



## **FWC History The 1930s**

While the Great Depression of 1929-1933 caused severe disruption for America's financial world and the lives of millions of people worldwide, the University of Michigan weathered the storm relatively unscathed. Enrollment, which was nearly 10,000 in 1930, fell to about 8500 in 1933, but then recovered and didn't fall again until WWII.

So, life went on pretty much as before for the FWC. Programs were planned for their monthly club meetings. There were continual debates about eligibility of prospective members (e.g., the wives of the Supervisor of Nichols Arboretum and Secretary of the Alumni Association were deemed eligible) and other than a small contraction in the early 1930s, membership grew steadily from 429 in 1930 to 551 in 1939. By then, there were nine sections: Play Reading, Monday Evening Dramatic; Bookshelf & Stage, the Bibliophiles, Music, Art, Painting, Interior Decorating, Garden, and Newcomers. Many sections outgrew members' homes, causing some to limit membership, some to split into multiple subsections, and some to find larger meeting places, such as the common areas in women's dormitories and sororities.

The Newcomers Section really came into its own in the 1930s. By 1939, it had its own constitution and by-laws, executive board, four meetings/year (including an Opening Tea in October and a Spring Tea in April), five exclusive interest groups, plus six sport-related groups, which any FWC member could join. The last included badminton, swimming, bowling, skating, golf, and tennis.

The Club gradually shifted with the times. Full-orchestra formal dances of the 1920s were modified by the late 1930s to add a "cabaret style," which commonly included an M.C plus dancers, and singers - who might mingle with the audience. Billie Holiday, Bing Crosby, and Fred Astaire were very popular in the big cities.

One new tradition was inviting the Michigan Dames to one of the monthly FWC meetings each year. The Michigan Dames originated in 1921, the same year as the FWC, as a social, intellectual, and service organization for the wives of students and married women students. They also had interest groups, each of which had a FWC member as a sponsor, who would suggest ideas for programs and meeting places, and generally act as a big sister. The Dames' interest groups included book, bridge, child study, choral, cooking, drama, and creative arts. In addition, they baked cookies and had parties for orphans, hospitalized children, and the elderly.

The University of Michigan had some achievements in race relations in this decade. In 1934 alone, the first Black men to earn a PhD in Civil Engineering and in Public Health, respectively, were granted their degrees by U-M. U-M students protested when a Black football player was benched because the other team refused to compete against an integrated squad. Plans to develop separate student housing for Black women were quashed. Unfortunately, I don't know how well these enlightened attitudes were reflected in the faculty or the FWC, but I do know that wives of Asian visiting professors were welcomed. Members of several sections mentioned greatly enjoying hearing



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about the customs, music, and cuisine of other countries from faculty members, faculty wives and visitors who had lived elsewhere.