school age artists, and held at the Blaine House in the spring of each year. A silver tea is served and awards made to the winning artists. On several occasions a Gardiner student has won an award or honorable mention.

Matters of health (from arthritis to services available to the handicapped), matters of general interest (from Maine's Indians to Maine's psychics!), affairs of the nation and world, Hawaii, national and

local politics, to newly developing countries of the Third World, environmental issues (of Nature projects and the introduction of Caribou back into Maine's wilderness) have all been covered and enjoyed. Several meetings on local birds, flowers and fauna were very well attended, especially those given by Mr. George Moore of Farmingdale who showed his colored bird slides, many of which were taken in our own backyards!

These meetings were not in the pattern of "in-depth papers" of earlier years but were instructive and interesting programs by people active in their own fields of endeavor, giving us a glimpse of first-hand know-how.

In 1988, the Club was saddened by the death of Laura Elizabeth Wiggins, better known to all of us as Betty Wiggins. She died at the age of 101, just ten days before her 102nd birthday—a birthday, February 12th, she proudly shared with Abe Lincoln! It is to her memory and in her honor that this book is written and dedicated. She was our link with the past, our help in the present, our example for the future.

Born 1886, the youngest daughter of Laura Richards, the author, and Henry Richards who designed the Gardiner Library, she had an illustrious heritage, her grandmother being the poet Julia Ward Howe and her grandfather Samuel Gridley Howe who founded the Perkin's Institute for the Blind. She grew up in the best tradition of a remarkable family, being educated in both Gardiner and Boston. She met her beloved husband-to-be, Charles Peter Wiggins, when he was a counselor at Camp Merryweather, the summer camp established for boys by her parents on Long Pond in the Belgrade chain of Lakes in 1900. This was the first such camp of its kind in Maine. After Peter had saved up \$500, the young people were allowed to announce their engagement.

They were married in 1909 and became the parents of four children, two boys and two girls. For many years, Charles Peter Wiggins was headmaster of the prestigious boys' school, Noble and Greenough in Dedham, Massachusetts. Here Betty acted as his hostess, teaching the boys their social graces by the example of her own wit and charm. After her husband died at 57 from a heart attack, Betty returned to Gardiner, living with her sister Rosalind, and her brother, John Richards, in their childhood home, the Yellow House at 3 Dennis Street.

From here, all Gardiner and especially our own Current Events Club came under her spell. Her intelligence, her wit, and her marvelous story-telling power sparked many a Club meeting. Her example of community service gave us all an awareness of what personal responsibility and commitment could be. During the last two decades of her life, the Club was privileged to go en masse to her home where she gave fine and exciting book reviews of the year's new and important books. She was active in the Red Cross and the Library for many years and made visits to inmates at the State Prison until she was 90 and to those imprisoned in the County Jail until she was 95.

Betty Wiggins' intelligence, her wit, and her marvelous story-telling power sparked many a Club meeting...

We had a great time... with a Christmas luncheon that was really a surprise party for our beloved Connie Thompson on her 90th birthday... Connie... was our club treasurer for thirty-one years and an active member since 1954...

On her 100th birthday, the whole city honored her on what the Mayor of Gardiner and the City Council designated as "Mrs. Wiggins' Day." Her courage and grace in living made her a special person to all who knew her. We are proud she was a member of the Club and grateful she was our friend. She is written up, page 112, in *Prominent Personalities in the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs, Vol. II.*

During these years, there were several opportunities for celebrations. Many of them centered around the festive boards of our fine local restaurants and many of them were progressive suppers by our own great cooks. We are grateful to Evelin Grover and Louise Hathaway who frequently opened their homes to our Annual Meeting festivities. Gail Harvey entertained us royally in her lovely home when she and Chef Avis Layman invited us for a Valentine luncheon, serving mouth-watering gourmet food on her beautiful Spode china. We had many happy December meetings at various members' homes bright with their Christmas decor. We had a great time at the Old Tavern Inn in Litchfield with a Christmas luncheon that was really a surprise party for our beloved Connie Thompson on her 90th birthday. Lucille Congdon's husband, LeRoy, acted as Santa Claus and brought the sack of presents to an incredulous Connie. Connie, who was our Club Treasurer for thirty-one years and an active member since 1954 was delighted, as we all were!

Financial support has been given over the years to "our regulars": MFWC, Gardiner Library, Augusta Nature Club, etc. Special donations were made to Samantha Smith Foundation, Friends of the Gardiner Common, American Field Services, the Hugh O'Brian Foundation for high school leadership training, the MFWC Art Contest and the Hinckley School, and, each year at Christmas time, gifts and subscriptions to the local nursing homes of the large print *Reader's Digest*.

