

History of the Dade City Woman's Club

In 1909, two prominent members of the Dade City community, Mr. C.A. Locke, and Dr. C.F. Touchton, approached Mrs. Wallace D. (Sallie) Embry about forming a women's auxiliary to the Board of Trade (which preceded the Chamber of Commerce). A group of about fifteen women formed the auxiliary, with Mrs. Embry as the first President. The first meetings were held in a room where Sugar Creek Antiques is now located. The next year, the auxiliary felt that they could do more productive civic work as a separate organization. The Woman's Civic Club of Dade City was organized on May 10, 1910, and Mrs. J.A. Dolly Hendley became the President, an office she would hold for the next 17 years. Mrs. Hendley was college educated and was a mover and shaker of her era. It has been said that Mrs. Hendley owned the first automobile in Dade City and learned to drive it herself. According to Mrs. Hendley, the Woman Civic Club mission was to work only for the interest and welfare of Dade City. A newspaper article states that "one practical benefit brought about by the Civic Club, is the stand taken by the women to do their buying before 6:00 p.m., thereby giving the merchants a chance to close their places of business at 6:30 p.m. the year round, a benefit they felt that both the merchants and the clerks would appreciate in the hot weather". They bought iron garbage barrels and placed them around the city and bought green park benches for the cemetery and Edwinola Park. The article added that when we plan and work for cleanliness, sanitation, and more beautiful surroundings, we are not doing it wholly for ourselves, but for our children, the men and women growing up to take our places and continue the work we began. The Civic Club also made an appeal for women to join the club and work with us to create a desire for better living, higher ideals, and a love for all those things which make the place we live in, a place of peace and beauty.

The club needed a permanent place to meet and began searching for a building to purchase and use as their clubhouse. In 1911, the club bought the salesmen sample Room that had belonged to the old Dade City Hotel. The Sample Room was a building where traveling salesmen would display those wares and was located where the Sharpstone Dental Associates parking lot stands today. The Dade City Hotel had been destroyed by a fire in 1909 and was later replaced by the Edwinola Hotel. During this time when there was no hotel, there was no need for the Sample Room. The Woman Club bought the building for \$250.00 and sold it a few years later for \$450.00. The group soon changed its name to the Dade City Woman's Club, which allowed them to become associated with the Florida Federation of Women Clubs. They officially became a federated club in 1913. In addition to serving the Dade City community, Mrs. Hendley felt that being a part of a larger organization enabled them to extend their influence and their usefulness to the rest of Pasco County and to other areas in Florida.

In 1915, the club purchased a residential dwelling on the corner of Church Avenue and 7th Street, where the Pasco Twin Theater stood for years. They purchased the property from Judge O.L. Dayton for \$3000.00. The Club remodeled the building, making it suitable for club and community use. Club members held its first reception in their new clubhouse on April 26, 1920. The President of the Club, Mrs. Hendley, said in her welcoming remarks that the club has always been like a big congenial family, and this is an event we have looked forward to for many years to own our home. It is the intention of the club to make this a community center. Such a place has been a long felt want in Dade City. The building will be used for club purposes, social gatherings and we hope for community sings.

The club participated in a variety of projects, several of which focused on improving the aesthetics of our town. To beautify the city, the Club planted oak trees down the middle of Meridian Avenue from the resent Centennial building to the train depot. These trees thrived and, in addition to being beautiful, provided lots of shade downtown. In later years, it was decided that the street was too narrow to accommodate both the trees and the traffic, and the trees were sorrowfully removed. In 1904, Mr. Hugh Embry, who was an outstanding member of the community, created a small library known as the Shakespeare Club. Upon his death in 1907, the books became the property of the Pasco County Library Association. When the Association disbanded shortly thereafter, the Woman Club took custody of its library of five hundred books. The club added to this collection and housed the first library in their new clubhouse on Church Avenue and 7th Street. Mrs. Emily G. Clark and Mrs. Sallie Embry oversaw this project. When the collection could no longer be housed in the Woman's Club building the library shifted its operations from place to place around Dade City. In 1927, Herbert Massey offered to permanently house the collection on the second floor of the Massey building, where First Union bank is located today. At the suggestion of Mrs. C.A. Locke of the Woman's Club, the library was named after Hugh Embry and a sign was placed over the sidewalk, which directed the people to the library. From that time until the 1940's, members and friends of the Woman's Club operated the library with the assistance of a trained librarian. By that time, it became evident that a permanent city library was needed, and plans were made to construct a building. The present Hugh Embry library was dedicated on Nov. 13, 1953.

