



Des Moines Women's Club

1885-1970

What Is a Women's Club?

"A meeting ground

*For those of purpose, great and broad and strong,
Whose aim is toward the stars who ever long
To make the patient, listening world resound
With sweeter music; purer, nobler tones.*

*A place where kindly, helpful words are said
And kindlier deeds are done; where hearts are fed;
Where wealth of brain for poverty atones,
And hand grasps hand, and soul finds touch with
soul*

*This is a Women's Club, a haven fair
Where toilers drop an hour their load of care."*

From a speech by Mrs. H. L. Carrell,
Building Committee, 1923.

THE DES MOINES WOMEN'S CLUB

Takes Pride

In Presenting Its Own

Intriguing and Fascinating Story

IN COMMEMORATION

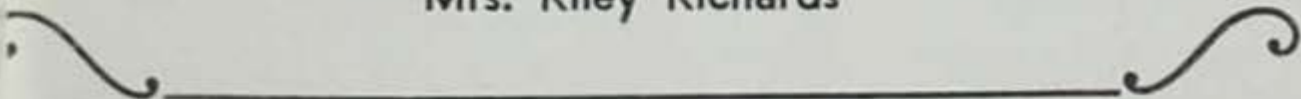
of its

EIGHTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

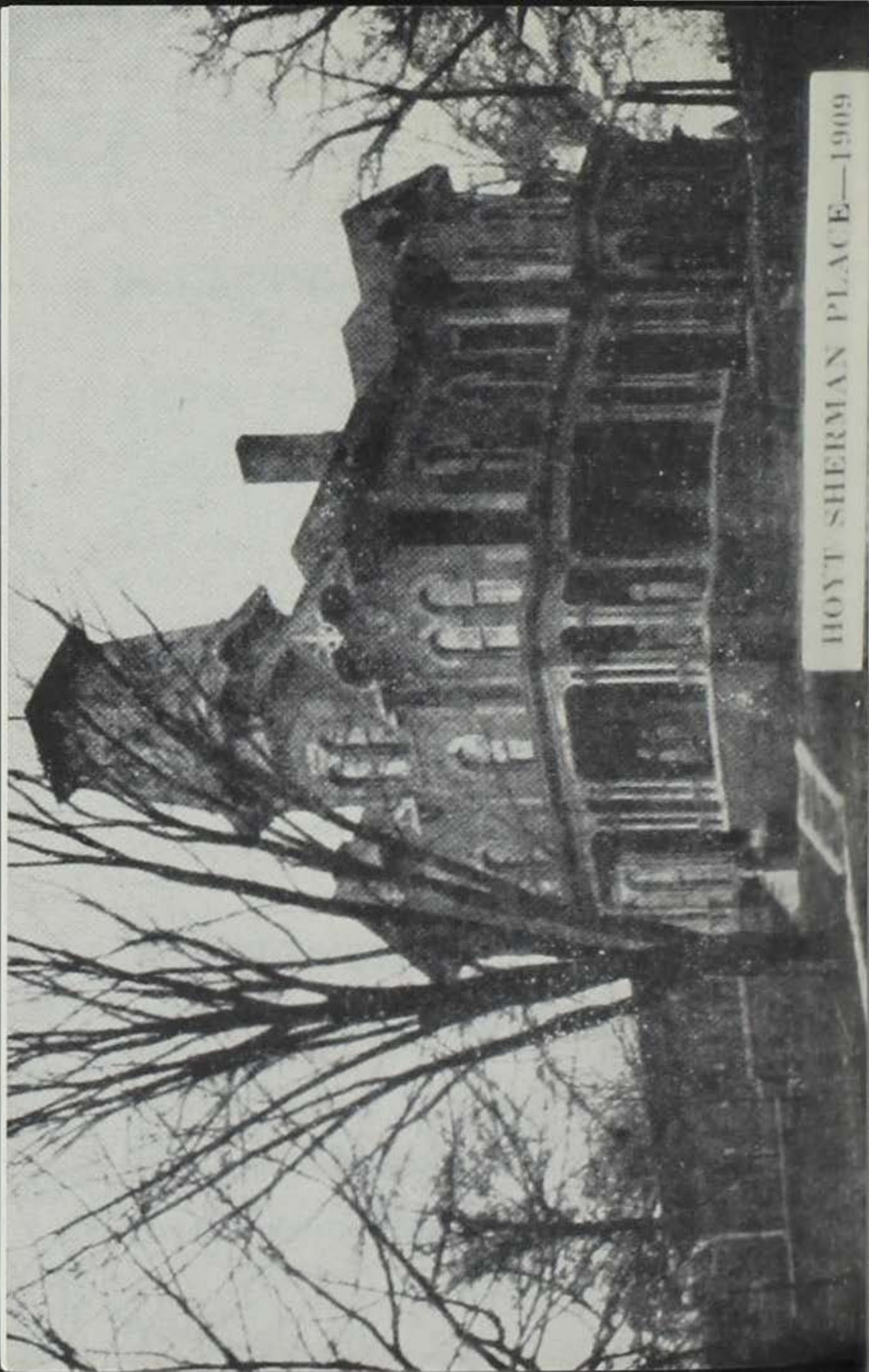
1885-1970

1970 Edited by the Historian,

Mrs. Riley Richards



HOYT SHERMAN PLACE—1909





THE STORY

How It Began

On a crisp fall day in October, 1885, five indomitable, farsighted ladies, their bustles in place, met in the old Plymouth Congregational Church at Fifth and Grand. At that time, the city of Des Moines had been incorporated only 32 years; it had been Iowa's capital 28 years, but it would be 11 more before the ornate, gold-domed Capitol would be completed. Population was about 22,000. Horse and buggy was the mode of conveyance; and streets were dirt—dusty in dry weather, deep in mud in the wet seasons.