And so we come to our 100th Birthday—a time of unstable world alignments and of changing social and moral values. It is also a time of scientific discoveries, bringing problems of great magnitude and far-reaching consequences to our families and to our beloved nation and world. But in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, we shall study and solve, with love and compassion, the problems of our day. We shall continue to grow and serve our Club, ourselves, our families, our nation and our God to the best of our ability and with joy in fellowship with one another and the incredible wonder and glory of this planet.

Happy 100th Birthday, Current Events Club. May you long endure—thank you for your First Century and bless your Second One! As Clara Robinson wrote in 1922:

"It is a fine experience to be a part of this body....May its life continue long and successful."

AN AFTERNOON TEA

A PLAY BY MARGARET HARRIS



The cast of AN AFTERNOON TEA, 1989.

Seated: Peg Harris, Anita Fish, Eleanor Briggs.

Standing: Esther Shaw, Doris Godfrey, Connie Thompson, Isabel Harriman.

AN AFTERNOON TEA

INTRODUCTION

This play is an imaginary “get-together” of some of the original members of the Current Events Club of Gardiner (which was founded in 1892) and various later members of the Club in its following nearly 100 years of activity. They recall some of the interests and incidents that happened during the Club’s history up to the present day.

Their meeting place is the Yellow House and the cast in order of their appearance is:

A NARRATOR (played by Doris Godfrey) who will act as Mistress of Ceremonies and read material appropriate to the characters and Club in its original versions.

JULIA WARD HOWE (played by Anita Fish), Mother of Laura Richards and an author and world figure of her era.

LAURA RICHARDS (played by Isabel Harriman), gracious hostess who, with her husband owns Yellow House—an author of note, both adult and children’s books—and an early member of Current Events Club. She represented the Club at the organizational meeting of the Maine Federation of Women’s Clubs in Skowhegan, Oct. 10-11-12. 1893.

DR. GERTRUDE HEATH (played by Peg Harris) who was the First President of Gardiner Current Events Club. She was a medical doctor, a writer, and a Gardiner resident. Her yearly reports of the Club and its activities were written in poetry—much to the delight of the other members.

LUCYCLASON (played by Esther Shaw) was an active member in the 20’s, giving fine programs and writing a history of the Club for the membership of her time—and ours!—to enjoy.

BETTY WIGGINS (played by Eleanor Briggs) whose grace and charm are memorable to many of us.

CONNIE THOMPSON (played by herself) who will bring us into the present day with her loving remembrances and comments.

AN AFTERNOON TEA

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

MARGARET HARRIS

TIME: The present (1989)

PLACE: A living room—similar to one in the Yellow House.

NARRATOR: Wouldn't it be great if some of the wonderful women in the eras of the Current Events Club History could get together? You know—the founders of the Club and the gals who came after them right up 'til now—to chat about their lives and “their day”?

Well, we thought so too!

So we present to you in order of their appearance, the following ladies—some of them who were small in stature but were “biggies” in the affairs and guidance of the Current Events Club. God bless them—one and all!

NARRATOR	Doris Godfrey
JULIA WARD HOWE	Anita Fish
LAURA RICHARDS	Isabel Harriman
DR. GERTRUDE HEATH	Peg Harris
LUCY CLASON	Esther Shaw
BETTY WIGGINS	Eleanor Briggs
CONNIE THOMPSON	Herself

Our thanks to Betty Heselton for being in charge of props and to Betty Fielder for typing. And special thanks to the author, Peg Harris.

Skit opens up to a pleasant living room (with places for 7 people to sit). Julia Ward Howe sits in a rocking chair.

JULIA WARD HOWE (*looking around while rocking*): How many memories it brings back to sit here in my favorite rocker! What a full life I've had! I remember that time in 1861 when Gov. Andrew and some of the rest of us went down to visit the Union soldiers and camped out in a tent. It was so dark that December night that I couldn't see to write down my poem—“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord”—but I could see the words in the morning and they just fit the tune of “John Brown's Body.”

I always liked that poem—got \$4 for it too when Atlantic Monthly published it in their 1862 issue. People used to sing it a lot. I wonder if they still do (*starts to hum the refrain—audience to join in and everyone sing the first verse and refrain*).

Thank God the war is over and we are all growing close together

again! Not Northerners or Southerners and not Yankees or Rebels—just Americans.

I am so looking forward to seeing Laura today. I know she's going to like the surprise I have for her.

Laura Richards enters and goes over to kiss her mother.

LAURA RICHARDS: Hello, Mother dear. Sorry I'm late. I met Gert downtown and we visited for a couple of minutes. She was on her way to see a patient but she didn't think it is too serious and she'll be along for tea later.

How are you, dear? You look pretty pleased about something. It's so good to have you here for a visit!

JULIA WARD HOWE: Well, I have something for you that I hope you'll be pleased with, dear. I was thinking about your Current Events Club that I know you are so involved with—such nice friends you have, Laura. They all seem so intelligent and caring. I've enjoyed your letters telling me about your meetings—and I know from experience how hard it is to stop ladies from talking and get a meeting under way. So I had a gavel made for your club. It's here in my knitting bag (*gets gavel out of knitting bag and gives it to Laura*).