In April 1925, the club paid off the mortgage on their building on Church Avenue and 7th Street and held a mortgage-burning ceremony at their May club meeting. Shortly thereafter, the members sold this building for \$15,000.00 cash to a Mr. Sims of New Port Richey. The Club then bought a lot for \$2,000.00 from Mr. J.R.A. Williams on the corner of Meridian Avenue and 10th

Street, which is the present site of the Cosner apartments. They had planned to build a clubhouse there but were offered a donated piece of property where the current building stands on the corner of Palm Avenue and 7th Street. This area of town, called Congress Park, was being developed by Mr. I.M. Austin of New York. Mr. Austin also offered the club \$500.00 to put toward their building fund. The club sold the lot it had purchased on Meridian Avenue to Mr. Cosner for \$10,000.

With approximately 150 members and \$23,000 in their treasury, the current clubhouse was built in 1926 by George Gillespie. The building was painted an "tobacco" shade and had white trim with the words Woman's Club" in bronze lettering at the top. Prior to the formal opening, a cornerstone of white Georgia marble was placed in the building on Jan 26, 1926. This cornerstone was a gift from the club officers and contained a historic box. Deposited in this historic box was a copy of the Dade City Banner, a history of the Dade City Woman's Club, a list of officers and members, individual cards bearing good wishes and a blossom of scarlet hibiscus, which was the club's flower. On May 17, 1926, the building was formally dedicated.

After the clubhouse was built, the club borrowed \$3,000 from the Bank of Pasco County to furnish it. No payment on principle or interest was made from 1926 to 1930. In 1930, the bank advised the club members that if they paid off the \$3,000 principle in three months, the bank would waive the interest. The club had approximately one hundred members at the time and voted to assess each member \$30.00. Some members paid more, and some members paid less, but in three months the debt was paid in full. Members were also given the privilege of paying \$2.00 per person for their own China plate, butter plate, and cup and saucer. This China is still used in the building today. Around this same time, Mr. John S. Burks donated a 100 X 40-foot lot north and across the street from the clubhouse for parking. In January 1927, Mr. Archie James Burnside (Archie) planted and dedicated two camphor trees along the west side of the Dade City Woman's Club and two large cedars on the N.W. corner of its lawn to honor Mrs. J.A. Hendley who retired after serving as President for 17 years. (These were watered by hand at intervals with the aid of six-year-old son Stanley.) The taller cedar at a 60-foot height had been graced for several years with a large electric silver star which he presented to the club with the city agreeing to install and light it for the enjoyment of the community during Christmas season.

Some of the early accomplishments of the club were as follows:

- Succeeded in persuading the City Commissioners to pass an ordinance banning cattle from freely roaming the streets both in town and in the cemetery.
- Marked the safe drinking places along the highway.
- Supported compulsory education and sent club members to the school board to request the appointment of school delinquent officers.
- Involved themselves in the upgrading of schoolteacher qualifications, especially those in rural areas.
- Instrumental in persuading Town Council to establish a health committee (This was granted in 1919)
- Upon the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution (women's right to vote), the Club sponsored educational seminars for women on voting and the responsibilities associated with it.
- Made an appeal to Women's Clubs across the nation to protest the small amount of bail imposed on men who were arrested for capital offenses involving women and children.
- Petitioned for the removal of unappealing signs along the highways.
- Petitioned the City Commission to forbid the telephone company to cut and destroy trees unnecessarily.
- Established the Red Cross Chapter in Dade City.
- Raised money to help address the problem of tuberculosis.
- Distributed baskets of food to several disadvantaged families in the community during the Christmas season.
- During World Wars I and II, the Woman's Club was active in Red Cross and other relief work. They rolled thousands of bandages and pads, and knitted sweaters, socks, and hospital gowns for the soldiers.
- Club members also sold Liberty Bonds to help with the cause.
- Planted trees on Arbor Day
- Involved in upgrading the education of the children in our community.
- They gave assistance to the needy and provided food for the poor, before the existence of national, state, and local social programs for that purpose.