Briefly, that was the picture as the "Association for the Advancement of Women"—the national organization with which these five ladies had affiliated—met to conduct business and to hear a lecture by the outstanding writer, Julia Ward Howe, best known as author of the stirring "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Inspiration for the A.A.W. organization had stemmed from the East. Women had long wanted to organize, to make an impact culturally, socially and politically upon this newly forming and fast growing country. In 1839, Margaret Fuller of Boston had received wide acclaim for her organization of the New England Women's Club—probably the first in the nation. Then came the banding

together for "equal rights for women" at a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. But it was twenty years after the advent of the New England Club that the Sorosis Club of New York called a Women's Congress, and the Association for the Advancement of Women was set up as a national organization.

Shortly after the first October meeting of the Des Moines AAW, another was held on October 14 at the home of Dr. Margaret Cleaves, (old Callanan College) 1301 High Street. Here, with 22 ladies in attendance, the Des Moines Women's Club, as such, became a reality. It was an exciting and memorable day. Many decisions were made.

First of all, it was decided it should be primarily a literary club, patterned somewhat after the successful New England Women's Club. Its object, however, came from the New Century Club of Philadelphia: "TO CREATE AN ORGANIZED CENTER OF THOUGHT AND ACTION AMONG WOMEN." Bylaws and rules were adopted; officers were chosen. Here is the first duly elected official slate of the Des Moines Women's Club:

President	Dr. Margaret Cleaves
Vice President	Mrs. Lena B. Abdill
Treasurer	Mrs. S. M. Dickinson
Secretary	Mrs. Sara B. Mills

The women who would go down in history that day as charter members of what is now recognized as Iowa's largest women's club were: Mrs. L. F. Andrews, Mrs. Martha C. Callanan, Mrs. Wheeler Carpenter, Mrs. Luella B. Clark, Mrs. J. C. Cook, Mrs. C. H. Gatch, Mrs. E. H. Gillette, Miss E. Hamilton (Durley), Mrs. Julia S. Hunting, Mrs. Lydia

J. Lamphere, Mrs. A. E. McMurray, Mrs. C. C. Nourse, Mrs. Maria S. Orwig, Mrs. Galusha Parsons, Mrs. Calista Halsey Patchin, Mrs. Delia E. Ruttkay, Mrs. Mary H. Wright, Mrs. E. B. Whitcomb.

At this initial meeting, four committees were named: Art and Literature, Woman's Work, Discussion, Education. Membership and associate membership (gentlemen could become associate members) fees were set at one dollar annually, ten dollars for a life-membership. The choice of motto is credited to Mrs. Ella H. Durley: "Was man nicht bes-pricht bedenkt man nicht recht"—"What man does not discuss he cannot think rightly about."

On November 10, 1885, Mrs. Calista Halsey Patchin gave the first club paper "Art and Literature." In it, she suggested a local place for exhibition for the advancement of art.

At the close of this first year, the membership had increased to 36.

The Embryo Years

These were the days of small beginnings, and while the club was new, there were different elements which gradually blended to form a club of intellectual strength. From early minutes we learn that it was "of more importance that the talents of its members should be developed rather than that outside lecturers, however excellent, should be employed." Whenever a paper was read before the club, it was deemed worthy to be discussed. Among early programs are listed the following:

"The Relation of Mistress and Maid"

"Is Confinement in the School Room the Cause of Nervousness in Girls?"

"Beauty and Hygiene in Dress"

"Sentimental Sympathy for the Criminal Class"

One spirited discussion concerned art in dress. A timid member later confessed that she had dearly wished to take part in this debate but hadn't had the heart in view of the threatened invasion of the hoop skirt.

During a discourse on inventions by women, the president stated that she was "waiting for some woman to invent an oven thermometer" as she felt until then the art of cooking could not be perfected.

Unforgettable was the November, 1888, meeting when the club met at beautiful Terrace Hill, home of Mrs. F. M. Hubbell. Later, the ladies thanked their gracious hostess for "permitting them to see pictures and bric-a-brac which are in themselves a liberal education."

This same year the club obligated itself to establish and maintain an art gallery in the city. A Mr. Gilbert gave the first thousand dollars for this purpose, and from time to time, other funds from gifts and projects were added. Later, an Art Fund Association Auxiliary to the club was established by bylaw. Any person could become a member of this association by the payment of \$10.00 annually, the fund thus created to be used for the purchase of art objects for the gallery.

Membership now (1888) had reached 42, and dues had been increased to \$2.00.

In these early days, the task of the secretary was a colossal one. She not only reported each paper and program in complete detail, but also kept a strict accounting of all that transpired in the business meetings. In the minutes, as they must have been during meetings, members were formally addressed as: "Mrs. Judge Day, Mrs. Major Byers, Mrs. President Parsons, Mrs. Dr. Carter."

A banner year was 1893 when the first art purchases were made. Mesdames West, Windsor and Clapp went to Chicago and, with the aid of Sculptor Lorado Taft, secured a bronze statue of Joan of Arc—a souvenir of the World's Fair—which is now in the main lobby; and a marble bust of Dante executed at Rome. These were augmented by a copy of Corot's Italian Landscape, presented by Mrs. Fredrick Field.

Gradually, through the years, other purchases have been made and many donations of beautiful and valuable paintings, statuary, embroideries, silver and furniture have been received. These are all listed with the names of artists, makers or donors in our Art Treasures and Possessions Catalogue. The price paid for most of them seems remarkably small to us today.

In 1894, the Des Moines Women's Club and the Iowa Society of Fine Arts sponsored an Art Loan Exhibit in the Masonic Building, the Women's Club putting up \$400. It was a failure. The club lost \$112.50 on a project it had hoped would help a dwindling treasury.

An outstanding and happier event was the organization of the State Federation of Women's

Clubs in 1892. Mrs. James C. Berryhill, then president, invited the club women of the state to Des Moines, and the federation resulted.