LAURA RICHARDS: Oh, Mother, how wonderful! It surely is hard to stop 18 to 20 women from their visiting! The whole club will thank you for this. It's just what we need. Wait until Gert and the rest of the club see it. Here comes Gert now.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Hello, Laura. Thanks for asking me for tea. How are you, Mrs. Howe? You look so well. I am so *pleased* to see you.

JULIA WARD HOWE: And it's good to see you, Gertrude. I always look forward to coming to Gardiner to see Laura and her family and friends. I hope when you say "How are you?" you're not expecting me to make a *professional* visit to you, dear. (*She smiles playfully at Gertrude and touches her arm.*) I'm just teasing, Gertrude. I do so admire your becoming a doctor. There aren't many doctors in our country and very, *very* few *women* doctors! Gardiner is lucky to have you here.

LAURA RICHARDS: We certainly are lucky to have her here in Gardiner! And to think we have two women doctors in the club. But let's have our tea and then I have something to show you, Gert. (*NEED CUPS AND SAUCERS*) *They sit down and Laura pours tea, gives a cup to her mother.* Mother, would you like cream or sugar?

JULIA WARD HOWE: *Answers:* No thanks. (*or*) Yes, please. *Laura gives tea to Dr. Heath.*

GERTRUDE HEATH: Thank you, Laura. Just milk, no sugar. Not a professional opinion—just my preference. Reminds me of all the times we had medical meetings for our Current Events Club, doesn't it?

LAURA RICHARDS: It certainly does, Gert. You and Dr. Huldah Potter taught us more medicine and anatomy than we ever knew before and you kept us up with all the new developments in the scientific field. I remember the manikin you brought in to teach us with that time. It was such a fun meeting. But I want to show you something Mother has had made up to give the Club.

Laura shows Dr. Gertrude the gavel.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Isn't this a fine thing for us to have! How kind of you, Mrs. Howe! We could have used this at that meeting when you told us about living in Paris—your adventures there. Every one was so pleased with your talk I couldn't quiet the Club down.

JULIA WARD HOWE: I did enjoy talking to you all. We've had many good meetings together, haven't we?

LAURA RICHARDS: We certainly have, Mother. You're our star performer! We *have* had good meetings and good times. And I think we've done some good, too. I'm glad we got the killing of the song birds stopped. You remember when milliners used to decorate our hats with bird wings or their long tail feathers?

JULIA WARD HOWE: I certainly do and I remember how you all made speeches in the community and wrote letters to the Federated meetings to get it stopped.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Yes, we got that stopped. And we did a lot to help the community become school conscious. My! The unsanitary conditions of the schools! Well, we did get those corrected. But we had a lot of fun at our meetings, too!

LAURA RICHARDS: We certainly did! I liked that last meeting of the year when you summarized our year of meetings in poetry. You did it for a couple of years and we all enjoyed them so much, Gert. And how about the time we had the Oriental party and everybody went in costume.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Those were good years. And remember all the furor over women's suffrage?

NARRATOR (*will read the minutes of the Current Events Club meeting of Feb. 25th, 1895, Book. 1 of C.E.C. minutes, page 185.*): With the exception of the

five years from 1901 to 1906, we have a nearly complete set of minutes of our organization. In effect, they are the history of Gardiner, the country, and indeed much of the rest of the world for the past 100 years.

Narrator reads the minutes—Vol 1, page 185 [See page 7, “The Early Years”].

LAURA RICHARDS: How serious we were, but finally women’s suffrage did get passed and we all *do* vote now. Good for us! I wish someone could tell us about the later years of the Club, somebody like Lucy Clason.

Enter Lucy Clason, smiling at Laura.

LUCY CLASON: I’m so glad you wished me here, Laura. I’ve always wanted to meet you and Dr. Heath and you, Mrs. Howe. What a lovely privilege (*shakes hands with Laura, Dr. Heath and Julia Ward Howe*).

LAURA RICHARDS: It’s a joy for us too, Lucy, dear. Come, have a cup of tea. Cream? Sugar? (*pours tea, gives it to Lucy*).

LUCY CLASON: Thank you, Laura. We are so grateful to you people that you did so much for the schools. It was so fine that you gave the first pictures to the schools so our children could look at pictures and not just bare walls—and incidentally absorb some art appreciation. You brought them from your homes, didn’t you? And those boxes of books you sent to the Gardiner schools and various rural schools around were so much appreciated that they were the beginning of the travelling book library for the state.

LAURA RICHARDS: Is that so? Isn’t that nice?

LUCY CLASON: I think so! If I should ever write a history of our club I would surely put that in! And how you supported two French orphans for two years during the great war in 1919. And the *fun* you all had together. Like the time you all dressed up as book titles! That must have been a dandy time.

