

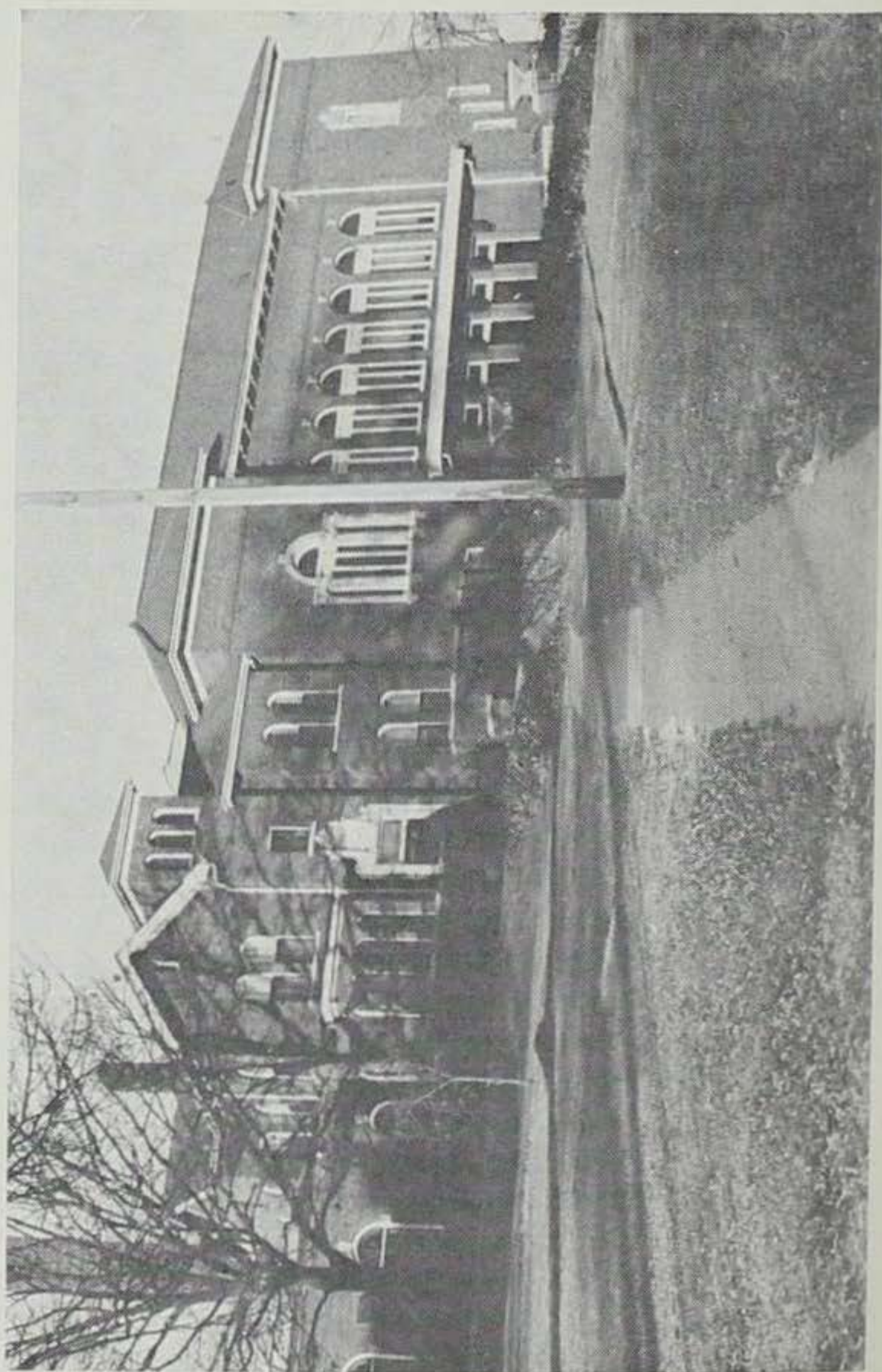
100th
Birthday
of
Hoyt Sherman
Place



1877-1977

The
Home
of
Des Moines
Women's Club

by
Kathryn Love



HOYT SHERMAN PLACE — 1977

HOYT SHERMAN PLACE

Hoyt Sherman Place is now 100 years old, a beautiful brick mansion of the Victorian era, in the center of a square block of lawn. The house is situated on a hill at 15th and Woodland. In the early days it overlooked downtown Des Moines, and in the evenings people would park their buggies nearby to enjoy the magnificent view of the city's flickering gas lights.

