



FWC History The 1950s

Were you in the United States in the 1950s, the era when “I Love Lucy,” Elvis Presley, “Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts,” and “The Guiding Light” debuted on television? Were you in Michigan then, to see the Mackinac Bridge opened and listen to the brand-new sound of Motown? Were you in Ann Arbor when the town-and-gown Michigras Parades wove their way down city streets and the library bought its bookmobile? Were you at the University of Michigan when the first successful polio vaccine was announced, women were permitted to enter the Michigan Union through the front door (how scandalous!), and the first-ever panty raid (how salacious!) was organized?

If you were in the University of Michigan Faculty Women’s Club in the 1950s, you may remember a lot of changes in the Club, too. Although the Club still referred to married and widowed women as Mrs. John X. Doe, some women signed their reports using their given names (how improper!). A membership list was distributed for one year but was quickly discontinued since everyone (usually meaning the husband) was already in the Faculty Directory. Personally, I’m impressed that the members could keep the names straight. In 1958, for example, there were 15 Mrs. Millers. The student enrollment continued to rise, and correspondingly the size of the Faculty and the FWC. In 1950-1951, for example, the Newcomers Section had 545 members! In the fall of 1955, the Club sent out 2550 newsletters (all hand-addressed) to members and potential members, describing the Club and all its activities.

During this era, the Fall Reception would attract close to 1000 members and potential members, easily outgrowing the ballroom and necessitating much planning to ensure a workable traffic flow from the registration and dues tables to the formal receiving line to section tables in various rooms. The Spring Luncheon had to resort to seating members at long tables to fit everyone in.

“Refreshments” began the era as board position, tasked with organizing the serving of (endless) tea and cake. During the 1950s, the duties were moved under the Social Chair and the fare occasionally branched out to such offerings as a Smorgasbord, coffee and doughnuts, cider and chips, and, for one dessert party, cherry tarts (how delectable!). In addition, the Newcomers Section provided cigarette girls for the 1951 Cabaret Night.

Many sections continued to outgrow members’ homes, requiring them to either pay to meet in the League or split into numerous subsections. In addition, with more members, interests within sections expanded. For example, the Garden Section exploded from one section to four, with the new groups emphasizing hands-on gardening.

Although the traditional formal orchestra dance series was well-attended each year, the new Square-Dancing Section appealed to those with a less formal inclination and was immediately popular. Another new section was University Affairs (such an intriguing name), which educated members about various aspects of the university and discussed issues confronting it. Popular sports



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subsections included skiing, ice skating, golf, and bowling. The Around the World section also debuted in the 1950s.

A few other interesting developments in the 1950s included:

- The Club helped the Faculty Women of the Flint Senior College found their own Faculty Women's Club and made their representative a "section chairman" so she could sit on our Board.
- The University requested that the FWC start a weekly radio program "Especially for Women," which aired on WUOM. Interviewees included Eleanor Roosevelt and General Douglas MacArthur.
- In 1956, the Club had a "Birthday Party" for all the members who had been "on campus for 35 years."