LAURA RICHARDS: Yes, it was. Tell us more about the Club’s doings in your day, Lucy.

LUCY CLASON: Well, the city began to assume some of the areas of interest the Current Events Club started. The school system took care of the conditions you brought to their attention, Dr. Heath, but you can be sure we check things out to be sure they do.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Good. I hope you do.

LUCY CLASON: We planted a tree in Gardiner Common to honor George Washington on his Bi-Centennial. For several meetings we discussed the World Court and whether the U.S. should join it or not. We decided we should so we all signed a petition to that effect and Mrs. Sills sent it out to several congressmen.

You see you set us a great example of being interested in politics when we read about your interest in women's suffrage! We've had great programs like "Zionists and the New Palestine" and "Russia's New 5-Year Plan." I gave a paper on "Modern Turkey" which was well received.

GERTRUDE HEATH: It sounds as though you are all keeping up with world affairs all right.

LUCY CLASON: Not only world affairs, but people and events around us, Dr. Heath. We were interested in Maine Craft Guilds and the 4-H Clubs. And in 1941 Mrs. Jessie White, a member of our club and a teacher, attended the Audubon Summer Camp and in the fall told us all about them. We've been supporters of Audubon and Nature clubs ever since. Then one of our club members took a trip out and back to California by *bus* and kept us all amazed and amused at her adventures. At one meeting, Dr. Hill talked to us about the problems of the "Hard of Hearing" and we made a special donation to further Dr. Hill's work and research.

LAURA RICHARDS: Oh, that was nice. Did you have other special donations?

LUCY CLASON: Oh, yes. For years we continued to support many of the charities that you folks had supported: Gardiner Library, especially the Children's Room which has been built and furnished, Grenville Orphanage, Seacoast Mission, New England Home for Little Wanderers and Public Health Nurses projects which you were so instrumental in forming. By the way, we still sell and encourage the use of public health stamps. Remember when the Club had the honor of selling right here in Gardiner the first such stamps that the government issued? That was before you helped form the Public Health Association.

LAURA RICHARDS: Yes, I do remember that!

LUCY CLASON: And speaking of "selling," we had a booth at the W. T. Grant store down town where we sold victory stamps and bonds. It was fun taking turns manning the booth and we all felt we were doing something to help our boys overseas.

JULIA WARD HOWE: So many wars! We'll be glad when our govern-

ments and people everywhere find better ways to solve problems than through fighting!

LAURA RICHARDS: We certainly agree, Mother. Will you all excuse me while I warm up our teapot? I'll be right back. *She takes teapot and goes out.*

LUCYCLASON: How pleasant it is for me to be here today. You see one of the unhappy times for our club was in 1943 when we lost Laura. Except that a person so beloved is not ever really "lost" because of the influences she leaves behind. There were so many write-ups and touching tributes from local and Boston newspapers.

NARRATOR: We are pleased to have the originals of some of these write-ups in our Current Events files. This one is especially loving and complimentary. *She reads write-up about Laura. [See pages 11-12.]*

GERTRUDE HEATH: Like mother—like daughter! What a nice tribute and all true.

LUCYCLASON: Well, we have been fortunate in the wonderful women who have been in our Current Events Club. I was always so fond of Betty Wiggins, too. It would be nice to see her again.

Enter Betty Wiggins carrying a book.

BETTY WIGGINS: Dear Gram! How good to see you. And Dr. Heath—I've heard so much about you! Isn't this nice to be wished back.

LAURA RICHARDS (*enters with tea pot*): Betty, dear! What a lovely surprise! Welcome to our Current Events afternoon, dear. Tea?

Betty Wiggins (*hugs her mother*): Isn't this great, Mother? Yes, I'd love a cup of tea. Thank you. Lucy, it's nice to see you. I remember it was 1948 when I joined Current Events Club although I had attended some meetings previously as a guest when I used to come home for a visit.

LAURA RICHARDS (*laughing*): I guess Current Events Club was a constant commodity for members of this household.

BETTY WIGGINS: Well, the Club was fun to visit. I always liked the programs. I used to enjoy Ellen Lucas presiding. She was our club president for ten years wasn't she?

LUCYCLASON: Yes, and then secretary for years. And if you were ill

and couldn't make a meeting, you felt when her minutes were read that you'd been there and knew just what went on.

BETTY WIGGINS (to Laura): It is hard to single out our most favorite meetings, isn't it? But I remember especially when Independence Hall in Philadelphia was being restored and we all got excited about that and sent a donation for it. Then one of our members who was a W.A.C. told us about her adventures in WW II and had us all on the edge of our chairs.

LUCY CLASON: I remember that meeting! And the one when Helen Keller who was visiting your home talked to us about her blindness.