Years passed swiftly and already it was time (1895) for the TENTH ANNIVERSARY! The Des Moines Women's Club was still growing, still progressing. Mrs. A. B. Cummins was president and the anniversary reception, held in the Circle room, was "magnificent." This was the year the club colors of green and white were chosen. Dues were raised to \$5.00.

An outstanding program in May of this anniversary year was a musical one. Listen to what the secretary recorded:

"Indeed the exercises called forth approval unprecedented in the Des Moines Women's Club, for never before did this company of demure ladies make applause so long and continuous; of course, it was subdued by well gloved hands, but hearty, nevertheless."

In 1904, the music department had another year of exceptional programs, and many glowing tributes were paid the new Women's Club chorus.

Club Active in Civic Projects

The club was active in many civic projects in those early years. There was some discussion, however, as to how far philanthropy and practical work were beneficial to a women's club. There were those who felt that most women belonged to other philanthropic organizations and that a women's club should be a place of relaxation and inspiration. The latter particularly wished to

inaugurate a free art gallery for the city of Des Moines.

The most vigorous participation in an altruistic project was in 1897, when the Home for Aged urgently needed \$1,000. What did the Des Moines Women's Club do? To raise the money, the women enthusiastically and willingly manned the city street cars for a day. The Iowa State Register, June 20, 1897, reports it this way:

"On next Thursday, the society young ladies of Des Moines will act as conductors on the street cars in this city. You will have the privilege of paying your fare that day to a sweet creation wearing a white duck cap, a pretty shirtwaist and trim skirt, and when you step aboard a crowded car, you will have a tender voice whisper in your ear, 'Kindly step forward a little, please, and make room for others.' Leave your horse in the stable that day, relegate your bicycle to the basement and ride on the street cars for sweet charity's sake."

Two hundred and fifty lady conductors, substitutes and extras were assigned places and times for that day. It was a great amount of work.

Some of the other projects which captured the interest of the club were: cleaner streets; the building of a public library; beautifying the river banks; better pictures in school rooms.

All this time the ladies were laying great stress on their intellectual programs, so much that one item from the Pioneer Mail and Times paper reported: "The women of the club are such thinkers and are so well educated and so talented that they discuss even the most complicated subjects with the ease of statesmen."

From Y. M. C. A. to Hoyt Sherman Place

And, where was the club meeting during these formative years? It had no definite place. In fact, it was flitting from one location to another—the basement of Plymouth Church, Central Presbyterian Church, the Savery Hotel, Good Templar's Hall, Yeoman Hall—twenty-eight various places in all, not including places where board meetings were held.

Imagine the thrill when the club on July 10, 1888, entered into a definite contract for fifth floor rooms in the proposed Y. M. C. A. building. On September 24, 1890, one hundred happy members and guests of the Des Moines Women's Club met in the new Y. M. C. A. building to celebrate their fifth birthday in their own home. Stairs were un-

FIRST CLUB HOME AT Y. M. C. A.



finished and there were many difficult and weary trips up and down the five flights.

During the months of December, January and February, because of the condition of the stairs and the absence of heating, the club held its meetings in the parlors of Plymouth Church. To obtain dishes and silver necessary for carrying on the social side, each lady was asked to bring a cup, plate and spoon.

Although the ladies were pleased with their new home which consisted of an audience room, a studio, a skylighted art gallery and a kitchen with private hall, stairway and toilet room for exclusive use of members, other tenants and trespassers forced them to seek another home. Now the club was again on the move, meeting in the Yeoman Auditorium, Elks Club and Shrine Temple.

There was much talk about buying or building a club house. In June, 1902, "it was moved and carried that a committee be appointed to interview local capitalists in regard to building us a club house." They voted that "no old house be bought with the idea of using it as a club house."

The question was raised as to whether to build a gallery for works of art in connection with the club house, or to house them in the City Library. As a temporary measure, they were placed in the State Capitol building.

The building committee, Mrs. W. F. Mitchell, chairman, decided to secure shares of stock for a club house, nothing to be done until \$10,000 was raised. In May, 1904, the club members edited the Des Moines Daily News for one day, and realized over \$2,000 for the building fund.

The administration of Mrs. W. F. Mitchell (1906-1908) will ever remain one of the brightest memories in the history of the club, for under her guidance the members' most cherished dream of a club house and an art gallery became a reality.

In 1907, the Des Moines Board of Park Commissioners purchased the Hoyt Sherman home and grounds from his heirs for \$14,500 with the understanding that it was to be known forever as Hoyt Sherman Place. That same year the Des Moines Women's Club obtained the property from the city for a clubhouse for \$1 a year rental; restored the house, and added a \$10,000 art gallery.

The first board meeting was held on the front steps because the home was being repaired. The first meeting of the club at Hoyt Sherman Place was held in October, 1907, with 400 members.

Hoyt Sherman

At this point we should go back in this historical sketch to the year in 1848, when Hoyt Sherman came to Des Moines. He was a member of an illustrious family of six boys and five girls. His father, Charles R. Sherman, was at the time of his death a member of the Supreme Court of Ohio. One brother, William Tecumseh Sherman, became one of the most noted generals in the United States—the "Marching Through Georgia" Sherman. Another brother, John Sherman, became a congressman, a U. S. Senator, U. S. Treasurer, a noted financier and a great statesman.

Hoyt was practically penniless when he came to Des Moines, but he was a young active business man, full of enterprise. He was admitted to the



HOYT AND SARA SHERMAN
Wedding Picture—1855

bar in 1849, appointed postmaster in 1850. He also was one of the founders of the Iowa State Bank and the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa. In 1861 he served as a member of the Iowa legislature. In 1850 he wanted to acquire one of the five acre tracts of the Pursley estate which a local court had ordered to be subdivided and sold at auction. Sherman desired the lot located between 15th and 16th Streets north of the present Woodland Avenue. He was about to lose the five acres because he had only \$100. But by adding his \$5 fee for clerking the sale, he was able to outbid his opponent and obtain the coveted land.

