The WHRC CONNECTION

Quarterly newsletter of the GFWC Women's History and Resource Center

Dale Fisher, Rae Lynn Hicks, Teresa Sanford Shipplett

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Welcome to GFWC WHRC 2026-2028

Established in 1984,the Women's History and Resource Center was designed to house the GFWC Archives and promote and document the past and present achievements of women as volunteers.

The WHRC is a wonderful resource for members and clubs to discover what their federation colleagues have done and are doing by using the projects of the past, as inspiration and guidance for what we do today.

Visit the GFWC Member Portal to access the Women's History and Resource Center **Advancement Plan**, a vital tool in assisting your club in addressing WHRC objectives. In the Advancement Plan you will find **the WHRC UNITY PROJECT: "*Her"stories Shape Our Future.*"** Clubs are encouraged to observe Women's History Month by collaborating with other community organizations and entities to honor club members and community leaders.

https://memberportal.gfwc.org

In our quarterly publication we will provide you with news, project ideas, and book reviews and suggestions for personal and ESO reading. We welcome questions, suggestions, and the sharing of successful projects.

Dale Fisher, Chairman
Dalegfwc86@gmail.com

Founded in 1890, **The General Federation of Women's Clubs** (GFWC) is one of the oldest international volunteer organizations of its kind. For much of recorded history, women's contributions were minimized or left out entirely. From organizing households and sustaining communities to leading social reform, women have driven change in quiet and revolutionary ways. Women fought for the right to vote, fair wages, access to education, and control over their own lives—often in the face of legal and cultural barriers. These struggles laid the groundwork for many freedoms people benefit from today.

Quiet Firsts and Early Influence GFWC clubs helped professionalize social work before it was a formal career. Many early "volunteers" were doing what later became paid public health and social service jobs. Long before women could vote, GFWC members testified before legislatures and influenced local laws through organized, research-based advocacy.

Libraries You have Used (Without Knowing It) GFWC clubs were directly responsible for founding or stocking thousands of public libraries, In some towns, the *first library* was a bookcase in a women's club member's home or a traveling trunk of books.

Environmental Wins Before It Was Trendy GFWC women were early champions of clean water, food safety, and conservation in the late 1800s. Clubs pushed for pure food laws years before the federal Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Many state parks and town green spaces exist today because GFWC clubs purchased land or lobbied to protect it.

Education Beyond College GFWC promoted adult education, vocational training and literacy at a time when formal education for women often stopped early. They ran night classes, sewing schools, and citizenship classes for immigrants—often quietly, without publicity.

Public Health on the Ground GFWC clubs operated early health clinics, funded visiting nurses, and led campaigns against tuberculosis. They introduced school lunches, vision screenings, and playground safety in many communities

Parliamentary Power GFWC is one of the reasons parliamentary procedures became common in women-led organizations. Many women learned leadership, debate, budgeting, and governance through GFWC decades before they could hold public office.

International Work (Often Overlooked) GFWC had international clubs early in its history, supporting education and health projects abroad well before global non-government organizations (NGOs) were common. After both world wars, GFWC clubs supported refugee aid and reconstruction efforts.

Women Who Shaped Policy Without Titles Numerous women who later became school board members, mayors, and state officials started as GFWC clubwomen. For many, GFWC was their only leadership outlet in an era when women were excluded from formal power.

The Power of "Small" Projects Projects like sewing circles, food drives, and beautification efforts were not "extras"—they often filled gaps where no government services existed. What looks insignificant today was sometimes the only safety net available in a community.

Studying women's history builds empathy and perspective. It highlights how race, class, and culture intersected with gender, shaping quite different experiences for different women. Recognizing these differences deepens our understanding of justice and equality and helps ensure that progress includes everyone.

Exceprt from Rae Lynn Hicks, President GFWC Michigan Newslettter Jan. 2026

How Can My Club Assist GFWC Headquarters and the WHRC?

Purchase items from the **Wishlist** on Amazon or at local book retailers.

https://a.co/0dqyFXAR

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Financially support the WHRC with a donation via the GFWC Annual Giving Program.

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Purchase the Silver Ironworks Necklace to support the GFWC "Brick by Brick, Continuing our Legacy" headquarters restoration campaign.



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Write or Update your club's history and submit it to the WHRC. Two guidelines are available to help you with this project: *A Guide for Recording Oral History* and *A Guide for Preserving and Writing a Club History.* These both may be downloaded from the Digital Library on the GFWC Member Portal.

