

Brief history of University Women's Club of North York

It all started in a laundry room. A small apartment building near Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue housed young families plus retired teacher of teachers Miss Grace Morgan. When the young mothers bemoaned the stagnation of their university degrees, Miss Morgan knew the answer – a university women's club. She conferred with her friend Margaret Grant, president of CFUW, who recognized that the Toronto Club was too expensive and too far away for this young group.

On October 18, 1951, Miss Morgan called an organizational meeting in her apartment. Then on October 31 they held the inaugural meeting of The University Women's Club of North York, the 70th club and first suburban club in the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Twenty members attended, plus school trustee Jean Newman, who spoke on Women in Public Life. A membership fee of \$1.00 was decided. Mrs Newman anticipated reality when she later sent the new club a donation of \$10.00. In the spring a collection was taken to help incoming president Sheila Rounthwaite attend the CFUW AGM in Ottawa to receive the Charter. The Inaugural Year ended with the first annual dinner in May 1952. The reports for that first year are amazing.

By then attendance was too large for a living room and meetings were held in a series of school gyms. The fee was raised to include CFUW dues of 1.50 per person, delegate expenses, and a bursary fund.

In 1953 guidelines were adopted for a scholarship, which was more a prize, for a young woman graduating from high school with top academic standing and enrolled in a degree course. The first award of \$100 was made in 1954. Since then, hundreds of women and a few men have appreciated a modest financial boost toward their education.

During 1953-54 two Study Groups were created. Book Review has continued to meet, now 63 years. Current Events was on the Group List for just seven years, though new groups appeared with similar names and possibly similar membership.

As membership grew past 200, the social convenor asked the Executive to approve more teacups and spoons plus another lace tablecloth. The president asked members to use the provided ashtrays.

At our second meeting in November 1951, the presentation had been on Penal Reform, the beginning of 20 years of study and action on Canada's prisons. Emphasis was on conditions in women's prisons which were particularly poor.

From the beginning a member's name was recorded in the minutes under her husband's initials, e.g., Mrs. J. L. Smith, not Betsy Smith, following the example of newspaper social columns, where our meetings were reported. Only Miss Grace Morgan had her own identity! During our twenty-fifth anniversary year "it was agreed that minutes...would refer to members by their Christian names..."

Very early also we studied many aspects of education in Ontario with briefs to the government. Our first report on "The Gifted Child" was sent to Chatelaine at their request. We examined curricula at all levels, advocated higher academic qualifications for teachers, supported mature women returning to school, and encouraged continuing education for all.

Speakers at our monthly meetings could have provided a liberal education. Some were famous, like Northrop Frye, June Callwood, George Ignatieff, Adrienne Clarkson, Robertson Davies. Others were outstanding club members, like Betsy Carr, Alice Medcof, Margaret McGovern, or family of club members, like Pierre Berton, Robert Fulford, John Plumptre.

We were involved with York University from its beginning, with invitations to seminars, our huge commitment to a \$5,000 library endowment celebrating Canada's centennial, Status of Women projects including a morning in 1976 with the President discussing the small number of female teaching appointments, which subsequently increased.

In the 1950s North York was the fastest growing municipality in Canada, with expanding concerns where our representation was requested. Among these were Board of Governors of Seneca College, North York Library Committee and Board of Education Status of Women Committee. We have collected money, socks, and Shoeboxes for local charities, and participated as a group in various events and projects. We have written huge numbers of letters and met with elected representatives at all levels advocating for women's rights, indigenous people, justice, the environment and health care.

We have made major contributions to CFUW, with Club members filling national posts, editing the Chronicle, and organizing the wonderful 1970 Triennial Conference with 450 women and 100 Indians at York U for a memorable week of organized and informal gatherings.

For 70 years we have had a lot of fun, made wonderful friendships, learned a great deal, contributed to the betterment of our community, our province, and our country. It has been a rich experience.

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