BETTY WIGGINS: That certainly was a truly special meeting. She was so special herself. And I'll tell you another meeting I liked—it was the one when Henry Shaw of Augusta talked to us about chinaware and brought down all those beautiful serving pieces of Spode and Wedgwood to illustrate his talk. Those dishes may have been empty but they made my mouth water!

LAURA RICHARDS: Meetings about beautiful things for our homes always had good attendance and were discussed for days afterwards!

BETTY WIGGINS: They certainly were. And many times we had meetings about the Federated Clubs, both National and State, and our own Evelin Grover was director of District 10. And, Gram, (*Betty looks at JWH*) there's a building in Washington, D.C. now that has one whole room called the Julia Ward Howe room after you! The women of Massachusetts have furnished that room.

JULIA WARD HOWE: Isn't that nice! I remember the meetings we used to have in Boston when we were living at Green Peace. Goodness how busy we were in those days!

BETTY WIGGINS: Gram, you remember the gavel you gave Mother in 1892 for her meetings?

LAURA RICHARDS: We were just talking about that a few minutes ago, dear. Here it is (*gives gavel to Betty*).

BETTY WIGGINS: Well, at one of the meetings when Maxine Lamb was president, I think in 1957, the gavel was banded in silver through the generosity of Mrs. Bowie, so we would always know where it came from and when. It says: "Presented to Gardiner Current Events Club by Julia Ward Howe—1892." *Women, especially Laura, Julia, and Dr. Heath look it over.*

GERTRUDE HEATH: Now that's what I call fine.

BETTY WIGGINS: Wouldn't it be nice if someone from the present Current Events Club were here too—somebody like Connie Thompson!

Connie enters—smiling—and looks around at the others.

CONNIE THOMPSON: Did somebody call me? How *nice* to see you all, 'tho I haven't had the pleasure of meeting some of you.

BETTY WIGGINS: I was just wishing for you, Connie, and I'd like you to meet my Grandmother, Julia Ward Howe—and Dr. Gertrude Heath. *Connie goes over and shakes hands with Julia Ward Howe.*

CONNIE THOMPSON: How do you do, Mrs. Howe. I am so *pleased* to meet you (*Connie shakes hands with Dr. Heath*). And you, Dr. Heath.

BETTY WIGGINS: And I don't think you've met my Mother, Laura Richards. *Connie shakes hands with Laura Richards.*

CONNIE THOMPSON: How do you do, Mrs. Richards. My goodness, I didn't know when I awakened this morning what a privilege I was in for! I've heard about your wonderful family all my life. And how are you, Mrs. Clason? Mother was so pleased with all your help on our genealogy. She would want to be remembered to you.

LAURA RICHARDS: Connie, it's nice to meet *you*. Would you join us in a cup of tea, dear?

CONNIE THOMPSON: Thank you. Yes. That would be very welcome.

BETTY WIGGINS: We were just talking about the Current Events Club, Connie. How are things going? I think you have served it well being treasurer for *thirty* years!

CONNIE THOMPSON: Thank you, Betty. Well, I enjoyed doing it. I think you were president of the Club in 1952, so you will remember that that was about the time we began to meet every two weeks, rather than every week as we had before.

BETTY WIGGINS: Yes, I remember that. We had a lot of discussion about that—about how life styles had changed over the years and many women were working outside the home and/or chauffeuring children to scouts, music lessons, dancing lessons, etc., and the changes that

modern technology like TV had made in our lives. So we voted to change the schedule of meetings. It seems to be working out well, don't you think?

CONNIE THOMPSON: Oh, it's working fine. Our members may not meet as often, but we certainly are pleased when we do meet! We don't have to pay a fine for being late as you used to (*looking toward Dr. Heath and Laura Richards*); but I sometimes wish we still had that system.

By the way, we meet in the afternoons now at 1:30 P.M. and have more than 25 members. Often we meet in the Library that has been so special for so many years to the Club. It is a fine library. You'd be proud of it.

BETTY WIGGINS: Our members always have had a special spot in their hearts for books—and the arts in general.

CONNIE THOMPSON: Yes, we have, Betty. And some of our most favorite meetings were those book review meetings *you* used to put on for us. Never an empty seat in the house on those days, Betty. Glenna Nowell, our present librarian, usually has one meeting a year when she reviews books. She does a good job too. But we miss your cheery comments and presentations!

BETTY WIGGINS: I'm glad you miss me! What other programs have you had?

CONNIE THOMPSON: Well, let's see. Baron Poushental gave us a talk on the "White Russian Colony" in Richmond, Maine, which was updated at a meeting at Lucille Congdon's. We've had all kinds of meetings on the arts—following the example of the meetings you ladies held. We've had music, architecture and art—I remember especially one that Louise Hathaway put on for us on women artists. We've had some great arm-chair travelogues by the members who did the traveling and logged a lot of facts and pictures to share with us when they got home. One particularly fine program was Esther Shaw's talk and slides on Sri Lanka after her big trip there.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Sri Lanka? Nowhere's that? I don't remember such a place!

