

Women Joining Together: Margaret Smith Hunter, Club Member Extraordinaire

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The women's club movement was essential to the political and educational advancement of women, and Margaret Hunter (1888-1971) was Williamsport's club member extraordinaire.

Born in Reedville, Margaret Smith and her brother moved to Williamsport to attend Dickinson Seminary (now Lycoming College). According to the school's catalog, they lived at 713 Elmira St. In 1909, their father, John Henry Smith, moved his business, Smith Printing, to the city as well. After starting out at 125 W. 4th St., the company moved to East 3rd and Basin streets, where it boasted a new showroom and advertised that it was the "Business Man's Department Store."

At Dickinson Seminary, Margaret Smith studied the classics and took college preparatory classes, including instruction in Latin and Greek and courses on the writings of Livy, Cicero, Virgil and Homer. After graduation she attended Goucher Women's College in Maryland — a school known for its suffrage advocacy. She received her liberal arts degree in 1910 with a double major in English and German, and would later serve on the Lycoming College Alumni Council and the Goucher College alumnae board, as well as being a member of that college's board of trustees and of the local Goucher Club. She also established the Margaret Smith Hunter scholarship at her alma mater

The Women's Club Movement

Before the Civil War, it was widely accepted that, except for benevolent work at church, "a woman's place is in the home." Women took pride in such hobbies as becoming expert in needlework, and the opportunities for them to further their education were minimal. However, in the late 1860s middle-class women began to form voluntary neighborhood organizations. In her "History of Women's Clubs in America," published in 1898, Jane Croly writes that these newly formed clubs brought emancipation and "changed the whole point of view of a woman under its influence and her own possibilities as a social and intellectual force."

Williamsport became part of this national trend in 1897 with the organization of the Clio Club. The club's stated mission was "the pursuit of study as a means of intellectual culture and general improvement." Hunter would hold every office in the club except treasurer and would be president twice.

IN THEIR WORDS

"We are proud to pay tribute to one who believes with Cicero that 'There is not a moment without some duty.' [Hunter] has a keen awareness of the fact that the world needs the cooperation of individuals and groups in building a better world."

—Chairman of awards committee,
American Association of
University Women's 1953
"Woman of the Year Award"

and Professional Women's Club and president and treasurer for 10 years of the Woman's Club. She also volunteered in the local canteen during World War II.

Hunter was a member of Pine Street United Methodist Church for 67 years. True to form, Hunter served in numerous capacities in the church, including being a charter member and first president of the Women's Society of Christian Service, chairman of the music committee, first woman to be elected to the board of trustees, and first woman president of the church's official board.

Parliamentary Procedure Based on Common Sense

Although Hunter painted in oils and watercolors and traveled extensively throughout Europe, Canada, Mexico and the United States, including Alaska, her passion was her club work. She was known for her informal talks on parliamentary procedure, and in 1940, she compiled a booklet titled "A Simple and Practical Handbook of Parliamentary Law." Copies of the publication were available at the time from her home at 831 Hepburn St.; a copy of the 38-page publication is now available at the Lycoming County Historical Society.

The text was designed to simplify the rules of parliamentary procedure based on common sense and reason. Hunter believed that every woman should be familiar with these guidelines so that she could be an intelligent club participant, whether she was an officer or just a member. In the introduction, Hunter states four principles of involvement: justice and courtesy for all; one thing at a time; rule of the majority; and rights of the minority. In her closing statement, she reminds women of rules of correct behavior, refrain from conversation, discuss business in a dignified manner, don't criticize unless you plan to correct the situation and be a facilitator, not an obstructionist.

Community Service and Leadership

In 1926, Margaret Smith married William Nevin Hunter, who owned an insurance agency. The 1930 census listed Margaret Hunter as having no employment, but she was far from idle. A 1949 alumnae activity form completed by Hunter, which is found in the Special Collections and Archives at Goucher College, required an attachment to list all of her community service.

The file on Hunter also includes a newspaper article stating "When it comes to firsts, Mrs. William M. Hunter has no peer." She was a charter member of the Williamsport College Club and the first president of the American Association of University Women. Among the many other club offices she held were treasurer of the YWCA, treasurer of the Williamsport Civic Club, secretary of the Business

Unwavering Commitment to Volunteerism

Hunter continued to participate in women's clubs long after the movement waned in the 1930s, as more women entered the workplace and found other areas in which their creativity and leadership were valued.

Hunter was the recipient of the American Association of University Women's 1953 "Woman of the Year Award" in recognition of outstanding qualities of leadership and sustained community service. At the ceremony, the chairman of the awards committee said, "We are proud to pay tribute to one who believes with Cicero that 'There is not a moment without some duty.' She [Hunter] has a keen awareness of the fact that the world needs the cooperation of individuals and groups in building a better world."

Hunter is buried in the Smith family plot in Wildwood Cemetery.

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