

Williamsport women

The Williamsport Music Club: Women of note

By JANET MCNEIL HURLBERT
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Like many 20th century women's groups, the Williamsport Music Club, organized in 1937, allowed members to realize their potential to improve society also while educating themselves in a collegial atmosphere.

An early Williamsport newspaper article offered this praise: "The youngest and among the most successful of Williamsport cultural organizations." As opposed to many professions, music was one area in which local women could distinguish themselves; a few women became published composers.

Madelyn Budd as founder

Madelyn Budd, of 1065 W. Fourth St., had come to Williamsport with her husband, a special agent with a fire insur-

ance company. A teacher and musician, she soon gathered like-minded women at the YWCA to discuss forming a music club.

With the help of Canton's Beethoven Society, the Williamsport Music Club was born. Budd would serve as the first president until her husband was once again transferred.

At a tea before her departure, she was commended for being active in the Clio Club, the YWCA, the Professional Women's Club and the Williamsport Community Concert Association, but her singular accomplishment was the formation of the Williamsport Music Club.

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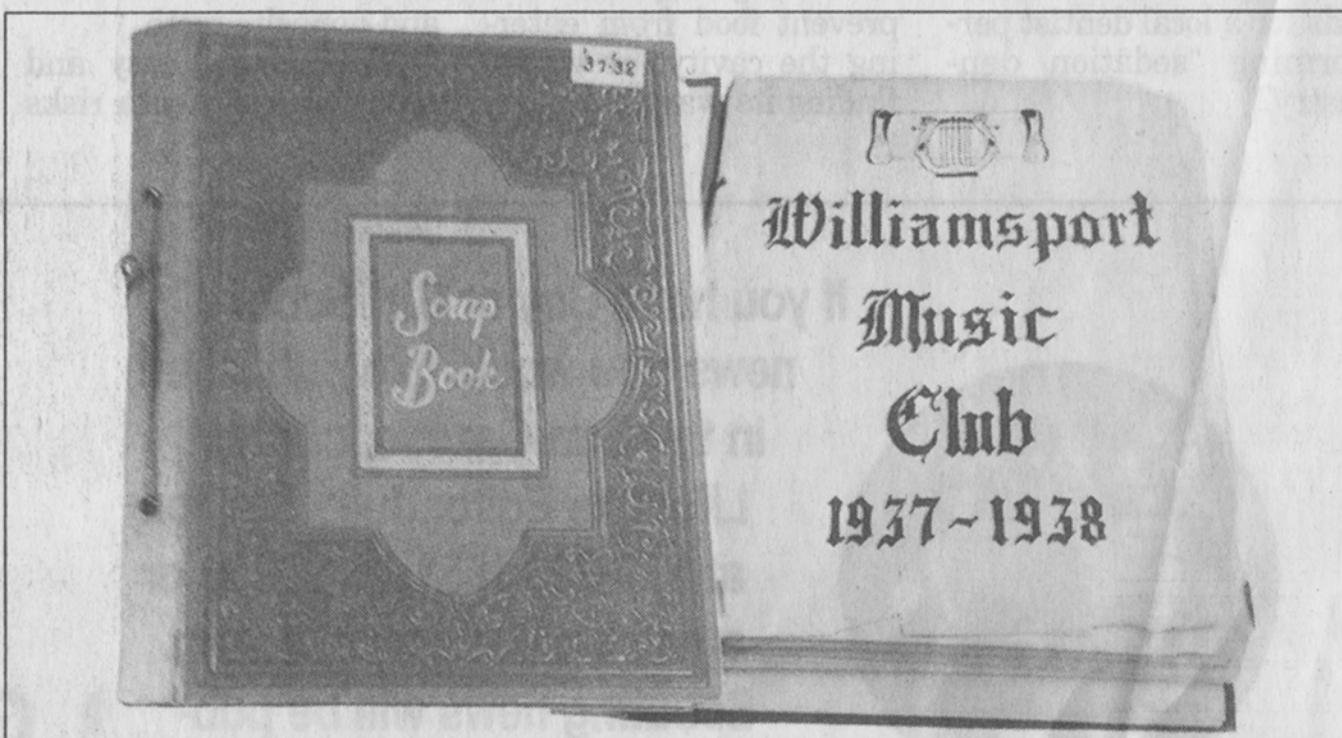


PHOTO PROVIDED

Members of the Williamsport Music Club have compiled an annual scrapbook since 1937, as shown is this photo from the collection of the Lycoming County Historical Society and Thomas T. Taber Museum.