In later years, the club was instrumental in other worthwhile projects. Among them were providing foster children in Pasco County with Christmas gifts. They also founded the Ruth Embry Touchton Scholarship fund, which provided financial assistance to students continuing their education at the East Pasco Campus of Pasco-Hernando Community College. For years, the club also sponsored the local Girls State representative and a HOBY Leadership representative.

May 25, 1983, the Dade City Woman's Club celebrated 70 years of community service at a tea. The dresses worn by several of the club members were styles popular when the club joined the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs in 1913. Modeling fashionable ensembles of the period from (left) Mrs. C.F. "Miss Polly" Touchton, Mary Alice Persche and Elizabeth Grunert. "Miss Polly" gave the crowd a vivid account of how the club was formed and how the members worked to obtain their first clubhouse. Her mother, Sallie G. Embry was the club's first president.

On October 27, 1985, the Pasco Historical Society designated the building as an historical site and placed a plaque on the clubhouse stating this. The building meets several of the Pasco County Historical Preservation Committees criteria for placement in the county register of historical places.

- It is associated with events, which are significant to the history of Pasco County.
- It is associated with the lives of several persons significant in local history, including charter members Ruth Embry and Dolly Hendley, Ruth Polly Touchton, State Rep. John Burks, and others.
- The two-door revival Mediterranean style clubhouse embodies distinctive characteristics of construction; basement, staircase to the balcony, a front porch leading to the foyer, a main auditorium with a stage at the South end, and a fireplace in the tearoom
- It is 50 years old or more and is of significance in the development of this community through the years and has largely retained its original design.

In 1994, the East Pasco Junior Woman's Club acquired the building from the Dade City Woman's Club. The Dade City Woman's Club disbanded shortly thereafter. To make the building more cosmetically appealing, the Junior club raised money to paint the exterior, which was completed during the summer of 1996. The Dade City Garden Club donated landscaping and a sprinkler system, adding to the appeal of the exterior.

In May 1999, under the leadership of President, Harriet Riddaugh, the East Pasco Junior Woman's Club voted to disband and simultaneously reinstate the charter of the original Dade City Woman's Club. This decision was made to continue the rich history of the Woman's Club, which had been such a vital part of the community over the years. It was an exciting year for the club. The many positive changes that were made revitalized the enthusiasm of the members and the community. The club membership increased by 314% (29 to 91 members). Membership Chairman Dina Rowland was asked to speak at the FFWC Convention on this dramatic membership increase.

During the next few years, with the expertise of Grant Chairman/Treasurer Julie Cotton, Building Chairman Kathy Reynolds, and the dedication of the DCWC members, the restoration of the original Dade City Woman's Club Building would be the primary focus of the Club. The restoration was funded by community support and grants from Florida Department of State. In December 1999, a "Paver Project" was developed where the club would sell engraved pavers to contributors who donated \$100.00 or more to raise money for the first grant. The original grant was applied for, and approved July 2000 totaling \$37,500.00 for Phase I of the restorations. The Club through fundraisers and Community support raised a matching \$37,500.00 to allow for a total for Phase I of \$75,000.00. The first step was to select an architect to create a Master Plan and oversee the first phase of the project. We retained the Abell Garcia Architectural Partnership as our architects. Phase I would allow us to make our restrooms handicap accessible, to include a handicap ramp into our building and replace the roof. The brick pavers sold in the "Paver Project" formed a patio on the east side of the building to complement the new terrace outside the tearoom. A dedication ceremony honoring the Touchton family their generous contributions and to open the patio to the public was held in June 2002.

Realizing that the building project would take much more funding to completely restore the building to its original state, the club members began another long application process for a second grant. After mailing the thirteen grant applications, compiled of several hundred pages each, the members of the Woman's Club were asked to travel to Tallahassee to attend the grant review meeting. During the three-hour drive, the members received a phone call to tell them the tragic news of the day, the day was September 11, 2001. The grant review board meeting was rescheduled for the following month.