It was on this land in 1877 that Mr. Sherman built the mansion which is now the center part of our Women's Club building. Here many prominent guests were entertained, including President and Mrs. U. S. Grant, General Sherman, Senator Sherman and Major McKinley, then Governor of Ohio and later President of the United States. Many were the gay and colorful social occasions when the Shermans entertained the leading citizens of Des Moines and out-of-town guests.

Mrs. Sherman enjoyed the home for only ten years since she died in 1887. Except for a very short time in 1893 when the home was used as a Catholic hospital under the direction of the Sisters in Davenport, Mr. Sherman lived on in the home until his death in 1904.

Pride in New Home

The members of the Women's Club were very proud of their new home. One of the first successful exhibits was an "Arts and Crafts" showing sponsored by the art department in February, 1908. The rooms were crowded with spectators.

In October, 1908, Jay T. Darling, a leading citizen of Des Moines, and a cartoonist of world fame, was a speaker at a club program on "Newspaper Art Advertising." He was introduced by Mrs. Henry A. Wallace.

A really lavish occasion was a farewell party for Mrs. A. B. Cummins when she left Des Moines to reside in Washington, D. C., where her husband was United States Senator from Iowa.

The first annual art contest was held in the spring of 1909. Fifty pictures were submitted,

with prizes going to Belle Hunt, Mrs. H. C. Everett and Miss Frances Keffer. This has become one of the most popular projects of the club.

About the time the art contests were started, the Women's Club chorus was founded. It has been active at different periods in the club's history.

In December, 1909, a bronze tablet containing the names of the charter members of the club was presented by Mrs. W. F. Mitchell, and later placed in the foyer of the auditorium where it can be seen today—a fitting memorial to 22 dedicated women.

The Silver Anniversary

Twenty-five years had passed, and now plans were being made for celebrating the club's Silver Anniversary. It was the year 1910-1911. In lieu of pretentious entertainment, each member was asked to donate an earned dollar or more and tell how she had earned it. This money was to help liquidate a debt incurred by the purchase of three pictures.

On February 15, 1911, the Silver Anniversary celebration took place. A birthday cake with 25 candles was the center of attraction. As the president, Mrs. Ernest Brown, cut the cake, she earnestly said, "I wish for our club renewed enthusiasm for the principles for which we stand, and a new grasping of opportunities and a broader outlook, a new realization of our desire to serve the best interests of our club and city."

The stories of how the 532 members earned their dollars were most interesting. No task was too menial. They cleaned houses; shined shoes; shoveled snow. Some sold hand lotion, others such items as cottage cheese, eggs, doughnuts, bread, marmalade, mats, aprons. Especially commended were the tatting makers for the time they had given. The largest gift was \$100 from the sale of advertising. The oldest member, Mrs. Andrews, reported she had taught French to earn her share. Because of the success and vigor with which the women earned dollars for the club treasury, this project was repeated the following year and an indebtedness of \$1,300 was paid off.

The Silver Anniversary year was a successful one. Two large meetings were held at the Princess Theater and the K. P. Hall. John Kendrick Bangs appeared at the club and wrote a poem, "Philosophy," especially for the Guest Book. There was a reception for the famous Madam Schumann-Heink; and on April 27, the members turned out to meet Helen Sherman Griffiths, daughter of Hoyt Sherman. The officers of the General Federation of Women's Clubs were guests in November.

The Byers Collection

The Silver Year brought important additions to the art gallery. Most outstanding was the impressive collection of antiques and rare paintings, given on October 11, by Major and Mrs. Byers. Most of this was collected while the Major served as U. S. Consul General in Italy and Switzerland. The double bookcase, which stands in our dining room, is one of the Byers' antiques. Carved in

1679, this was used by the city council of Zurich, Switzerland, for over a hundred years. The history of the tall, solid mahogany desk, surmounted by a clock, which we are sure you often have admired, can be traced back to the Sixteenth Century, when it belonged to the Court Marshal of the King of Wurtemberg. Around the dark, oak table, once sat such guests as Mark Twain and Russell Lowell. The most notable painting in the Byers' collection is "The Madonna and Child" by Annibale Carracci, prominent Italian painter. "A Monk's Head" is the most controversial. Claimed by the Major to be an original and priceless Velazquez, great doubt has been expressed by critics as to its authenticity. Because of certain papers verifying Velazquez as its painter, this remains an unanswered, interesting question. These possessions were given to the club in 1910, but not housed at Hoyt Sherman Place until 1923, when the Byers room was added.

Another art addition was E. Rau's painting, "The Tyrolese Girl," purchased in Munich by Mrs. Ernest Brown. This was made possible by Mrs. W. O. Riddell, who gave German lessons to pay for it. Also hung was "The Gleaners," a painting by Alice Beckington, a former Des Moines girl.

In November the club made a drive for 1,000 memberships and in order to achieve this goal, each member was asked to invite a friend to join.

In 1914, the board decided to have a painting made of Mrs. W. F. Mitchell, who was instrumental in securing Hoyt Sherman Place as a club home. But before this could be done, Mrs. Mitchell died. Accordingly, a picture of her was purchased

and hangs in our hallway today, a bronze plaque commemorating it.

First Messiah Presented

What no doubt was the forerunner of our present day Christmas Messiah programs was the one first mentioned in the Women's Club board notes of November 11, 1914. At that time, Mrs. J. C. Cummins was chairman of the Music Committee. She reported that Dean Frank Nagel of Highland Park College and the 150-voice Philharmonic choir would be glad to "give" the Messiah for the club if it would take care of renting a piano, an auditorium, and admitting free all escorts of the choir members. The first date was cancelled because it conflicted with the time set for a Billy Sunday revival. (The club later accepted an invitation to go in a body to one of Sunday's meetings.) On December 14, 1914, the glorious and inspiring Messiah was presented at Plymouth Congregational Church, and a great tradition in the city of Des Moines began. At that first presentation, soloists were Daisy Binkley, Mabel Wagner Shank, Jack Campbell and George Brewster. Door receipts totaled \$14.