CONNIE THOMPSON: Well, it used to be called Ceylon, Dr. Heath, years ago, but now it's known as Sri Lanka. Esther and her husband were invited by our ex-Governor John Reed who was U. S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka to come for a visit. They had a wonderful time.

GERTRUDE HEATH: My, that does sound like a fine experience to share.

CONNIE THOMPSON: Yes, and we've had other wonderful places shared with us through the marvel of modern cameras which take breath-taking slides. Molly Fleck took pictures in Australia and New Zealand that made us feel we'd all been *there!* And Betty and George Heselton took us on a tour of South America.

GERTRUDE HEATH: Is that so? I was always interested in what might become of photography. I guess it has become highly developed by now.

CONNIE THOMPSON: Oh, it has, Dr. Heath. We've had several fine meetings with slides—some of the nicest were of those sweet song birds like the Club worked so hard to protect in its early days. A Mr. George Moore has taken many slides of our native birds in their natural habitats and given us several most pleasurable meetings. And many of the birds were filmed in our own back yards!

LAURA RICHARDS: How wonderful. We have always so enjoyed watching the birds flitting around Yellow House.

LUCYCLASON: Thank goodness there's no "Silent Spring" after all!

CONNIE THOMPSON: Betty, we *loved* celebrating your 100th birthday at Yellow House with you. That was a *special* Current Events Club *event!*

BETTYWIGGINS: Well, it certainly was for me. I can see that tender, pretty pink corsage now and the card "In love and admiration to our most special member." I don't think I'm the "most special member" but I did love you all, dearie, for making me a lifetime "member emeritus." Current Events Club has always been a special club in my life.

CONNIE THOMPSON: We are so glad it was, Betty. When the Federation put out their new volume of *Prominent Personalities in the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs, Volume II, 1988*, you and Ellen Lucas and Evelin Grover are all honored.

NARRATOR: I wish there were time to read aloud the write-ups that Lucille Congdon submitted for the book. There's a copy in the Library, and you may want to check it out and read about our ladies when you can.

CONNIE THOMPSON: Well, aside from all we've learned over the years from our meetings and all the good fellowship that came with

them, we also had some just plain *fun* times!

One day we went to Rockland and enjoyed the Farnsworth Museum. And one day we had a picnic in Brunswick and then explored the Bowdoin campus. Last year we had a great day down at Lynn Sparrow's home in New Harbor. For several years we had our last meeting of the year at Evelin Grover's or Louise Hathaway's home—an everybody-bring-something *feast*. They were real *banquets*.

I've been a member for 33 years and wouldn't have missed it!

BETTY WIGGINS: I always felt that way too, Connie.

ALL: I too!

LAURA RICHARDS: What a great afternoon! Let's do this again in another few years.

Everybody nods.

NARRATOR: Well, these are just some of the highlights of Current Events Club. We know the calibre of our membership hasn't changed so we all look forward to the coming years when the events of the present and the future—in the categories of our original Current Events Club—in music and drama, in literature and art, in science and politics, both foreign and domestic, and in philanthropies of our day will continue to be studied, enjoyed and influenced by the women of Gardiner's Current Events Club.

LATER AND PRESENT MEMBERS

*Present Members are marked by * those who were present by a (P)*

Year joined

Year joined

1887 Adams, Mrs Sarah

1887 Baker, Mrs (present)

1888 Allen, Mrs Bertha

1887 Barber, Mrs

1887 Allen, Miss Louise

1889 Sparrow, Miss (P)

1842 Almond, Mrs Harry

1924 Burrows, Mrs George (Martha)

1894 Ames, Mrs Wilson S.

1927 Burrows, Mrs George (Alice)

1894 Antshury, Mrs Frank (Julia)

1928 B. Hill, Mrs

1928 Arne, Miss Edsel

1888 Bennett, Mrs Robert (Margaret)

1897 Bailey, Miss Annie

1905 Bliss, Mrs

CURRENT EVENTS CLUB MEMBERS PAST AND PRESENT

ORIGINAL CLUB MEMBERS - November 18, 1892

Those who were president are marked by a (P).

