Women's Organizations in Iowa: Selected Holdings in Major Iowa Repositories

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10999

Hosted by Iowa Research Online
Women’s Organizations in Iowa: Selected Holdings in Major Iowa Repositories

THE FOREGOING ARTICLES convey some of the diversity among women’s organizations in Iowa. But they only begin to do so. The women’s organizations established in Iowa run the entire gamut from neighborhood social clubs and sewing circles to groups that banded together for educational, political, religious, economic, or professional reasons. Joining a club allowed a woman to serve her community while achieving some social status or recognition within her community or state. Perhaps of greater importance to some was the opportunity to extend their education or to serve as mentors to younger members of the club. The strong grass-roots organizing by local chapters, formed as part of a larger national organization, often placed Iowa women in leadership roles while linking them to the outside world.

For over one hundred years, major research institutions in Iowa have preserved women’s records. The State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City made a concerted effort, beginning at the turn of the century, to document women’s activities in Iowa. And Dr. William J. Petersen, partially to support a fund-raising drive in 1957, garnered local club records from around

For compiling the entries for this listing, thanks are due to Tanya Zanish-Belcher at the Archives of Women in Science and Engineering, Parks Library, Iowa State University; Karen Mason and Robert Jett at the Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries; and Becki Peterson at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Most of all, Mary Bennett deserves praise and gratitude for proposing the idea for this listing, compiling the list of items from Special Collections at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City, and preparing the introduction.

the state for a proposed Women’s Heritage Room (which never materialized). In the 1970s the women’s movement and the emergence of women’s studies stimulated the collection of materials relating to women. In the mid-1970s Andrea Hinding (in association with the University of Minnesota) led a systematic effort to identify primary source materials relating to women that might be hidden in archives. The resulting 1979 publication, *Women’s History Sources*, served as a landmark study but also pointed to the need for further collecting. In 1992 the University of Iowa established the Iowa Women’s Archives, the first serious collecting initiative in Iowa devoted primarily to material about women. Working cooperatively, Iowans are helping to create a comprehensive source of information about and about women from every station of life—of different ages, races, occupations, or religions and from both rural and urban areas.

Scholars can trace Iowa women’s activities by using the archival record to reveal how literate women transmitted ideas about American culture and government. Typically, organizational records contain constitutions and bylaws (which spell out the mission and purpose of the club), minutes of meetings, reports, correspondence, financial records, scrapbooks, newsletters, membership lists, yearbooks, and directories. The material found in scrapbooks can vary considerably, ranging from programs, news clippings, and photos to reports on project activities or small mementoes from club events. The depth of coverage for any one club may be limited, but comparative analysis of the records of several smaller groups may yield significant information about women’s involvement in the club movement.

Documentary materials relating to women’s organizations are often embedded within larger collections of personal papers. This list does not attempt to include every women’s organization documented in the archives, but focuses on those clubs that deposited official records. Additionally, many clubs had both male and female members and therefore do not fit the narrower criteria defined for this list. This would be especially true in the case of church records but also for groups such as the United Nations Association, the Republican State Central Committee of Iowa, the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, and various labor unions.
Vast numbers of Iowa women were actively engaged in bettering their lives and their communities. Their clubs did not focus exclusively on civic housekeeping; they sought involvement in local, national, and international issues affecting all citizens. The extensive holdings described here reinforce the need to further investigate and interpret the lives of Iowa women who frequently sought intellectual stimulation and community participation in the public arena.

Special Collections Department,
Parks Library, Iowa State University


League of Women Voters of Iowa. Records, 1961–1970. 1.3 ft. Minutes of state board meetings, state council meetings, and conventions; position papers; state board reports; and reports on ongoing League projects.

Archives of Women in Science and Engineering,
Special Collections Department,
Parks Library, Iowa State University

Association for Women Geoscientists. Records, 1975–. 16 ft. Minutes and newsletters pertaining to the Iowa City chapter of this national organization.

Curtiss-Wright Engineering Cadettes Program (Iowa State University). Records, 1941–1943. 2 in. Quizzes and course schedules for this World War II engineering program.

Program for Women in Science and Engineering, Iowa State University. Records, 1986–. 7.5 ft. Career conference materials, internships, and minutes concerning the program, designed to mentor women students at Iowa State University and other Iowa schools.

Society of Women Engineers, Iowa State University Chapter. Records, 1975–. 1.5 ft. Newsletters, minutes, résumé books, and photographs.
Iowa Women’s Archives,  
University of Iowa Libraries


Burlington Women’s Clubs. Time capsule, 1896, 1946. 5 in. Summaries of the activities of the women’s organizations in Burlington, Iowa, placed in a time capsule in 1896 and 1946.