The War Years

One of the first orders of business when Mrs. Gardner Cowles took office as president in 1917 had to do with the club motto. Written in German, and with World War I just beginning, there was much spirited criticism and controversy regarding it. Everyone agreed there were only two alternatives: discard it; or anglicize it. The club voted

to do the latter, with Mrs. Fred Weitz as chairman of the committee. In August, the club accepted the anglicized motto: "Discussion stimulates thought."

On October 7, the room known as the upper auditorium was renamed the "Helen Sherman Room" in honor of Hoyt Sherman's daughter. Helen Sherman Griffith came for the dedication, acknowledged the honor with feeling, and gave an interesting talk on her life in the mansion.

During this period the appointment of the first committee for the secret investigation of names proposed for membership was made.

The establishment of the Cummins Memorial Library was voted in April, 1918. The nucleus of this collection was part of the library of the late Senator A. B. Cummins, whose wife had been an active member of the club. In her honor, the club decided to add each year a group of reference books for young people.

Two noteworthy events were the election of a permanent house secretary, Mrs. Frank Carlton; and the election of daughters of members as junior members.

One of the most valuable additions to the art collection was made in December, 1918, when it was voted to buy "An Autumn Mood," by Ben Foster and "Thompson's Bend," by Gardner Symonds, from an exhibition being held at the club at that time. However, there was not enough money to buy both, so only the Foster picture was purchased. Then, in 1920, Mr. G. D. Ellyson gave the Symonds picture to the club in memory of his wife, a past president.

The club continued its steady growth. In 1918 a limit of 1,000 was placed on the membership.

During the early twenties, when women were exercising the right to vote for the first time, several debates were held as to whether or not women should seek political office. Also, women were urged to give serious consideration to persons seeking office as school board directors.

Auditorium Built

No history of the club would be complete without some time and space being given to the herculean efforts put forth by the women to secure the present large and beautiful auditorium. To build such a room had been the dream of each succeeding administration from the early beginnings down through the years. Mrs. W. F. Mitchell had led them into the "promised land" and secured the first lease on Hoyt Sherman Place (1907). Mrs. Mitchell had hoped to see the building of an auditorium, too, but she died before that could be done. Fortunately, subsequent presidents had the same ambition. Mrs. W. O. Riddell (1911-13) was the first president to sponsor a sale of debenture bonds to create a building fund. Then in the year 1915-16, president Mrs. C. E. Hunn appointed the first building committee, naming Mrs. H. L. Carrell chairman.

Now events moved more swiftly toward the coveted auditorium. Mrs. H. L. Carrell, in February, 1915, sought the board's sanction for an architect (or architects) to determine whether or not an addition was advisable. What to do was a weighty problem. Sites for a new building also had been considered and some estimates made. Since the lease with the city on Hoyt Sherman

Place called for such an addition within 10 years, an extension of time was requested. The architects first consulted suggested that the addition be made on the west and north, rather than on the east, as was finally done.

The next two years were busy, serious ones for the building committee as various plans were studied and decisions made. In the spring of 1917, bids were taken for the addition. But the day contracts were to be awarded, World War I was declared. A board meeting was hastily called and the construction of the building indefinitely postponed. The building fund committee, however, was continued. Sometime in the future, these women vowed, the club would have its auditorium.

* * * *

A few years after the close of the War, one of the most thrilling periods in the club's history began with the following conversation:

"What is the building committee going to do?" queried the new president, Mrs. Fred Weitz, in March of 1921.

Mrs. Carrell looked her straight in the eye. "Let's build a club house."

"Let's," agreed Mrs. Weitz, emphatically.

The two women shook hands. And that was it. A new 99-year lease on Hoyt Sherman was secured, even though it entailed the women going to the legislature to have it legalized.

For the next few years, an intense building fund campaign was carried on. Women of the club were divided into groups: the Pioneer group, including the women who had joined from 1885-

1901; the rest in single year groups, all vying with each other to see how much money they could raise. They took over theaters, operated stores, gave bridge parties, sold every kind of object saleable, enlarged and ran a very successful Women's Club Exchange with a cafeteria, trudged through laundries and other industrial plants at so much a head, sponsored concerts by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. In fact, no opportunity to raise money was overlooked. Assisting the women were the Des Moines bankers and the Greater Des Moines committee, which sold the \$60,000 bonds issued by the club. The only security behind these bonds was the integrity of the club members. In order that the building project would not be interrupted, Mrs. Weitz and her corps of officers were re-elected for a second term.

"Welfare Days" in March of 1922 was one of the club's most memorable occasions, for on that gala day the "surprise feature" was the breaking of the ground for the new addition. Just east of Hoyt Sherman Place, Mrs. Carrell, with a brightly decorated spade, turned the first dirt. The club chorus sang. And, the announcement was made that the contract for the building had been awarded to Charles Weitz and Sons.

Auditorium Opens

Ten months later, January, 1923, the auditorium was formally opened and Mrs. Carrell presented the keys to the president, Mrs. F. C. Travers. Mrs. Carrell paid tribute to the many women who had made the building possible. Among them, she mentioned Dr. Mae Habenicht, Mrs. Eugene Cutler

and Miss Florence Harsh, the building finance committee, who had, as she said, the magic power to coax dollars from deep hiding places.

In 1928, the money-making groups were disbanded with resolutions of appreciation from the building fund committee.

The last \$4,000 bonded indebtedness for the auditorium was paid off in the fall of 1934, when Mrs. Donald Evans was president. On November 21, a celebration was held to express the club's gratitude to the men and women who had made the auditorium possible; the women of vision who dreamed it; the men of faith who helped provide the money; the club presidents; the members.