Lifestyle

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

In the above left photo from the collection of Kay Huffman, mothers of the members of the Williamsport Juvenile Music Club were honored at a luncheon. Shown, from left, are Mary Hart, president-elect; her mother, Mrs. Fred Hart; Sara Jane Thomas, club president; Dorothy Balch and Eleanor Weston, club counselors; and Martha Fulmer, president of the senior club. Above right, past presidents of the Williamsport Music Club gather at the club's 20th birthday party, Feb. 26, 1957. Front row from left, are Martha R. Fulmer, current president; Mrs. James M. Mensch; Mrs. C.W. Williamson; Mrs. E. Earl Miller; Mrs. J. Frank Budd, first president; and founder of the club, Mrs. G. Edward Eisenfeis. Back row from left, are Elizabeth H. Sims, Mrs. M.J. Barrick, Mrs. Mitchell E. Younken, Mrs. Francis A. Courtright and Mrs. Glen Russell. Both photos are from the collection of Kay Huffman.

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A chapter of the Federation of Music Clubs

The object of the local group reflected that of the national Federation of Music Clubs: to "advance the interest and promote the culture of music in this vicinity." Active memberships were divided into two categories, voice and instrumental.

Women who wanted to perform for the group had to be approved by the membership. A non-performing associate member needed to be committed to promoting music and attending all programs. The initial fee was \$1, with annual dues of \$2, and a guest fee of 50 cents for each program.

Meetings

Monthly meetings were study-recitals, with each year's programming based on detailed guidelines issued by the Federation of Music Clubs. One of the first themes for the new organization was the development of music within American life, and members presented Irish immigrant songs Cape Cod sea chanties, spirituals, Stephan Foster songs, and Kentucky mountain melodies.

For one program, a clavichord was brought from the attic of William B. Bower and "Miss Myrtle Stroup attired in a costume representing early days in American history and dressed in a hooped skirt with powdered hair" played a minuet that had been played for George Washington.

Soon there also would be a meeting once a month at which

members would present papers and essays on different aspects of music and composers related to the year's programming topic. The Federation awarded points to local chapters for programs that met their guidelines, and one year the Williamsport chapter came in second only to Pittsburgh within the state.

Members held meetings in their homes, but as the membership increased (from 26 to 44 the first year), meetings also were held at churches, in Bradley Hall on the Williamsport Dickinson Junior College campus and at the Lycoming Hotel, especially if a dance presentation was included. After an 18-month fund drive culminated in the purchase of a Steinway grand piano, the group started to meet at the Women's Club; a dedication ceremony featured Robert M. Sides performing on the newly acquired piano. Later it was discovered that the piano was signed inside by the grandson of the company's founder.

Commitment to young musicians

In 1938, the women formed a junior and a senior club for young girls, with more than 100 prospective members gathering at the YWCA on registration day. During roll call, each girl would respond with the name of a composer, and all would recite a pledge that acknowledged indebtedness to good music that inspires the nation, and included a promise to do all in their power to make America truly musical.

In conjunction with the Pennsylvania State Federation of Music Clubs, the Williamsport Music Club also began to sponsor a yearly contest for young musicians, so that talent in this area could be identified. Later, members created the Madelyn Budd Scholarship, for which they still raise money each year.

Candlelight service

In 1937, attendees of the first candlelight service sponsored by the club filled the First Baptist Church. The newspaper described the event as "soul-satisfying, well-balanced, and well arranged." Soon, the service was moved to a larger space, St. Paul Lutheran Church, but even that failed to accommodate everyone. The newspaper titled an article, "Hundreds Crowd St. Paul's for Splendid Yule Program presented by Music Club." After a few years, another article termed the event "super," adding, "another year nearer to perfection."

Club activities

It wasn't long before the club had established a fall dinner, held at Covenant Central Presbyterian Church, to start the musical season, as well as an annual spring gala, which featured in 1940, 155 musicians. A monthly radio program aired on WRAC and many events were scheduled for National Music Week. The first year, the newly formed club gave a performance at a different school each morning for National Music Week. Fund

raising supported contributions to the Metropolitan Opera Company as well as local charities.

For socializing, the group would host teas and "corn and wiener roasts" at members' cottages for bathing, boating, and dinner. The women would often "motor" to musical events out of town. Since most club musical presentations were long-gowned affairs, invitations for these causal events would read "dress-optional."

World War II war support

The Music Club joined the community in supporting the home front during World War II. