Capsule History of Washington State Juniors

The progress of the Junior movement throughout the life of the Federation has been of great interest. It didn't start in 1925, when the first Junior State Organization was formed, but started in 1896, which is the year Washington State affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The Junior Club movement was not a matter to be brought into being on the spur of the moment. It had its inception in the early days of Federation in this state. The founders of the Federation and their contemporary clubwomen had reached ages spanning the late 40’s and 50’s to the 70’s and 80’s. Thus, some of the outstanding thinkers of the time wondered if the Federation would last. The best solution to the problem of future existence was infiltration of young women into women's clubs. A great deal of thought was given to the best method of first attracting them and then coordinating them with the established personnel, maintaining the dignity and prestige of the older women while making the best use of the energy and stimulating initiative of the newcomers. However, these early club leaders did not believe a young woman could spring unfledged into the responsibility of clubwork, any more than a bird could fly unfeathered into the heavens.

The first plan for beginning Junior Clubs was to form Junior Memberships as a part of each existing club. The Junior Memberships were to be made up of girls between the ages of 12 and 17 years, and in most cases were daughters of members of the mother club. Yearbooks of early clubs tell us that such Junior Memberships were still in existence as late as 1917.

However, this arrangement did not produce the desired results. It smacked too much of frustration fostered by a too tight grip of the mother’s apron strings. Therefore, it became clear that the thing to do was to establish definite Junior Clubs, which were to be training schools for future clubwomen. The maximum age for membership was to be 40, and there was no minimum age since it was felt that common sense would take care of that matter. Later the age eligibility for Juniors was set from 18 to 35.

Junior clubwomen were to be drilled in parliamentary procedure, club ethics and study plans to prepare them for the important role they would ultimately play in furthering federation projects of every description. Thus, upon attaining the mature age of 40 (later 35) their wisdom and judgement would enable them to become a working unit in a Senior Club, capable of standing for office, holding chairmanships and accepting and performing the big chores and the little chores required in the successful manipulation of plans and management of an organization the scope and magnitude of the state and General Federation.

Being in the fresh vigor of youth, they would have the strength, stamina and energy to perform all tasks assigned them. Having attained the fateful age, the happy candidate would be welcomed into a Senior Club in’n need of replacements and would be put to work immediately. This was a very good plan carefully thought out by wise clubwomen who believed in training and advancement along the orderly line of ability and desire for the best in cultural attainment. When first suggested the idea did not take hold among younger women. Some of them thought the age element to be a stumbling block. Most women did not want to admit to being 40, and if they suddenly joined the Seniors it was an obvious admission that youth was passing on the fleeting of time. However, one of the older clubwomen disagreed with this attitude, saying, "When a working clubwoman is crowding 80, 40 or thereabouts seems quite young!”

All obstacles to Junior Clubs were finally overcome. The first Junior Club was organized in Yakima in 1925, called Rosalma (using the first names of its two founders.) This club went on to become a Senior Club. The organization of this club was followed by many others all over the state. Some of these later became Senior Clubs intact .... others members joined Senior Clubs separately.

Not until 1931 did the Junior Clubs meet together in any sort of annual meeting. This first conference was in Vancouver in connection with the Senior State Convention. It can only be guessed, but it would seem that much of their business must have been making plans in preparation for the 1932 GFWC Convention which was in Seattle, for which the nine Junior Clubs in the state served as hostesses for Juniors from 45 other states.
Later in 1932 the first Junior District was organized -- Columbia District. In 1933, 20 Junior Clubs attended the annual Junior Conference, but it was not until 1934 that the first state project was undertaken - a Scholarship Loan Fund.

In 1935, there were 56 Junior Clubs in the state and at the year's conference, the Washington State Federation of Junior Women's Clubs was organized. Charlotte Gyllenberg was elected the first President of the Junior Federation.

NOTES

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