Nineteen thirty-four continued to be an eventful year. In May there was a program commemorating Major and Mrs. Byers. Johnson Brigham, state librarian, was the speaker. He eulogized his old friends. A bronze tablet in memory of them was placed in the room that day.

Elmer Schofield presented to the club his painting "The Approaching Storm," (valued at \$2,500) in appreciation of the club's interest in art and for the many courtesies extended to him during an art exhibition he had held in the city. The Steinway Grand piano was purchased and dedicated, having been autographed by composer Percy Granger, Leroy Sheidl and the younger Mr. Steinway.

Discontinued was the Women's Club Exchange, which had started in the early days of the club as a money-making project and a place where members could sell their handicraft.

The club was saddened by the passing of its last charter member, Mrs. L. B. Abdill (1934). Some of her art treasures were willed to the club.

The Programs

Through all these years of building projects, the quality of the open day programs or the departmental days was not lessened. Because of the excellent programs of Des Moines Women's Club was one of the most popular organizations in the city. The membership committee was soon faced with a waiting list of women wishing to join.

Some of the outstanding speakers included fiery Senator Smith Brookhart, Ted Shawn—the dancer, Count Ilya Tolstoy, John Phillip Sousa and his eighty-piece band, Will Rogers, Richard Halliburton, Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, Edgar Guest, Albert Edward Wiggam, and interior decorator, Ruth Draper. Such large crowds came to the meetings that the board reserved the right to restrict some programs to members only. Ruth Draper's program was one of these.

Other programs were given by Julian Street, John Cowper Powys, the Flonzaley Quartet, Padraic Colum, Capt. Roald Amundsen, Cornelia Stratton Parker and Edgar Lee Masters. The latter spoke so softly that some of the members were unable to hear and, from rear rows, called out "LOUDER, please." Later in some eastern city, in commenting on his tour of the middle west, Masters spoke of the members of the Des Moines Women's Club screaming at him to speak louder.

One of the best received programs was the presentation in January, 1928, of the New York Theater Guild in two plays "The Silver Cord" and "Arms and the Man."

Popular speakers of the thirties were the artist Homer Saint Gaudens; Alberto Salvi, harpist; Dr.

John Erskine, author; Gutzon Borglum, who carved the presidential heads on Mt. Rushmore; Maurice Hindus; Ruth Bryan Owen, Ambassador to Denmark.

Many will remember the day Abbe Ernest Dimnet, the eminent Frenchman, was to speak. His plane was delayed and, while waiting for him to appear, Mrs. George Cosson, the president, and Forrest Spaulding, city librarian (who was to introduce the Abbe) carried on such clever impromptu repartee it almost overshadowed the Frenchman's address.

Others to come to the platform were Stuart Chase, Amelia Earhart, Vicki Baum, Lloyd Douglas, Dr. Morris Fishbein, Emil Ludwig, and the unforgettable, lovely white-haired Mrs. Percy Pennypacker, president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and of the Chautauqua Women's Club. Both Otis Skinner and his talented daughter Cornelia Otis Skinner, appeared; also Clifton Fadiman; Raymond Clapper, and after his death, his wife; and the charming Edna St. Vincent Millay, who read her delightful poems.

Top Artists Appear

Other famous women, who received accolades from the Women's Club were Jan Struther, author of "Mrs. Miniver"; Agnes DeMille, the dancer; Margaret Bourke White, Life photographer; Helen Kirkpatrick; Anne O'Hare McCormick; Willie Snow Etheridge; Dorothy Thompson; Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, one of the "Cheaper by the Dozen" family; Erika Mann; Eva LeGallienne; Amy Vanderbilt; Madame Claire Chennault; Perle Mesta; and the incomparable Elsa Maxwell, who made all the women wear little black mustaches.

Down through the years famous men have appeared, too, such as Dr. Mortimer Adler; Ely Culbertson, who described himself as "kept by American women," but who talked on his world peace plan; Dr. John Furbay, traveler; Robert St. John and his beard; Vincent Sheehan; Dr. Ralph Sockman, eminent New York minister; Carl Van Doren; Charles Taft; Hartzell Spence; Ogden Nash; John Mason Brown; Richard Gump of the famous San Francisco store; Sidney Harris and Stewart Alsop, columnists; Vincent Price; and Meredith Willson.

None will ever forget the appearance of Roger Williams, known to us as Louis Weertz, as he sat at the piano recalling his boyhood days in Des Moines and playing so beautifully the numbers which have made him famous.

In March, 1932, the club celebrated the tenth anniversary of the building of the auditorium, by presenting an historical pageant "The House that Jill Built." Written by Miss Eunice Meers and Helen Marr Van Tuyl, it opened with a scene in the home of Dr. Margaret Cleaves, first president, on Oct. 25, 1885. It included such groups as the Foremothers, Gay Ninety group, Daring Daughters, Planners, Promoters, Builders, and closed with an afternoon program titled "World Premier, 1932 Edition of the Flo Wheatfields Depression Jollies." During lunch, James B. Weaver gave the commemorative address. A special birthday gift was a huge icebox from the Des Moines Ice and Fuel Company. It was to see many years of service.

Some of the "just for fun" days, in which members have taken part, have been memorable. One

such program featured circus sideshows with Mrs. Bert McKee and Mrs. George Kraetsch as the Siamese twins and Harriett Ankeney Mott as the snake charmer.

During the first World War, and later when the maps of the various continents were changing so rapidly, Mrs. Max Mayer gave interesting map talks, telling of events leading up to the new boundaries. These were veritable courses in modern history and geography.

One of the spectacular years was 1935-36, the Golden Anniversary. Under the leadership of Mrs. O. W. Follett, president, each department planned programs covering the events of the fifty years. Yearbooks bore gold colored covers. Highlight was the pageant on October 2 when the semi-centennial revue was presented. Arranged by Wilda Spencer Tillman, it consisted of five episodes describing the life of the club. Over 150 women took part. The stage setting was a huge book, out of which characters stepped.