President — Dr. Gertrude E. Heath

Vice-President — Mrs. Frederick Dingley

Secretary/Treasurer — Miss Mary Cooper

Directors— Mrs. William Morrell, Mrs. D. C. Palmer, Miss Clara Robinson, Miss Eleanor B. Stevens

Mrs. Sarah Beeman

Mrs. William Ellis

Mrs. Langdon Quimby (P)

Miss Anna Collins

Mrs. Mary Haddock

Miss Amy Richards

Mrs. J. W. Dana (P)

Mrs. Daniel Longfellow

Mrs. Walter Robinson

Mrs. Frederick Danforth

Mrs. Ernest Morrell

Mrs. A. M. Spear

Miss Harriet Dennis

Dr. Huldah Potter

Mrs. Henry S. Webster

LATER AND PRESENT MEMBERS

*Present Members are marked by *; those who were president by a (P).*

Year Joined

Year Joined

1897 Adams, Miss Sarah

1991 Baker, Mrs. Ray (Jannice)*

1909 Allen, Mrs. Bertha

1897 Barber, Mrs.

1953 Allen, Miss Louise

1909 Barstow, Miss Alice (P)

1942 Almond, Mrs. Harry

1924 Barstow, Mrs. George (Martha)

1924 Ames, Mrs. Wilmot S.

1924 Barstow, Mrs. Joseph (Annie)

1944 Amesbury, Mrs. Frank (Julia)

1924 Bartlett, Miss Martha

1928 Anne, Miss Ethel

1968 Bennett, Mrs. Robert (Margaret)

1893 Bailey, Miss Annie

1965 Betts, Mrs. Robert (Frances)

1970	Bodman, Mrs. Lennox (Nan)* (P)	1943	Freeman, Mrs. Fred
1927	Bonney, Mrs. William (P)	1977	Gilpatrick, Mrs. Waldo (Rita)
1940	Bowie, Mrs. David (P)	1955	Glazier, Mrs. Lucien (Frances) (P)
1971	Briggs, Mrs. Alfred (Eleanor)* (P)	1982	Godfrey, Mrs. Doris*
1904	Brown, Mrs. A. W.	1923	Goodspeed, Mrs. Ernest (Olive)
1953	Brown, Mrs. Royal (Madeline)	1947	Goseline, Mrs. Arthur (Katherine)
1954	Bull, Mrs. Frank (Mary) (P)	1943	Goss, Mrs. Harold (Esther)
1931	Campbell, Miss Sadye	1924	Gould, Mrs. Louis F. (P)
1946	Cates, Mrs. Morris (Catherine)	1897	Gray, Mrs. Charlie
1919	Chaffee, Mrs. Thomas C. (Mary)	1898	Grey, Mrs. Adelbert
1911	Chase, Mrs. Ambrose G.	1947	Grover, Mrs. Harry (Evelin)* (P)
1984	Chase, Mrs. Thomas	1927	Hall, Mrs. G. D.
1979	Cilley, Mrs. Gail	1925	Hamlin, Mrs. Fred (Jennie)
1951	Clark, Mrs. Paul	1935	Harlow, Mrs. Lincoln (Helen)
1914	Clason, Mrs. Silas (Lucy) (P)	1983	Harriman, Miss Isabel* (P)
1939	Colby, Miss Dallas	1969	Harris, Mrs. Willard (Peg)* (P)
1943	Colcord, Mrs. Elmer	1974	Hathaway, Mrs. William (Louise)* (P)
1906	Collins, Miss Eugenia	1942	Heselton, Mrs. Henry
1897	Collins, Miss Delia (P)	1987	Heselton, Mrs. George (Betty)*
1980	Congdon, Mrs. LeRoy (Lucille)* (P)	1930	Heymoun, Mrs. R. D.
1935	Cummings, Miss Mary	1947	Hinds, Mrs. Charles (Patricia)
1960	Daley, Mrs. John (Evelyn)	1927	Houdlette, Mrs. William (P)
1962	Dunn, Mrs. Robert (Dorothy)	1968	Hunt, Mrs. Ernest (Ida May)* (P)
1943	Dunton, Mrs. James	1924	Huntington, Miss Alice
1975	Erskine, Mrs. Wilbur (Barbara) (P)	1934	Hussey, Mrs. Thomas
1986	Estabrook, Mrs. Penn (Barbara)*	1894	Jackson, Mrs. Clarence (P)
1951	Farrington, Mrs. Carroll	1953	Kassay, Mrs. John (Maud)
1956	Fassett, Mrs. Katherine (P)	1963	Knipe, Miss Virginia (P)
1987	Fernald, Mrs. Harriet* (P)	1990	Kyes, Mrs. Charles (Mary)*
1980	Fielder, Mrs. Thomas (Betty)*	1931	Lamb, Mrs. Bert E. (Lucretia)
1973	Fish, Mrs. Anita*	1854	Lamb, Mrs. Phillip (Maxine)* (P)
1923	Folsom, Mrs. Milo G. (Josephine)	1967	Lane, Mrs. John (Delphine)
1959	Fortier, Mrs. Alfred	1978	Lane, Miss Katherine
1903	Foster, Miss Alice	1930	Lane, Miss Ruth
1900	Foster, Miss Angeline	1855	Leach, Mrs. Richard (Jane)
1900	Foster, Miss Martha	1967	Leighton, Mrs. Bernard (Dorothy)* (P)