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The GFWC Skowhegan Woman's Club (GFWC ME) formed a committee to safeguard the club's rich history. Assisted by an archivist and past curator of the Skowhegan History House, the committee evaluated the club's historical material, created a master list and numbering system for identifying items, rehoused materials in archival sheets, and safely stored. Many gems were discovered that "give voice to the past."

MEET OUR WHRC LIBRARIAN

Joanna Church



As the GFWC Women's History and Resource Center Librarian, Joanna manages our extensive WHRC collections, including books, photographs, art, artifacts, and archival materials, ensuring these unique materials are accessible – physically and intellectually – to clubwomen, academics, and other interested researchers. She handles research requests and donation offers, as well as Headquarters tours and the annual Women's History Month celebration. At home, she makes art and handwork for herself and for craft fairs, and reads a lot of history/historical fiction. Before joining the GFWC staff four years ago, Joanna worked for over twenty years as registrar and curator in local/regional history museums in Maryland, with a particular interest in women's history and the stories of everyday communities; the WHRC collection is a perfect fit.

Want to do a little research? Visit the link below for do-it-yourself or librarian assistance appointments.

https://www.gfwc.org/research



Women's Suffrage National Monument

Did you know? . . . In 1867 suffragists from Kansas adopted their state's flower, the sunflower, as a symbol for their campaign. This iconic symbol spread nationwide. Artists such as Mary Cassat added sunflowers in several of her portraits to show support of the suffrage movement.

For the first time in our Nation's history, Americans are invited to to play a part in the design of a new monument on the National Mall. The Women's Suffrage National Monument will recognize and celebrate the challenges of the journey for women's right to vote. Members and clubs are encouraged to submit their ideas through artwork, photos, a poem, or statement. Brainstorm with your club, partner with a local high school art class, or collaborate with a girl scout troop to develop your club's vision of this monument. The deadline to submit ideas is December 30, 2026.

https://womensmonument.org/monumental-ideas

Please continue to financially support the museum's building campaign. Thus far, GFWC members and clubs have donated $258,000 towards the construction of the WSNM. Let's not stop there. Continue to bring awareness to this endeavor and be a part with your financial contribution.

https://womensmonument.org/donate

MILITARY WOMEN'S MEMORIAL
Every Story Matters!
REGISTER NOW!

The Military Women's Memorial is dedicated to preserving the history of women who have and will volunteer their service to our country. It is GFWC's goal to register the stories of 500 women by Dec. 31, 2026. You can register a servicewoman's history or your own at the link below.

https://womensmemorial.org/make-herstory

Book Nook



The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins by Kirstin Downey is a critically acclaimed 2009 biography that chronicles the life of the first female U.S. Cabinet member and the primary architect of Social Security. Frances Perkins was named Secretary of Labor by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. As the first female cabinet secretary, she spearheaded the fight to improve the lives of America's working people while juggling her own complex family responsibilities.

The GFWC Evart Woman's Club (GFWC MI) features a "Woman in History" at each meeting, highlighting 10 women each year who have accomplished something noteworthy, from national figures to local community leader. The project engages 10 club members each year and over five years has inspired many to consider the various roles and achievements of women who come from all walks of life.

Dates to Remember: 12/9/26 – GFWC Holiday Open House
3/3/27 - GFWC Women's History Reception

GFWC HISTORICAL WOMEN WORD SEARCH

L D E L D L O O P S C T A E
E T R D M O O S O O H C E E
D R A W D O O W R E A E S S
E E C A L E O S H R S P R S
M A R R R O I H T L E E O S
O R R O S S S A A I S W O S
R L R L D W O O L T M O S H
E W E D A H M E L O I H E O
S L L O R R A C C M T D V C
T O E R R S D E E W H R E D
O T S M E W D H L O E A L A
O L C H S H A R D L A W T N
L M O O P A M L A N D E S O
T S R R L S S S O V E D V A

CHASESMITH
ROSS
WOODWARD
WARDHOWE
LATHROP
LANDES
ROOSEVELT
DEMOREST
ADDAMS
MCCARROLL

Did you know . . . . .

Margaret Chase Smith . . . was an active member of GFWC Sorosis Club of Skowhegan, Maine. She was the first woman to ever be elected to both Houses of Congress and in 1964, became the first woman to campaign for the presidential nomination of a major political party. FUN FACT . . .Margaret Chase Smith wore a red rose on her lapel every day when Congress was in session!

