Women's clubs, from page 1

players in relief efforts during the Civil War, working right beside men on the battlefields. They put the organization and management skills inherent in running households into play on a very public scale. Women played key leadership roles in establishing the United States Sanitary Commission, a private relief agency created by federal legislation in1861 to support sick and wounded soldiers of the U.S. Army. "Sanitary Fairs" developed and managed by women were held across the north to raise money and enlist volunteers.

The first Sanitary Fair of note was held in Chicago in 1863 and included a six-mile-long parade of militiamen, bands, political leaders, and delegations from various local organizations. Thousands of items from artwork to fresh vegetables were donated to be sold at the fair and over $100,000 was raised – about $1.9 million in today's dollars.

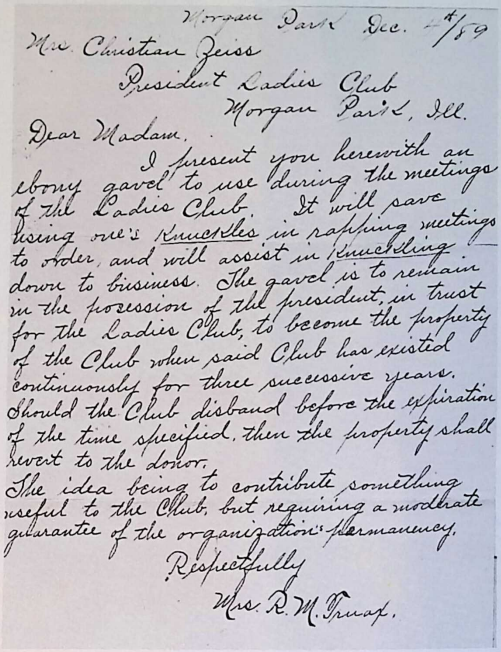
The planners of the Chicago event suggested to President Abraham Lincoln that the original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation would be a distinguished donation to the fair and would show the President's support. He complied, sending the document with a note: "Ladies having charge of the North Western Fair For the Sanitary Commission, Chicago: According to the request made in your behalf, the original draft of the Emancipation proclamation is herewith enclosed .... I have some desire to retain the paper; but if it shall contribute to the relief or comfort of the soldiers that will be better. Your obt. servt. A. Lincoln."

The document was purchased for $3,000 by Thomas B. Bryan who donated it to the Soldier's Home in Chicago that was built with the proceeds of the 1863 fair and managed by "the loyal women of Chicago." Unfortunately the document was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

Following the war, women did not quietly return to traditional roles. Modern conveniences and a move from rural life to industrial cities were creating a new middle class with women who had more free time from domestic duties.

Then came the Progressive Era of the late 1800s, a time of great reform in all areas, from education to politics to business to the sciences. Women's rights were hot issues, especially suffrage, property ownership and education and employment opportunities.

Self-improvement clubs were started up by and for women denied college educations, employment opportunities and membership in men-only groups. Literature, history and the arts were all emphasized. By the late 1800s, the emphasis began to shift to the betterment of the community. In 1890, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) was officially formed, to allow clubs to unite for common causes. Improved labor laws for women and children, workplace safety and inspections, workmen's compensation,



Morgan Park Dec. 4/89

Mrs. Christian Ziess
President Ladies Club
Morgan Park, Ill.

Dear Madam,

I present you herewith an ebony gavel to use during the meetings of the Ladies Club. It will save using one's knuckles in rapping meetings to order, and will assist in knuckling down to business. The gavel is to remain in the possession of the president, in trust for the Ladies Club, to become the property of the Club when said Club has existed continuously for three successive years. Should the Club disband before the expiration of the time specified, then the property shall revert to the donor.

The idea being to contribute something useful to the Club, but requiring a moderate guarantee of the organization's permanency.

Respectfully
Mrs. R. M. Truax.

The Morgan Park Woman's Club has done an outstanding job of organizing its archives, and keeps the materials at RHS. An early document in the collection is a letter dated Dec. 4, 1889, from Mrs. R. M. Truax giving the gift of a gavel to the President of the Ladies Club of Morgan Park, Christine Ziess. Mrs. Truax requests that if the club doesn't last, the gavel be returned. Her concerns were unfounded – the club celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2014.

The Dewalt Mechlin Chapter of DAR found time for fun as well as community service. This "Gay Nineties" benefit luncheon was held in October 1953. From the DAR collection housed at RHS.

establishment of juvenile courts and improved health and education services for Native Americans were examples of the type of issues women began addressing as united groups. Under GFWC, women founded 75-80% of the community libraries across the nation, and the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed.