Dade City Woman's Club Preserving History and Serving the Community

On October 8, 2001, the Bureau of Historic Preservation's Advisory Council in Tallahassee reviewed the new grant. The Club was commended by the council on another professionally written grant with extraordinary community support. The council recommended the grant for full funding, \$90,000.00 and word was received of approval July 2002 for full funding. With generous contributions from our general contractor, Bob Larkin, this project was completed in 2003.

Another important goal in the restoration process was getting national protection of the Dade City Woman's Club Building. Extensive research and documentation of the history of the building and its surrounding community was required for inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places. Club members, Kathy Reynolds and Julie Cotton completed this phase of the application. Club member, Kathy Simpson tackled the photographic documentation of the application. In February 2002, Kathy Reynolds presented our application to the Florida Department of State in Tallahassee. Upon Florida's approval, the application was sent to the United States Department of Interior. In October 2003, the Dade City Woman's Club Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

January 6, 2001, the longtime dream of member, Kathleen McNatt became reality; the first Dade City Farmer's Market of the year was held at the Old Courthouse on Meridian Avenue. The farmer's market provided fresh fruits, vegetables and cut flowers, Vidalia onion relish and sauces, beautiful plants, and other unusual items. At the time of inception, it was the only Farmer's Market in Pasco County. The farmer's market remains strong with over forty vendors registered for the 2004-2005 market year.

Under the two-year presidency (2000-2002) of Dina Rowland Bardin, the Woman's Club members donated several hundred hours to community service. Shoes for Children was a project that was close to their hearts. The club received phone calls from the local elementary schools, that children were coming to school without shoes on at all. The schoolteachers were pleased that the members came that very day and provided new shoes for those children. Baskets of food were given to needy families. The "baskets" were pots, pans, or large bowls that the families could use. The Woman's Club building was donated to the Healthy Families Pasco organization for them to have a place to hold their monthly meetings on the education of new parents. Classes included educating participants on child safety seats and at the end of the meeting each child received their own child safety seat. Woman's Club members provided refreshments and brought gifts at every meeting for the new mothers and children to enjoy. The DCWC also gave to a family that the oldest of their four children was suffering from cancer. They had moved to the Dade City area to be closer to Moffit Cancer Center. The DCWC donated a television, VCR, and video tapes to entertain the other children while the mother took the child to have daily treatments. Funds for travel expenses to and from Tampa were also given to the family. The GFWC Dade City Woman's Club has received awards on the state level in the following categories: newsletter, yearbook, programs, fundraising, public affairs and for membership.

Dina Rowland Bardin went on to honor our club by serving on the board of the Florida Federation of Woman's Clubs (FFWC). With the assistance of fellow member, Paula Kretzinger, Dina served as Club Communications Chairman for a two-year term from 2002 to 2004. In this capacity, she had to oversee communications with all the clubs in Florida, including yearbooks and newsletters. She was instrumental in developing the FFWC website.

Dana Ward followed with a two-year term from 2002 to 2004. Under Dana's reign the building restoration project was completed! We continued our annual major fundraisers. In 2002, the Cowboy Cotillion was a kicking, foot stomping, rip roaring fun time that raised over \$6,500. Groovy doesn't even begin to describe Boogie's Nights tremendous success in 2003. Not only did we have an incredible turn out with all donning platform shoes, bell bottoms or leisure suits, but we raised over \$9,200. During her era, the club provided over \$3,600 in shoes to our local community.

Our club elected Julie Scott to serve as president for the 2004-2005 club year. Under her presidency, our club made great contributions to the community. We continued to supply shoes to needy children through our Shoes for Children program, replenished Lacoochee Elementary's food pantry in time for Thanksgiving with over two hundred cans of food, Christmas presents for teens served by Sunrise and gave Easter Baskets filled with books. Hands on projects were introduced at the general meetings. Our club members made Valentine's Day goody bags for the mothers of Healthy Families Pasco Club De Madres. The bags were decorated by members with pearls, hearts and flowers and filled with hygiene products, candy, and blank cards to give to their families. Our club members also made candy for goody bags for our Administrative Professional Luncheon fundraiser. This year's fundraising efforts were extremely fruitful. Our major fundraiser, A Speakeasy Evening, celebrated the roaring twenties and was extremely successful! The event profited over \$10,000. During 2005, The Administrative Professional Luncheon and Monster Yard Sale added over \$3,000 to the club's treasury.

Julie Cotton was elected to serve as president for the 2005-2006 club year. Under her presidency, our club continued to make great contributions to the community. Beginning with our major fundraiser "Margaritaville" and ending with our annual salad luncheon, the club earned over \$30,000. We were able to reduce our debt by \$8,700; distribute over two hundred pair of shoes to children in our local elementary schools under our "Shoes for Children" program and continue to assist others in the community with our many hands-on projects and volunteer work. We showed our appreciation to those who protect and serve by baking for the fire and police departments. We sent baked goods to our troops overseas to support them during the holidays. We continued to support Healthy Families Club de Madres by handing making valentine gift bags and sending them Happy Mother's Day wishes. These gifts went from our hearts to theirs. Julie's theme for her term was "*Let's Get Cooking*;" and it was decided to do a club cookbook taking recipes from the prior club cookbook and adding recipes from the current membership. Cathy Yann and her committee did a wonderful job! This fundraiser continues to bring in money to the club. Cookbook Committee: Kristy Rowland, Dina Bardin, Patrice Steele, Cathy Yann, Tracy Boltin, Lisa Knous and Julie Cotton

Dina Rowland Bardin served as our club president for two terms from 2006-2008. During her presidency we continued to work on: Shoes for Children, we repainted our building back to the original tobacco color, added a DCWC sign in front of our building to help market our building rentals. Members focused on marketing our club to the community and helped develop club logo and the Shoes for Children logo. Our club celebrated our building's 80th birthday with a cocktail reception that featured special members of the community and the FFWC. We had historic documents on display and unveiled a President's plaque that celebrated all our past club presidents. The club added Historian and Member at Large as board positions. Historian, Martha Butterworth began a 2-year process of going through all our club archives to preserve and learn more about our club and building history. We held two fundraising auctions under Dina's term, Hooray for Hollywood, and Boo Bash. These two events made the club over \$76,730.22 combined net!

During the 2008-2009 club year, our annual club auction was called "Open Season" and netted \$14,037.02 Our club decorated a Christmas Tree for a Downtown Merchant project and won first prize. We held our first annual Tour of Kitchens to show off our building's beautifully restored kitchen as well as other amazing kitchens in our community.

Dina Rowland Bardin was re-elected as president for the 2009-2010 club year. In 2009, our club turned one hundred! On September 12, 2009, we held a cocktail reception to celebrate this momentous occasion. Honorable Scott Black, Mayor of Dade City, presented a proclamation from the Dade City Commissions recognizing our club's community service over the last one hundred years. On October 9, 2009, the Pasco County Commissioners presented our club with a proclamation acknowledging the impact our club has made on Pasco County, Florida. Dina Bardin led our club for three consecutive terms, through the 2011-2012 club year. During these years, the club continued to hold its annual fundraising auctions. In 2009, we scared up funds with Boo Bash! For our 10th annual fundraiser, we hosted the DCWC Masquerade Ball. With the profits from these auctions, our club provided over 1,000 pairs of shoes to children in the community all while we continued to maintain our historic clubhouse. As the club approaches another year, we are committed to maintaining the beliefs that our founding clubwomen started. We look forward to reaching out to the needs of our community.

GFWC Dade City Woman's Club In 1999, the club voted to reinstate the charter of the original Dade City Woman's Club. Since then, these are the women who dedicated their time to serve as our club's president.

2000-2002	Dina Rowland Bardin
2002-2003	Dana Ward
2003-2004	Dana Ward
2004-2005	Julie Scott
2005-2006	Julie Cotton
2006-2008	Dina Rowland Bardin
2008-2009	Holly Russell
2009-2010	Dina Rowland Bardin
2010-2011	Dina Rowland Bardin
2011-2012	Dina Rowland Bardin
2012-2013	Darcy Brune
2013-2014	Darcy Brune
2014-2015	Lisa Knous
2015-2016	Lisa Knous
2016-2017	Lisa Knous Green
2017-2018	Lisa Knous Green
2018-2019	Laurie Padavan
2019-2020	Lisa Knous Green
2020-2021	Lisa Knous Green & Sandra Austin Co-Presidents
2021-2022	Sandra Austin
2022-2023	Sandra Austin