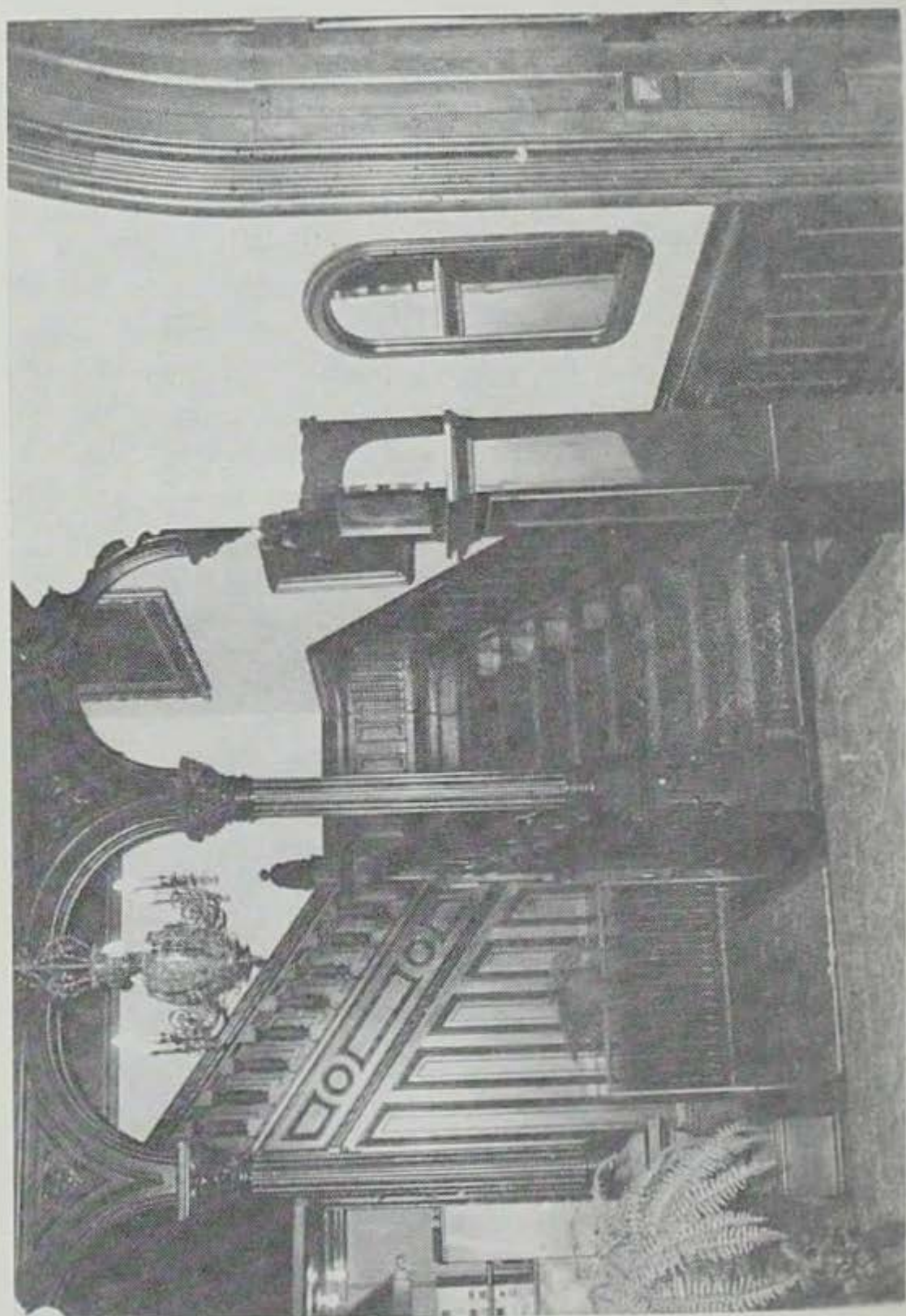
The house was the home of Mr. Hoyt Sherman, a founding father of Des Moines who came here in 1842, five years before the city was incorporated.

Originally from Ohio, the Sherman's became a notable family. The seven sons achieved success in many ways. Best known was William T., the Civil War general who marched through Georgia.

In 1850 a Des Moines judge ordered subdivision of five acres of the Pursley estate to be sold at auction. Hoyt Sherman wanted the lot at 15th and Woodland, and having only \$100 to bid, he nearly lost the sale. However, he clerked the auction and by adding his \$5 fee for that, got the property.

In 1867 Hoyt Sherman built his first home at 6th and Locust. Twenty-five years before on this wooded area, Indians had roamed and prairie grass had been waist high.

In 1851 Hoyt built Des Moines' first post office building at Second and Vine and in 1854 he established the Hoyt Sherman & Co. Bank. In 1855 he married Sara Moulton in Ohio and returned to Des Moines to begin the state's largest office building, the Hoyt Sherman Block, at Third



THE FRONT HALL

and Court where Equitable Insurance Company had its first offices. Mr. Sherman was a founder and was President of the company for 14 years. By 1861 he was a wealthy man and a Major in the U. S. Army.

Hoyt's home on Locust burned in 1873 and Hoyt Sherman Place was completed in 1877. President McKinley, President and Mrs. Grant, and notables of the stage were frequently entertained there. From his library, Hoyt administered the affairs of the Associated Charities of Des Moines which he founded, and which was the predecessor of the United Campaign.

His house is a symbol of gracious living in the 1800's. It has very high ceilings, tall arched windows and many spacious rooms. The double doorways are arched and the heavy arched doors are made of five different varieties of hard wood. There are marble fire-places, a long staircase, and intricately carved woodwork. The dining room has a superb parquet floor. Before the removal of the cupola, the house very much resembled Terrace Hill which had been built by B. F. Allen and sold to F. M. Hubbell, associates with Hoyt Sherman in Equitable Life.

Mrs. Sherman died in 1887 and for a while in 1893 the house was a Catholic hospital operated by the Sisters in Davenport. Hoyt Sherman Place was, therefore, the first location of what is now known as Mercy Hospital. Mr. Sherman lived in the home until his death in 1904.

Hoyt Sherman Place is the home of the Des Moines Women's Club—the second largest Women's Club home in the nation. The members built an Art Gallery on the west and an auditorium on the east of the original house.



ETCHED GLASS IN FRONT DOORS

Over the years each room has acquired its own special name. The Byers Room houses an unusual collection of art objects left to the club by Colonel Byers. The Mirror Room has a beautifully ornate mirror given to the club by "The Group" in 1921. At the top of the winding stairway is the Deets Room honoring the former house secretary and used by the Board for its meetings. To the west of the Deets Room is the Helen Sherman Room. Helen was the daughter of Hoyt Sherman.

Hoyt Sherman Place is, indeed, one of the show places of Des Moines.

FINDING A HOME

Des Moines Women's Club now has a membership in the many hundreds. In 1885, it was so small it could scarcely be called a club.

That year five ladies attended a meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Women, a new national organization that wanted to make an impact culturally, socially, and politically upon our fast growing country.

That same year a meeting at Dr. Margaret Cleaves' home at 1801 High Street had 22 ladies in attendance, and the Des Moines Women's Club became a reality, with Dr. Cleaves as the first President.

However, they were a club without a home. The ladies met in private homes but as new members joined, more space was needed, and they met in vacant rooms of office buildings.

To quote from past records: "In 1886 Mrs. Pomeroy offered our club a home in Callanan College — warm in winter, charming in summer. Pure air, high ceilings and sunny windows are of great importance to an intelligent organization like ours."

During their first 22 years, the club met in 28 different locations, including churches, lodge halls, hotels, and office buildings.

In 1907 the Des Moines Board of Park Commissioners bought the Hoyt Sherman home and grounds for \$14,500 with the understanding it would be always known as Hoyt Sherman Place.

That same year the club leased the property from the city for a clubhouse restored it and added a \$10,000 art gallery. . . The first board meeting was held on the front steps because the house was being renovated.

At last the club had its home. In 1921 they secured a 99 year lease on Hoyt Sherman Place which had to be legalized by going to the State Legislature. Since that time maintenance and preservation of the building has been the complete responsibility of the Women's Club.

If there are no emergencies, the cost of fuel, electricity, salaries, catering, insurance, attorney's fees, art restoration, scholarships, refurbishing, maintenance, departments, etc., amounts to thousands of dollars a year.

The club is 92 years old and it has been 70 years since the members had to scurry around looking for a meeting place. We now have a well furnished home.

In the early years one of the inventories taken of our belongings listed "a few cups and spoons, 1 tray, 1 pail, and 1 mop."

The most virgorous participation in a civic project was

in 1897 when the Home for the Aged urgently needed \$1000. The club, to raise the money for them, manned the city street cars for one day. The Iowa State Register reported: "The young ladies will act as conductors on the street cars. You will have the privilege of paying your fare 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.' "

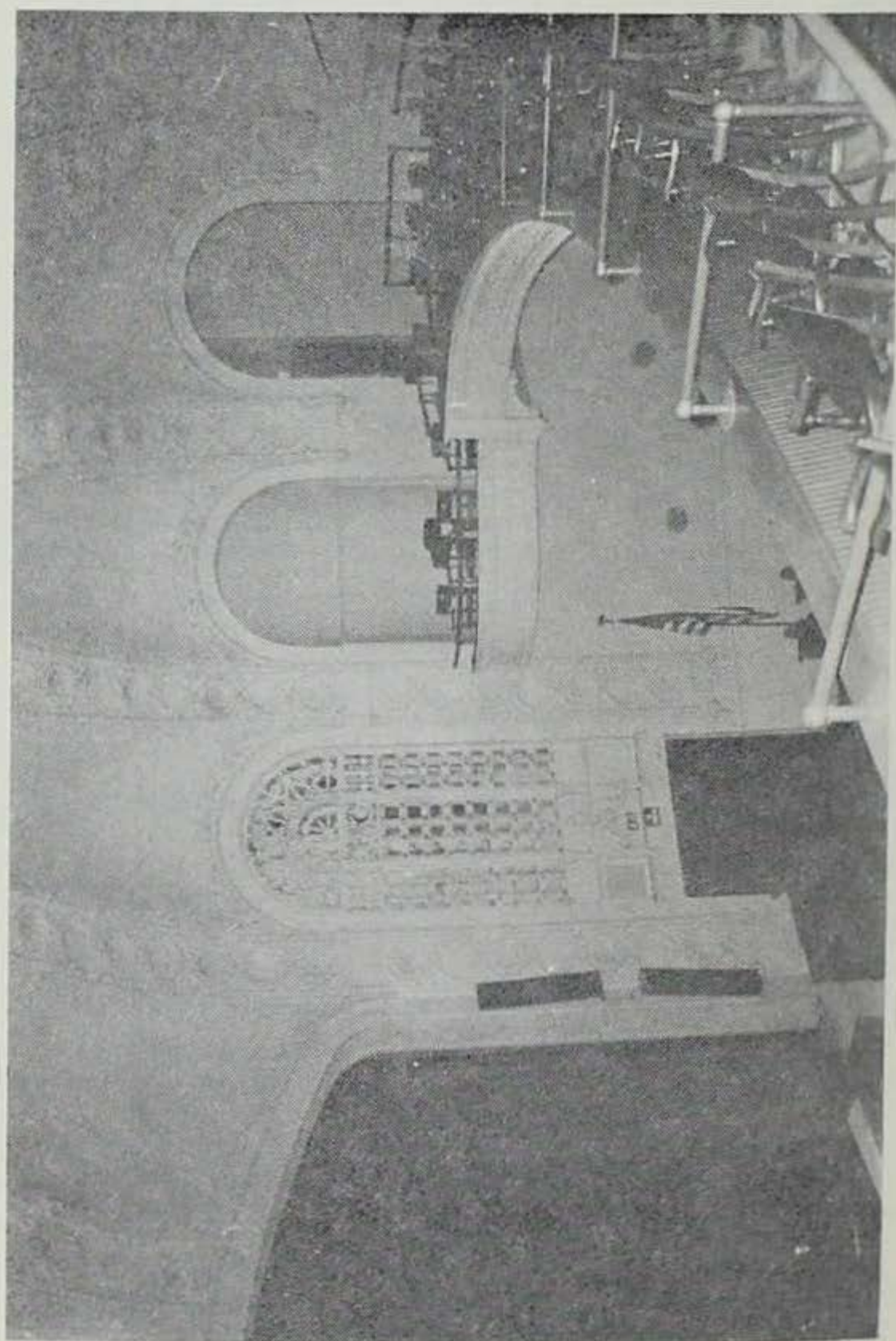
Having leased Hoyt Sherman Place, \$60,000 worth of bonds were issued after World War I for an addition to the building. The members left no stone unturned to raise the money. They took over theaters, operated stores, ran a successful Club Exchange with a cafeteria, trudged through industrial plants at so much a head, and sponsored concerts by the St. Louis symphony. In January of 1923 the auditorium was formally opened.