The Chicago Woman's Club was formed in 1876 and stood out as being one of the most active and influential in GFWC social causes in the country. Of course, there were people like Jane Addams of Hull House involved in the club so this is no wonder. The members studied classical literature and art, but they also established kindergartens and homes for needy women. Women from the Ridge area were involved in Chicago clubs. Alice Gertrude Boughton Blackwelder served as president of the Chicago Woman's Club from 1906 to 1908. The Blackwelders were prominent in Morgan Park; Isaac Blackwelder served as Morgan Park Village President.

Formation of women's clubs on the Ridge - MPWC

The women of the Ridge formed their own clubs. Chief among them was "The Ladies Club of Morgan Park" which began on November 5, 1889 with the stated purpose "To seek the mutual improvement of its members in music and for charitable purposes." Sixty-two charter members met at the home of Miss Elizabeth Iglehart at 111th and Western. The Iglehart House, which was moved to 11118 S. Artesian Ave., still stands and is one of the oldest houses on the Ridge and indeed in all of Chicago.

In 1897, the name of the club was changed to MPWC. The stated purpose in the Bylaws from this time reflects the changing and growing role of women: "The object of this Club shall be intellectual improvement, and the practical considerations of educational, philanthropic, and civic questions." The club became part of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs in 1896 and GFWC in 1914. By 1924, there were close to 500 members in the club.

A few examples of the many good works that MPWC has been involved in through the years help to illustrate the contributions of the group to the community. In 1912, the group organized "penny lunches" in the local schools when asked for assistance by the Board of Education.

MPWC assisted in forming PTAs in the areas and in improving Morgan Park High School. The club helped establish Occupational Therapy at Oak Forest County Infirmary, helped secure a public defender for the Chicago Woman's Court, and provided services to the Oakhaven Home, the forerunner of Smith Village.

During World War II, the club earned a Chevron Award from the Red Cross for 1200 hours of service. In the 1980s, the club was involved with "Winning Wheels," working with a group of engineers custom building means of locomotion for young handicapped persons. Many scholarships have been given out through the years,

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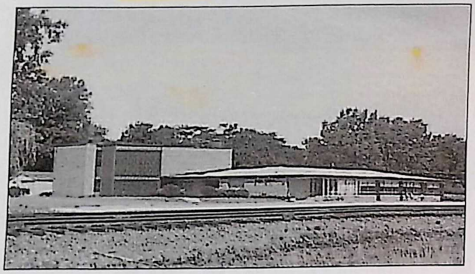
Beverly's only Jewish synagogue

In 1953, Jews living on the far southwest side of Chicago and nearby suburbs established a Reform congregation which they named Beth Torah. All but one of the officers lived in the Beverly/Morgan park community. In their early years, they held services at the Givins Castle and Trinity Methodist and Bethany Union Churches, and in members' homes. Although small, the congregation was active with classes, a youth group, membership and fund drives, and social events like hay rides and fashion shows.



Beth Torah, 9200 South Vanderpoel Avenue, Chicago, 1968.
Courtesy of Judith Holz.

Beth Torah was Beverly's only Jewish synagogue, from 1961-1974. The congregation was small but active for a number of years, and will be the topic of an RHS program on June 14. Photo from "Beth Torah: the Congregation that Held Services in a Castle," by Errol Magidson, in Chicago Jewish History, a publication of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, Vol. 38, No. 4, Fall 2014.

A major goal of the congregation was to have its own synagogue. Funds were raised, land was purchased at 93rd St. and Vanderpoel Ave., and a building was constructed. Beth Torah Synagogue opened in October 1961. But by 1974, due to an aging membership and a decline in the number of Jewish families in the Beverly area, a number of the Beth Torah congregants opted to affiliate with another congregation in Olympia Fields.

The Beth Torah Synagogue was purchased by the Chicago Board of Education in 1974 and used for classrooms for a few years. Eventually the building was torn down but the foundation still remains.

RHS will host a program on the history of Beth Torah Congregation and Synagogue on Sunday, June 14, at 2:00 p.m. The speaker will be RHS member Errol Magidson, retired professor from Daley College, City Colleges of Chicago, who currently teaches at Saint Xavier University, and is the producer of the documentary available on DVD, "Chicago's Only Castle: The History of Givins' Irish Castle and its Keepers. See the RHS calendar on page 8 for details.

From: "Beth Torah: the Congregation that Held Services in a Castle" by Errol Magidson, in Chicago Jewish History, a publication of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, Vol. 38, No. 4, Fall 2014.

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Flag and pole for the Community House in Washington Heights and holding a Flag Day Ceremony. To establish a treasury, each member agreed to earn one dollar and tell the story of how it was earned.

