

UM Faculty Women Celebrates 50 Years  
By Diana Orban  
Ann Arbor News Women's Editor  
Ann Arbor News, Sunday, December 26, 1971

What can you say about 50 years of a club's activities?

Not nearly enough. In fact, you can't really say anything; you have to be content to flip quickly through the years and catch a flavor, a glimpse.

Surely, Mrs. Marion L. Burton, wife of the University's president during the 1920s, would be surprised to see the UM Faculty Women's Club as it is today...she never would have believed that her little band of 50 women would grow into an organization 1,500-strong with 45 interest sections and dozens of activities.

The late Mrs. Burton, a strong-willed Minnesota native, arrived in Ann Arbor with her husband after he assumed the presidency of the University of Michigan. She decided that a faculty women's club similar to one at the University of Minnesota needed to be organized.

To that end, she gave a tea for wives of deans, administrative officers and heads of departments on October 21, 1921, to discuss the advisability of establishing a faculty women's club.

Within two months, a group formed a constitution written and accepted and officers installed with Mrs. Burton as president (it is said that Mrs. Burton was not the sort of person to let grass grow under her feet!) She led the club until 1925 making her term the longest of any president since.

It is hard to think of our mothers and grandmothers as ecology freaks and liberationists, but that's exactly what they sound like when you read accounts of early Faculty Women's Club activities.

For example out of the initial four interest sections in the club during the 1920s, one was the Athletic Section (with hiking, horseback riding and riley) and another was called the Nursery Section.

It is interesting to note that the Hiking Section, which had died early in the club's history, just recently was revived by the Faculty Women's club as a sort of return-to-nature experiment.

Even more amazing is the fact that the old Nursery Section of the 1920s operated a cooperative day care center to benefit wives of students. Again, history has

repeated itself in the 70s with agitation on campus for – you guessed it! – a cooperative day care center.

Child card programs definitely have changed since then, though. A 1923 report describes the old nursery program: “Constructive play is provided and a slight discipline whereby the tiny tots are given tasks to perform, as dusting, preparation of “tea” (which consists of water and an Arrow-root biscuit at four o’clock) and putting away the things afterward.”

In the 1930s, events continued at a normal pace. It was noted in a 1934 newspaper clipping that several newlywed couples would be welcomed into the academic community that year.

Included in the list was “Prof. John E. Tracy of the law faculty, an Mrs. Tracy (Dr. Margaret Elliott), whose wedding was an event of last winter.” Margaret Elliot Tracy was one of the early women faculty members at the UM and is a professor emeritus of personnel management in the School of Business Administration.

During the years of World War II, the Faculty Women’s Club saw some changes. In announcing plans for the club’s annual reception in the fall of 1942, one article notes:

The dance committee...has put the money remaining in its treasury into an \$85 War Bond. The club as a whole has to it credit a \$600 bond, and the Garden Section has brought a \$50 bond.

“In harmony with the policy of reducing club expenses, the customary invitations were omitted in sending the announcements of the reception and of the club’s program...”

It appears that in the 1950s brought out the theatrical aspirations of club members and their husbands. They staged such extravaganzas as the “Cabaret Extraordinaire” (1950) complete with a juggling act and barbershop quartet; “Faculty Frolics” (1952); “Faculty Frolics of 1953” with a skit, “Kinsey Take it? Or Why Did I Marry a Professor?”

Every Women’s lib would have loved to have been around in 1954 when “Faculty Frolics” uncovered “Men in a World of Women,” a skit which poked fun at the “Women in the World of Man” series of discussions and events that the UM sponsored during the summer of ’54. A photograph, which appeared in The News publicizing “Frolics” that year, pictured Vice President Allan F. Smith (then Prof. Smith) wearing an apron and contemplating KP duty.

In 1961 predictably, the Faculty Women’s Club celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a skit, “40 Years in Song and Rhyme.”

The faculty women and their husbands looked ahead in 1964 with a musical skit exploring "The Faculty Club of the Future." And perhaps a repeat of the skit would be in order now that the club has marked its half-century anniversary.

Since 1921, the club's activities have continued without even so much as a pause for breath. The women have been hiking, skating, painting acting, cooking, reading, hostessing, teaing, bridging, gardening and laughing their way through the years.

Now they have 50 years of memories to review and another 50 to plan.

Anniversary congratulations, Faculty Women!