Now, in 1977 it is the only Des Moines auditorium or public meeting place which contains elaborate plaster carving of Rococo design so often seen in architecture of the 1800's.

In 1926 it was announced that the grounds of Hoyt Sherman Place would be landscaped by the members. Everyone brought wildflowers from home — Silky Dogwood, Golden Currant, Prairie Roses, Elder, Privet, Sweet William, Sumac and Snowberry — which the ladies, on their knees in the dirt, planted.

In 1937 and 1938 the members again needed money, this time for silver tea pots and new dishes. No longer would they have to "bring your own."

After World War II, the women rallied around again to raise money for a major program of overhauling and



A VIEW OF THE AUDITORIUM

enlarging Hoyt Sherman Place. A goal of \$25,000 was set. As usual, the ladies raised it and obtained a modern kitchen, powder room, dining room, and dumb waiter to the second floor.

That work was completed in 1951. Then, improvements were made in the auditorium by the addition of a new curtain. Oriental rugs were purchased for the upstairs and downstairs.

In the 1960's came an equally difficult project — paying for a newly acquired parking lot. Its mortgage was burned in April of 1977.

DEPARTMENTS

Today's Club departments are: Antiques and Treasures, Art, Drama, History and Travel, Home and Science, Junior Women, Literature and Philosophy, Music, and Public Affairs.

In the early years, the departments were Art and Literature, Woman's Work, Discussion, and Education. Some of the early programs were concerned with sympathy for the criminal class, maids, nervousness of school girls, and hygiene in dress.

Art: From the beginning, the club had a great interest in art in all forms. In 1885, the first club paper, "Art and Literature" was presented. A local place of exhibition for the advancement of art was suggested. In 1888, the club first obligated itself to establish and maintain an art gallery in Des Moines. Anyone could become a member by paying \$10 annually, the money to be used

in buying art objects for the gallery.

In 1893, the first art purchases were made, Mesdames West, Windsor and Clapp went to Chicago and secured a bronze statue of Joan of Arc and a marble bust of Dante sculptured in Rome.

In 1902, the question was raised, whether or not to build a gallery for our works of art. As a temporary measure the art was placed in the State Capitol.

During 1905, the Board of Directors authorized the selection and purchase of a picture at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.

In 1908, the Art Committee reported "money taken in at the door of department meetings for the year was \$3.90 expenses 60¢, a profit of \$3.30."

The annual Art Exhibit began in 1907. In 1915 Miss Harriet Macy won first prize. In 1925, the Chairman of the Art Department was "authorized to look over our pictures stored in the attic to loan some to public schools, returning the others to the attic". Many of the pictures that won prizes in early exhibitions were purchased to add to the art collection. In 1977, Velma Rayness gave her picture that won first in the Art Exhibit in 1918, to the club.

The art collection has grown tremendously. Statues, antique implements, paintings, cut-glass, urns, silver sets, Chinese embroidery, a teakwood chair, cabinets, mirrors, tables, desks — the list is long.

Brochures of art possessions are available at the club. Each year new members are given a guided tour of the House, which in itself, is an art object.

The club guest book, because of its autographs, is another valuable possession. On stage over the years at Hoyt Sherman Place has appeared Gutzon Borglum, Grant Wood, Dorothy Thompson, Otis Skinner, Schumann-Heink, Henry Hull, Will Rogers, Vincent Price, Amelia Earhart, Lloyd Douglas, Ogden Nash, John Phillip Sousa, Edgar Guest, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and, of course, Louis Weertz, home town boy known as Roger Williams, pianist.

Music can be made almost anyplace in the clubhouse. There are five pianos plus the magnificent Hawley Memorial Organ. This represents a change in outlook since 1896 when the secretary reported: "After selling tickets at the Baseball Park for the start of a piano fund, the \$33 was used elsewhere, because where would we put a piano if we had one?"

In 1924 it was "moved that the Board purchase a Steinway Concert Grand piano and that cash be paid if it is to our advantage." The piano is autographed by the younger Mr. Steinway.

Each Department — Philosophy, Public Affairs, Home and Science is responsible for a number of programs. Regular Programs usually feature imported artists, or lecturers, but the majority of the year's programs are done by local talent.

Decorating: Twice a year, members of the club decorate Hoyt Sherman Place. On May Day, every room is full of color. At Christmas, a tree at least 15 feet high is placed in the Art gallery. Each year the committee chairmen use new ideas to make the tree and the house outstanding. One President, being of Swedish descent, asked that a smaller tree be put in the stairwell and

ornamented with white paper birds in true Swedish tradition.

BIRTH OF THE BULLETIN

The Bulletin began in 1901 when a little book called "Suggestions" was issued each month containing club notes. Apparently its shape varied, for in 1935 it was announced that "another purse-size Bulletin would be issued which can be referred to in meetings without disturbance of rattling paper."

To quote from past records: "In 1925 the Club House was rented to the State P.E.O. Convention so we met at Unitarian Church. There the rent was \$40 if fire was needed, \$25 if no fire, and \$7.50 for the Circle room for lunch, which does not include dishes."

In the Bulletin of 1926 it said "lunch on Open Days will be served for 50 cents and on Department Days for 30 cents."

In 1933 the first advertisements appeared, some of which were: Grace Ransom Tea Room, Younkers 25¢ Buffet Lunch, Red Ball Food Stores, Sefren and Glickman Furs, Skondras and Berland's Shoes.

February of 1950 the Colonial Bread advertisement said, "George Washington, Abe Lincoln and Des Moines Women's Club members — three names that stand for extraordinary service and devotion to a worthwhile cause."

In the Bulletin of 1954 a recipe From the Kitchens of Hoyt Sherman Place for Escalloped Chicken was printed, the last line saying, "Will serve 16, if they are ladies."

Early in 1954, the Des Moines paper had a write-up about the successful musical career of Mr. Jon Spong. In a 1955 Bulletin it tells of Mr. Spong appearing on stage, adding, "he is a Senior at Drake."

PROJECTS

Four scholarships are awarded each year; one, in Art; one, in Drama; one, in Literature; and one, in Music. These are given to graduating high school students who are gifted in their fields and who are planning to go on with their education. In the past year, 1976, one more scholarship has been made possible through a gift — the Olive C. Riddell scholarship for continuing education.

The Art Exhibit is in its 70th year. Awards are made to both the professional and non-professional artists. Art has been a very important part of the Club's interests.

The club involves itself in many special projects — Flaming Festival, Antique Show, Flea Market, a Lobby shop, Club talent shows, card parties — to support and maintain the building.

Rentals add to the yearly income. Hoyt Sherman Place is rented for symphonies, dance recitals, evangelists, shows, dinner dances. One of the few times a request for rental was denied was in 1925 when the Ku Klux Klan wanted the auditorium for the state convention.

None of this would be successful without the willing assistance of the house staff.

HAPPENINGS

From the minutes of 1896 it says, "your secretary was so busy she had no time for the minutes."

In 1897 a paper was being read when the hour of adjournment arrived; so a motion was made and carried that the time be extended long enough to finish the paper.