Church Women United in Iowa. Records, 1933–1983. 8 feet. Ecumenical organization. Correspondence, reports, audits, minutes.


Daughters of Ceres. Records, 1898–1988. 5 in. Walnut and Webster chapter records of this social and benevolent club comprising farm women. Minutes, correspondence, photographs.


Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission. Records, 1910–1941. 2 in. Commemorated the efforts of pioneer suffragists and the enfranchisement of women. Correspondence, reports, speeches, bulletins, and pamphlets.


Iowa Women in Natural Resources. Records, 1979–1996. 1.5 ft. plus audiovisual materials. Organization to promote communication among persons in natural resources. Treasurer’s files, newsletters, board minutes, membership lists, audiovisual material.


League of Women Voters of Johnson County. Records, 1920–. 12 ft. Correspondence, minutes, newsletters.


who are employed or own businesses in the construction industry to "exchange ideas and enjoy stimulating programs."


Polk County Women Attorneys. Records, 1986–1995. 9 in. Organization to promote the professional growth of women in the law through educational and job placement programs and other activities. Correspondence, bylaws, minutes, subject files.


State Historical Society of Iowa
Manuscript Collection, Des Moines Center


Catholic Daughters of America, Iowa Court 302. Des Moines. Yearbooks and programs, 1940s–1970s. 1 ft.

Church Women United. Records, 1940’s–1960’s. 4 ft.

Daughters of Union Veterans (various Iowa tents). Circulars and scrapbooks. 7 scrapbooks and miscellaneous records.

Des Moines Federation of Women’s Clubs. Records, 1920s–1960s. 8 ft.


Iowa Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (also known as Iowa State Federation of Afro-American Women’s Clubs and Iowa Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs). Records, 1900s–1970s. 1 ft.


Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection. Contains various records of the Iowa Women’s Suffrage Society, Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission, Iowa League of Women Voters, and Des Moines Political Equity Club. 1866–1951. 9.5 ft.

Junior Federation of Women’s Clubs (mostly Des Moines, random records of other Iowa locations). Records, 1920s–1950s. 1 ft.


Polk County Women’s Republican Association. Minutes and correspondence, 1938–1959. 6 in.
Service Star Legion of Iowa. Records of Iowa Division, 1920s–1970s. 1 ft., plus 6 volumes of records maintained by 23 local chapters. Women’s organization for relatives of World War I soldiers.
Social Literary Circle of East Des Moines. Minutes, 1883–1895. 1 vol.
Tourist Club. Des Moines. Correspondence, yearbooks, secretary’s books, 1892–1959. 1.5 ft.
United Service Women of America. Records from various Iowa county organizations, 1940s–1960s. 9 ft.
Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps. Scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, publications. 4 ft.
Women’s Relief Corps. Records from various Iowa corps. 6 ft. Auxiliary to Grand Army of the Republic. There are also W.R.C. records in the Grand Army of the Republic record group of the State Archives of Iowa.

State Historical Society of Iowa
Manuscript Collection, Iowa City Center

AMVETS Auxiliary, Dept. of Iowa. Records, 1942–1983. 16 ft. Service club for wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of veterans of World War II, Korean War, and Vietnamese Conflict. Scrapbooks, correspondence, secretary’s and treasurer’s records for state, district, and local units.
American Association of University Women (AAUW), Iowa Division. Records, 1923–1983. 26 ft. State and local records include reports, minutes, correspon-


Book and Basket Club. Iowa City. Records, 1939–1961. 2 vols. Minutes of meetings, constitution, and dues records for neighborhood club that discussed short stories or current events while sewing or mending.


Cedar Rapids First Lutheran Church, Women’s Society. Records, 1868–1963. 3 ft.

Charles City Equality Club. Secretary’s books, 1891–1897. 2 vols.

Class in English Literature. Vinton. Records, 1880–1881. 1 folder. Constitution, minutes of meetings, and list of members. Also relates to Vinton Reading Association and interest in setting up a library.

Clinton Presbyterian Church, Women’s Home Missionary Society. Minutes, 1891–1900. 1 vol.


Columbia Circle. Clarence. Records, 1885–1910. 1 ft. Secretary’s books, include minutes and attendance records.


Daughters of the American Revolution. Iowa Society. Records, 1898–1994. 25.5 ft. State and chapter records, include minutes, scrapbooks, yearbooks and directories, newsletters, historical project reports, financial records, chaplain’s records, and necrology rolls.


Davenport Music Club. Photographs and brief history from newspapers, ca. 1958. 1 folder.