The Dewalt Mechlin Chapter has actively preserved history on the Ridge by placing a granite boulder with a plaque at 91st St. and Pleasant Ave. marking the Vincennes Trail; by placing an historical marker on the grounds of the previous Beverly Bank marking the Calumet Portage Trail used by Indians and pioneers; by marking the Platt house in Beverly on the site of an Indian meeting ground; and by dedicating a marker honoring the 50th anniversary of World War II placed on the grounds of Ridge Park. DAR sponsored the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's traveling Lincoln Centennial Exhibit at the Beverly Art Center, co-sponsored by the Ridge Historical Society.

DAR is always a patriotic presence in the local Memorial Day Parade and this year will be featured prominently because of the 100th anniversary. The

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RHS thanks annual fund appeal donors

The RHS Board of Directors thanks those who contributed to the 2014 RHS Annual Fund appeal. As a special incentive this year, donors' names were entered into a drawing to win a time-share accommodation. At the RHS annual meeting in February, Richard and Mary Jo Barry were selected as the winners. The time share was donated by Herman and Lois Schell; Herman is an RHS Board emeritus member, and Lois an active volunteer with the Program Committee and other endeavors.

2014 donors

Richard & Mary Jo Barry
Helen Boyle
Larry & Nancy Brown
Leroy Bryant
Mary Ellen Cassidy
Sue Delves
Paula Everett
Joseph & Mary Ann Furlong
Lois Grayston
Wayne & Janice Helge
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Mati & Kathy Maldre
Pat McGrail
Kathleen McKee
Daniel Moulton
Peter & Colleen Mulchrone
Joseph O'Connor
Kurt & Mary Quinn Olsson
Patrick Racey
Bill & Marie Sandstrom
Wendy Schulenberg
Elaine Spencer
Barbara Thompson

Now is the time to send in your membership renewal

Enclosed with this issue of the *RHS Record* is the annual membership renewal envelope. The RHS Board recognizes that patrons have many, many choices of where to make their philanthropic contributions, and very much appreciate that you share your resources with RHS. Your membership dues help to maintain the historic Graver-Driscoll House and the RHS collection, as well as produce the *RHS Record.* RHS is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you for your generosity.

Women's clubs, from page 6

annual DAR Good Citizens program and scholarship contest recognizes outstanding young people who exhibit the qualities of good citizenship in their homes, schools and communities. In addition, DAR invites the public to free genealogy workshops and educational programs.

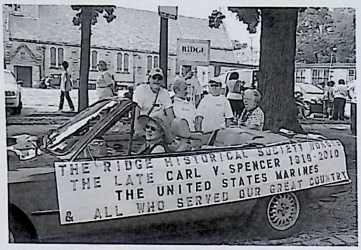
For more information ....

The clippings notebooks compiled by MPWC for RHS are available for use by members of the public. Arrangements to do this may be made through the RHS office, 773/881-1675 or ridgehistory@hotmail.com.

MPWC meets monthly from fall through spring. The meetings include business, an education or information program, refreshments and socializing. MPWC welcomes interest from potential members who may contact MPWC President Doris Moulton at 773/239-2377.

For more information on the Dewalt Mechlin Chapter of DAR, contact Suzanne Smith, Regent, at 773/791-9747. In October, DAR plans an anniversary event that will feature presentations from DAR leaders and local politicians, entertainment, and good food and company. The event will be open to the public by reservation. Watch the local papers for further information on this upcoming event.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



RHS has participated in the Memorial Day parade for many years. This picture from 2010 shows Lois Schell in the driver's seat, and standing from left to right are Herman Schell, Doris Moulton, Allison Moulton, and Sue Delves. Holding the RHS sign in the background is Bill Hopper. Photo by L. Lamberty, RHS Historian.

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2:00 P.M.

Spring Bonnet Tea

Join us for a Full Victorian Tea, featuring a fine selection of savories, scones and pastries! For adults and young ladies – please wear a spring hat or bonnet! At RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago. Cost: $20 per adult; $10 per child ages 8-16; children must be accompanied by an adult. Reservations are necessary – call RHS at 773/881-1675 or email ridgehistory@hotmail.com.

MONDAY, MAY 25, 10:30 A.M.

Memorial Day Parade

...kicks off at 110th Place and Longwood Drive and proceeds north to Ridge Park at 96th and Longwood Drive.

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 2:00 P.M.

A program on the history of Beth Torah Congregation and Synagogue

...the only Jewish congregation in Beverly, which was active from 1953 until 1974, when it merged with another congregation. Speaker: Errol Magidson, retired professor from Daley College; currently teaches at Saint Xavier University. At RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago. Cost for program: $5 per RHS member, $10 per non-member. Light refreshments will be served. See page 7 for details.

Ridge Historical Society
RECORD
BEVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & MT. GREENWOOD
10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago, IL 60643
SPRING 2015 ISSUE