Twenty-five years later, in celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Club, the Drama Department presented an original playlet entitled "Yesterday a Dream—Today a Diamond," written by Mrs. Russell Jordan, a member of the Women's Club.

Loyal Helpers

The club has always been blessed with loyal helpers, who have contributed much to the friendly atmosphere and efficient operation always in evidence at Hoyt Sherman Place. Mrs. L. C. Deets came to the club in 1920 to serve as house secretary, following Mrs. Frank Carlton. She stayed for twenty-seven years. Mrs. Arch Mellor,

who was named financial secretary in 1940, became house secretary in 1947, and later executive secretary, a post she held until retiring in 1965. Mrs. Paul Elliott became executive secretary in 1965, retiring in 1969, at which time Mrs. Robert V. Calhoun took that position, with Mrs. Lyle Wright the assistant executive secretary. Mrs. F. M. Davison came to the house as a full time cateress in 1948 and retired in 1967. Mrs. Albert Garrett is presently the catering manager and Mr. William Roberts the custodian. Loyal employees over many years were Mr. E. M. Mackey, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Berg, Mrs. C. E. Burbank, and Mrs. John C. Wisdom.

Progress to the Present

A major club operation is the monthly bulletin, covering club programs and other data. The bulletin started as a simple little pamphlet, growing to its present size in recent years. The advertising it carries has made it more than self-supporting, and each year, a sizeable surplus from it is contributed to the club treasury.

For many years, the club gave scholarships to the Cumming School of Art. In 1970 it was decided by the Board of Directors that four scholarships of \$450 each be awarded annually in art, literature, music, and drama-speech. These scholarships are open to any graduating high school senior in an area where a member of our club resides. The contestant must have been accepted by the school of his choice before entering the competition.

An innovation in 1924 was the establishment of a permanent program committee. Before this, various department chairmen chose whom they would like to present as open day speakers and

were allowed so much money to finance them. Later, a three-member rotating committee was appointed, each member serving three years. This has done much to coordinate the programs and has enabled the committee to obtain better speakers and talent.

The club has gone through two terrible wars and a great depression. During the first World War, Hoyt Sherman Place, with a War Emergency Committee in charge, was open every Sunday to soldiers and their guests. The club donated \$300 for the care of Armenian orphans and Red Cross sewing and knitting was done in the club house. Mrs. F. O. Green presented a large service flag with 132 stars, representing the close relatives of members. The club sponsored a poster contest featuring the conserving of food. There were also thrift luncheons with meatless and wheatless days.

During the second World War, because so many members engaged in war work, two evening meetings a year were planned so they could still enjoy some of the activities of the club. War bonds were sold at all meetings and the club received a merit award showing that over 90 per cent of the members were regular purchasers.

At the time of the depression, belts were tightened and everything possible was done to keep the club going. Mrs. Deets, the house secretary and Mr. Mackey, the custodian, each took voluntary salary cuts, and rental prices were reduced to hold renters.

After the auditorium was built and paid for, the women continued to dream, to plan for more and better things for Hoyt Sherman Place. A new

vestibule was built outside the auditorium, and from time to time, new lights were installed. The year 1937-38 was dedicated to raising money for new dishes and silver coffee pots for the dining room.

That same year one of our most valued gifts, the Hawley Memorial organ, was given by Mrs. Henry B. Hawley, in memory of her husband. It was dedicated on October 6, with Dr. Edward Eigenschenk, eminent organist, giving the program.

In the late forties, a major program of overhauling and enlarging Hoyt Sherman Place was undertaken. Once again the women rallied to the cause and all kinds of money-making schemes were undertaken. A goal of \$25,000 (in addition to money on hand) was set to take care of the various remodeling projects. Architects were employed to draw plans for the work, which included an entirely new modern kitchen, a powder room on the first floor, a dining room with dumb waiter service on the second floor, and other major improvements. The money was pledged, raised and the work completed in 1950-51.

The next major improvement was the redecorating of the auditorium, with new curtains for the stage and carpeting of the aisles and mezzanine, and the purchase of beautiful American oriental rugs for both upstairs and down in the Club House.

By the early nineteen-sixties it became apparent that a parking lot was urgently needed if the Des Moines Women's Club was to maintain its membership, not to mention the matter of growth. Street parking spaces in the vicinity were con-

sistently filled by all-day parkers, working in the downtown area.

In 1964 Mrs. Edward W. Riddell and Mrs. Robert D. Jackson, past presidents, were asked to look into the possibility of buying property on the east side of Fifteenth Street, north of Woodland Avenue.

With the approval of the Executive and Finance Committees, and final approval by the Board of Directors, the club gradually purchased eight lots, seven with houses, on the east side of Fifteenth Street between Woodland and Pleasant, at a cost of \$67,161. A drive for special contributions and pledges to the Parking Lot Fund was held the summer of 1964. By December 15, 1965 gifts to this Fund amounted to \$13,972. Members have continued making gifts, large and small, to this Fund.

The houses were torn down and the parking lot constructed, the final payment for preparations being made to Parking, Inc., December 17, 1965. Payment was made with \$41,314 from the Permanent Maintenance Fund (money which had been accumulating for a number of years) and from the special contributions to the Parking Lot Fund. On December 13, 1965 a loan was negotiated with the Iowa Des Moines National Bank for \$50,900 at 5½ percent interest, with the parking lot as collateral, monthly payments to be \$554. In the spring of 1969 regretfully it was found necessary to reduce the monthly payments to \$300. At this time the interest rate was raised to 7 percent.

About the time the black top was dry on the lot, rumblings were heard that the area south of Center Street might be added to the Oakridge

Urban Renewal Area. However, this did not gain the approval of Urban Renewal officials. In the spring of 1969 the Club was informed that the City would be extending Fifteenth Street north from Woodland Avenue, diagonally through our parking lot.