In 1907 a program was given on "Athens, Old and New" with the aid of a stereopticon.

In 1914 Mr. Clifford DePuy spoke on "How to Reduce the High Cost of Living", and in 1915 the club was offered the privilege of serving lunches at the Auto Show.

A Shakespearean Revel was held in 1916 in honor of the tercentenary anniversary of Shakespeare's death. In 1917 the Election Committee was instructed to use 1¢ stamps in sending out ballots; in March of 1921 attention was called to the fact that women for the first time may vote for school directors.

At the Club Exchange in the Fleming Building during 1922 there was a Christmas sale. Offered, were crocheted lace-trimmed sheets, dresser covers trimmed with Hardanger lace, and pongee handkerchiefs.

It was directed by the Board, in 1925, the "two three-yard tablecloths and six more table runners be purchased at a price not to exceed \$30."

In 1925, John Hammill, an Iowa Governor, signed the guest book. In 1926, the Women's Relief Corps of G.A.R. was given permission to plant a tree on Hoyt Sherman Place ground during the National Encampment in memory of Henry C. Wallace, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

For the Christmas program in 1931 the Kendall Community Players presented "Icebound." In 1934 there was a card party where "you can win a prize of a chocolate cake baked by your President."

1936 was the year Brinsmaid's asked the club to participate in the Company's 80th anniversary celebration by entering the Table Setting Contest— at which the club won third prize.

The Minutes of 1938 say "the Board Room was presented with a gift of comfortable straight chairs, which are a great improvement over the camp chairs."

During World War II, bonds were sold at every meeting and courtesy tickets were extended to members of the W.A.C. for programs.

In the '50's a memento of the war was acquired: The name plate on the easel in the entrance hall is of native walnut from the World War II scrap pile of West Des Moines' gun-stock mill. The letters are of butternut wood sent from New York in exchange for the club's own walnut.

In 1974 the auditorium was redecorated and a new stage curtain purchased.

During the Bicentennial year, as part of the Polk County celebration, club members dressed in old-time costumes and marched and rode in a parade which featured their own four floats depicting authentic historical carriages.

That year, too, a large and beautiful stained glass window was found in the attic of the house. It was believed to be the skylight originally over the front hall stairway.

REMEMBERING

The Women's Club has changed as the times have changed. Etiquette, programs, protocol, clothing, have

adjusted to the differences in the way of life.

The club founders, fortified by petticoats and bustles, always dressed in their best for meetings — gloves on their hands, hats on their heads, and every meeting was deadly serious. In fact, they were allowed to discuss programs during a meeting.

Only a few short years ago one could sit in the back of the auditorium and look out over a sea of brilliant colors — flowers or feathers on every lady's hat.

Today no one owns a hat, and half the members appear in casual pant suits.

No matter how they dress nor how club routine is conducted, the women have accomplished much over the years.

Our Presidents have had tremendous responsibilities. In 1910 it was said of an outgoing President:

... "ability of uncommon order is required in our President. The demands upon her are exacting and the duties arduous."

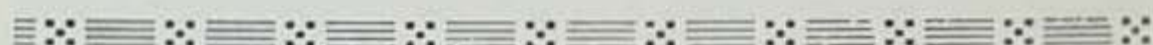
The club has since grown to such magnitude that the duties of today's Presidents represent an even greater effort.

The Des Moines Women's Club is proud of its organization and its lovely home. Through group effort it has been able to award cash prizes to many entrants in the Art exhibits, given scholarships to worthy college students, and raised thousands of dollars for maintenance of the house and public Art Gallery.

The Club has entered into civic affairs and worked on many projects. Best of all are the friendships made with fellow members — friendships which will last a lifetime.

Hoyt Sherman Place, having shared a large part of the

physical and cultural growth of Des Moines for 100 years, has earned its designation by the Board of Review as an Historic Iowa Building. On September 29, 1977, it was placed in the National Register of Historic Buildings. It is the focal point of the area which may become known as Sherman Hill, to be preserved and protected.



The art gallery and some original rooms in Hoyt Sherman Place may be visited by arranging tours with the Women's Club. These are available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 A.M. until 4 P.M.