Elder Daughters of the State University of Iowa. Iowa City. Minutes and treasurer's statements, 1900-1934. 2 folders.

Entre Nous Club. Iowa City. Records, 1915-1954. ½ ft. Organization devoted to dramatic readings and plays and full-scale productions of plays. Records include constitution and bylaws, programs, and annual yearbooks.


Fort Dodge Junior Woman's Club. Project scrapbook, 1954. 1 vol.

Fremont Baptist Church, Ladies Aid Society. Records, 1915-1921. 10 folders.


Iowa City Book Club. Records, 1888-1898. 2 folders. Secretary-treasurer's books, include accounts and minutes.


Iowa City Country Club. Records, 1934-1942. 1 vol. Includes minutes, membership lists, financial records, and news clippings of the Golf Association for Women of the Iowa City Country Club.

Iowa City First Presbyterian Church, Women's Club. Treasurer's book, 1923-1938. 1 vol.

Iowa City Presbyterian Society. Records, 1936-1959. 1 ft. Scrapbook, president's records and correspondence, minutes, financial records, membership lists.


Iowa Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Records, 1919-1994. 27 ft. Includes state, district, and local club records for over 75 local chapters. Minutes, treasurer's reports, newsletters, scrapbooks, yearbooks, annual reports, histories.


Iowa Presbytery Society. Records, 1930-1959. 1 ft. Treasurer's records, quarterly reports, minutes, and correspondence relating to several Iowa locations.


Iowa Yearly Meeting, Society of Friends. Women's Missionary Union Handbook, 1941-1942. 16 pp. (Also various records from women's meetings across the state.)


Manville Heights Club. Iowa City. Secretary and treasurer's reports, 1919-1963. 7 folders.

Modern Mixers Club. Iowa City. Minutes, 1953-1983. 4 vols. Women's club formed by women employed as cooks in the University of Iowa fraternities and sororities or campus dormitories.


Orient Federated Woman's Club. Secretary's book, 1919-1924. 1 folder.

O.W.L. Club. Orient. History and minutes of meetings, 1907-1925. 1 folder.

P.E.O. Records, 1931-1978. 1 ft. Includes history of West Liberty and Farmington chapters, programs, poems, news clippings about the founders of P.E.O., and scrapbooks from Chicago chapter.

Perry Wednesday Study Club. Scrapbook of club projects, 1975. 7 folders.


Richland Woman's Club. Speeches given at 30th (1932) and 60th (1963) anniversaries and history, 1974. 1 folder.


Rundell Club. Iowa City. History, 1913-1963. 1 folder. History of neighborhood club reports on activities and history of streetcar route that opened area to working-class families.


Sigourney First Presbyterian Church, Missionary Society. Secretary's handbook, 1903-1918. ½ ft.


Solon Teacher's Reading Circle. Secretary's books and notes on talks, 1894-1895. 2 vols.

Sorosis Club. Mt. Vernon. Secretary's books and roll books, 1896-1950. 1 ft. Includes history of the Woman's Improvement and Sorosis Clubs until they
disbanded to become Mt. Vernon Woman’s Club, 1895–1950. Also includes programs from Olin, Morning Sun, Sioux Rapids, and Riverton chapters.


T.T.T. Iowa State Convention. Records, 1911–1975. 1 ft. Minutes, correspondence, speech, programs, state convention minutes, and local chapter records, such as two scrapbooks from Wellman.

Union Township Woman’s Club, Johnson County. Records, 1921–1977. ½ ft. Secretary’s books, annual reports, and history.

University Club. Iowa City. Records, 1917–1994. 11 ft. Club for women affiliated with the University of Iowa as faculty, staff, graduate students, alumnae, or faculty wives. Includes scrapbooks, annual reports, minutes, newsletters, and history.

University Dames. Iowa City. Correspondence, 1920–1921. 1 folder.


Washington County Hospital Nurses Alumnae Association. Records, 1921–1952. 3 folders. Minutes, constitutions and bylaws, and membership reports.


Welsh Congregational Church of Old Man’s Creek, Women’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society. Records, 1891–1973. ½ ft. (9 vols.).


Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Records, 1937–1966. 1 ft. Includes records for Iowa City, Oelwein, and state of Iowa. Scrapbooks, minutes, news clippings, and convention programs. (Additional correspondence, pamphlets, and literature relating to Ellen Mather’s WCTU activities in the Mather-Bush Papers).


Young Women’s Christian Association, Des Moines Area Council. Bulletin, May 24, 1933. 9 pp. Includes list of members, plans for a camp, and neighborhood conferences.