Endless meetings were held by the Parking Lot Committee as well as many conferences with city officials. The final decision was made that the parking lot would be moved, at the City's expense, west and south of its original location and it now adjoins the grounds of Hoyt Sherman Place.

Due to soaring interest rates during this time, the City agreed to pay the club the difference in interest rate when the loan would be changed from one property site to the other. The City's payment was \$7,500. On September 28, 1970 a new loan was negotiated in the amount of \$26,200 at 8 percent interest. Monthly payments would continue to be \$300. In spite of numerous delays in acquiring property and the weather, the newly-constructed parking lot was ready for limited use on opening day, October 7, 1970.

For a number of years the scholarships and parking lot payments have been met by an annual bazaar, special projects, and rentals of the Club House. In 1970, in order to meet increased costs it was necessary to raise the senior membership dues to \$35.00 annually with life memberships to remain at \$250.00.

Eighty-five Years

This, then, will give you some idea of the history and scope of the Des Moines Women's Club in the eighty-five years since it was started. It has been a changing organization, expanding and en-

larging and adjusting its programs as the times have demanded. The women who have served as leaders have been dedicated to their work and have given unsparingly of their time and energy. We are pleased to honor these women on page 32, "The Presidents' Page." It is true today, as it was back in 1910, when Mrs. Preston Durley paid a glowing tribute to the outgoing president, Mrs. G. D. Ellyson, in which she said "the club has grown to be an institution of such importance that ability of uncommon order is required in its president. The demands upon her are exacting and the duties arduous."

In bringing this history to a close, we ask you to return in memory to April 29, 1925, when the poet Arthur Guiterman stood upon our platform. He let his eyes drink in the beauty, the dignity, the atmosphere of this gracious place, and then he gave us our House Blessing, which hangs framed in our hall. It is:

*"Bless the four corners of This house
And be the lintel blest;
And bless the Hearts and bless the board
And bless each place of rest;
And bless the Door that opens wide
To stranger as to kin;
And bless each crystal window pane
That lets the starlight in;
And bless the Rooftree overhead
And every sturdy wall.
The peace of man, the Peace of God,
The peace of Love on All."*

THE END

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

1885-1970

- *Cleaves, Dr. Margaret A.
- *Callanan, Mrs. James
- *Parsons, Mrs. Galusha
- *Ruttkay, Mrs. Louis
- *Windsor, Mrs. James H.
- *Durley, Mrs. Preston B.
- *Berryhill, Mrs. James G.
- *Clapp, Mrs. E. R.
- *Goode, Mrs. Lowry W.
- *Cummins, Mrs. A. B.
- *Peters, Mrs. R. R.
- *Reichard, Mrs. D. H.
- *Witmer, Mrs. W. W.
- *Walker, Mrs. T. M.
- *Bailey, Mrs. W. H.
- (Mrs. Charles Gorst)
- *Elbert, Mrs. B. F.
- *Cummins, Mrs. J. C.
- *Gilcrest, Miss Belle M.
- *Carrell, Mrs. H. L.

Acting Pres. from Jan., 1906

- *Mitchell, Mrs. W. F.
- *Shipley, Mrs. A. E.
- *Ellyson, Mrs. G. D.
- *Brown, Mrs. Ernest W.
- *Riddell, Mrs. W. O.
- *Carrell, Mrs. H. L.
- *Grundy, Mrs. J. G.
- *Hunn, Mrs. C. E.
- *Morris, Mrs. C. H.
- *Cowles, Mrs. Gardner
- *Green, Mrs. Frank O.
- *Littell, Mrs. W. W.
- *Weitz, Mrs. Fred W.
- *Travers, Mrs. Frank C.
- *Kurtz, Mrs. Louis C.
- *Cutler, Mrs. Eugene
- *Elliott, Mrs. Henry E.
- *Clark, Mrs. Howard J.
- *Shore, Mrs. F. E. V.
- *Marshall, Mrs. A. H.
- (Victor Emhoff)
- *Bogardus, Mrs. G. W.

- *Pierce, Mrs. Charles N.
- *Cosson, Mrs. George
- *Marshall, Miss Bonnie
- *Elliott, Mrs. Gordon L.
- *Johnston, Mrs. Josiah
- *Evans, Mrs. Donald
- Follett, Mrs. O. W.
- (Lee R. Bartholomew)
- *Kraetsch, Mrs. George A.
- Huttenlocher, Mrs. Raymond W.
- Mannheimer, Mrs. Eugene
- French, Mrs. Leslie R.
- *Newton, Mrs. Ray D.
- Bolton, Mrs. Lewis
- Mills, Mrs. Bert N.
- Payseur, Mrs. Pritchard
- Root, Mrs. Frank S.
- Hornaday, Mrs. William R.
- Fountain, Mrs. Ray C.
- Gordon, Mrs. Harold
- Riddell, Mrs. Edward W.
- Throckmorton, Mrs. Tom B.
- Davis, Mrs. Edwin H.
- Tuller, Mrs. Ralph W.
- Johann, Mrs. Albert E.
- Lan, Mrs. Maurice
- Herrick, Mrs. Allan A.
- Milligan, Mrs. David O.
- Marken, Mrs. De Loss
- Watters, Mrs. George H.
- Selvy, Mrs. Walter W.
- *Jackson, Mrs. Robert D.
- Biermann, Mrs. E. H.
- Burgess, Mrs. Floyd
- Barlow, Mrs. Charles W.
- Faber, Mrs. J. G.
- Bishop, Mrs. Wendell W.
- Grossman, Mrs. Jan
- Braucht, Mrs. LaVere
- Friedman, Mrs. Abe J.
- Meadows, Mrs. Roy W.
- Williams, Mrs. Roger F.
- Kilgore, Mrs. Benjamin F.
- *deceased

HOYT SHERMAN PLACE—1960