- 1907 Libby, Mrs. Dexter (Lute) (P)
 1979 Lind, Mrs. Howard (Ann)
 1915 Lucas, Mrs. Edwin (Ellen) (P)
 1976 Lund, Mrs. Richard (Harriette)*
 1929 Manson, Mrs. William G. (Caroline)
 1907 Maxcy, Miss Helen
 1900 Maxcy, Mrs. Frank (Julia) (P)
 1902 Maxcy, Mrs. Josia (Louise)
 1969 Maynard, Mrs. Clifton
 1984 Matz, Mrs. Helen*
 1902 Mitchell, Miss
 1898 Morrell, Mrs. Ernest
 1948 Morse, Miss Katherine
 1905 Moulton, Miss Alice
 1943 Nason, Mrs. Arthur
 1946 Nichols, Mrs. W.
 1947 Norton, Mrs. Ruth
 1947 Norwood, Mrs. Wilford D. (P)
 1982 Nowell, Mrs. Glenna*
 1919 Parshley, Miss Marietta
 1905 Partridge, Mrs. Carrie
 1951 Peacock, Mrs. George
 1947 Peat, Mrs. David (Mary)
 1966 Perkins, Mrs. Walter (P)
 1893 Pinkham, Miss Grace
 1931 Pomroy, Mrs. Ora C.
 1924 Price, Mrs. Wallace
 1900 Reynolds, Mrs. Emma
 1893 Richards, Mrs. Henry (Laura) (P)
 1924 Richards, Miss Rosalind
 1949 Ricker, Mrs. Lee (Madeline)
 1972 Rines, Mrs. Fred (Catherine)*
 1959 Rowe, Mrs. Paul (Lois)
 1979 Ruffing, Mrs. John (Marcia)
 1954 Sewall, Mrs. Howard (Ruth)
 1989 Shapiro, Mrs. H. (Doretta)
 1963 Shaw, Mrs. Stanley (Esther)* (P)
 1976 Sippel, Mrs. Paul (Helene)
 1980 Skehan, Mrs. Joseph (Ellen)
 1892 Small, Miss Clara
 1935 Smith, Mrs. B. Maude
 1931 Smith, Mrs. Harold (Gwendolyn)
 1939 Snyder, Mrs. Andrew (Mildred)
 1984 Sparrow, Mrs. Lynne O.*
 1925 Steward, Mrs. Lynwood
 1951 Stone, Mrs. Frank (Lillian)
 1926 Stone, Mrs. Ralph (Lou) (P)
 1937 Strong, Mrs. Charles (Anne)
 1892 Swan, Miss Caroline
 1972 Swift, Mrs. Harold (Geneva)* (P)
 1987 Temple, Mrs. Norman (Barbara)*
 1954 Thompson, Mrs. Raymond (Connie)*
 1962 Towne, Mrs. Herbert
 1991 Tracy, Mrs. William (Dorna)*
 1926 Wadsworth, Mrs. Melvin (Mary)
 1930 Walker, Mrs. Frederick
 1909 Webster, Miss Martha
 1936 Wentworth, Mrs. B. H.
 1939 White, Mrs. Jessie
 1893 Whitemore, Miss Lilly
 1948 Wiggins, Mrs. Charles (Betty) (P)
 1962 Wilder, Mrs. Clifford
 1948 Wye, Miss Mildred

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*Then long may our fellowship last!
For the years that come hurrying fast,
I'll give you a toast!
May it still be our boast
That our future is proud as our past!*

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COLOPHON

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THE CURRENT EVENTS CLUB of Gardiner, Maine

FOUNDED IN 1892, the Current Events Club has as its purpose, "The intellectual development of thought and discussion upon the current events of the day."

LAURA E. RICHARDS was a charter member. Over the years, women from these historic Gardiner families have been members: Dingley, Palmer, Heath, Maxcy, Robinson, Morell, Webster, Quimby, Lucas, Wiggins. The Club is a member of the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs.

THE CURRENT EVENTS CLUB • established the first traveling library in Maine • was responsible for the distribution and sale of the first issue of Christmas Seals • established PTA's in local schools • worked to establish manual training and domestic science in schools • monitored hygiene in school facilities and promoted the formation of the Public Health Nurses Association • supported two French orphans in World War I • participated in the struggle for women's suffrage • collects books, large print *Reader's Digests* and Christmas gifts for those in need • contributes annually to the Gardiner Public Library and to the Friends of Gardiner • supports Maine Federation of Women's Clubs projects including scholarships and conservation programs.

RECENT PROGRAM TOPICS have included the Alzheimer Center, the Samantha Smith Foundation, Options for Older Learners, Legislative Issues, Arthritis, Project Graduation, Fort Western and the SAD 11 Curriculum.

MONTHLY MEETINGS are held in the Gardiner Public Library. The public is invited to attend all programs.