Julia Ward Howe . . . best known for authoring the poem, The Battle Hymn of the Republic," Julia Ward Howe, was a prolific writer, a leader in the suffrage movement and a respected lecturer. She helped orgainize the New England Women's Club in 1868 and eventually served as President of the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs. FUN FACT . . .Living in Boston, Julia Ward Howe's circle of friends included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Eleanor Roosevelt . . . was a First Lady, social reformer, teacher, and political activist. She was a tireless advocate for the poor and disadvantaged and exercised her influence as a speaker and writer. She served on the first U.S. delegation to the United Nation (UN) and drafted the Declaration of Human Rights while chairing the Human Rights Commission for the UN. She was an active member of the Chautauqua Woman's Club in New York and had strong ties with GFWC througtout her years as First Lady. FUN FACT . . Mrs. Roosevelt often hosted groups of GFWC members in the White House. In 1936, during a tea given by Mrs. Roosevelt, President Roosevelt unexpectedly joined the group!

Jane Addams . . .founded Hull House, a settlement home for immigrants, the poor and homeless in Chicago. She was a vocal advocate for working women and child labor laws. Ms. Addams was a member of the Chicago Woman's Club and served as Chairman of the GFWC Committee on Child Labor. FUN FACT . . In 1931, she became the first woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nellie Ross . . . became the first female governor of Wyoming in 1924. Following her term, she served as vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee. In 1922, she became the first woman to be appointed Director of the United States Mint. She was a member and past president of the Woman's Club of Cheyenne. FUN FACT . . . Six days after her husband died from appendicitis, state officials asked her to run for governor herself in the election being held to replace her husband. She accepted at the last minute and defeated her opponent.

Dr. Julia Lathrop . . . was the first woman to lead a government agency when President Taft, in 1912, appointed her to lead the Children's Bureau in the Department of Commerce and Labor. After living and working in Hull House in Chicago, she became a vocal advocate for major problems such as infant mortality, poor nutrition, and juvenile delinquency. As a member of the Chicago Woman's Club, she assisted the club in working for juvenile court laws, including providing education for boys in county jails and worked tirelessly to provide a separate school for boys. FUN FACT . . . under her leadership, a nationwide baby week was initiated to study and work in child hygiene, education, and labor laws.

Ellen Demorest . . .helped revolutionize the fashion industry in the 1860's with the invention of mass-production of paper dress-making patterns. She owned a successful dressmaking shop in New York City and a popular magazine which featured Jennie June as one of the chief writers. She was a founding member of the Sorosis Club, serving as vice-president and treasurer of the club. FUN FACT . . . Jennie June is also known to us as Jane Cunningham Croly, founder of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Dr. June McCarroll . . .was a pioneer doctor in Southern California, who developed the idea for white center highway lines. In 1917, while driving her Model T Ford to see a patient, she was run off the road by a truck. Through her membership in the Indio Woman's Club, she launched a statewide letter writing campaign for all highways to have center stripes. The idea was finally adopted in 1924, by the California Highway Commission. FUN FACT . . . while waiting for the Highway Commission to act on her idea, she took a can of paint and a brush and personally painted the first stripe on Indio Blvd.

Ellen Woodward . . .An active member of the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, she was elected to the state legislature in 1925. After serving her state in various leadership positions, she was asked to come to Washington, D.C. and serve in the administration of Franklin Roosevelt in Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Soon after she headed up a division of the Works Progress Administration – at its peak she had 480,000 women in her area. FUN FACT . . .next to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, Ellen Woodward was said to be the most important woman in the New Deal.

Bertha Landes . . . held positions of leadership in several women's organizations. In 1921, as President of the Seattle Federation of Women's Clubs, she organized a weeklong manufacturer's exhibit staffed by more that 1,000 clubwomen. In 1926, after many accomplishments on the Seattle City Council, Bertha Landes was elected mayor of Seattle, becoming the first woman to be elected mayor of a major city. Despite her success in office, Landes lost her bid for re-election in 1928, under the sentiment that a city of stature should be led by a man. FUN FACT . . . Perhaps it's ironic, that her male successor was recalled in 1931 by angry voters.

"*Women's history is women's right . . . an essential, indispensable, heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision." ~ Dr. Gerda Lerner*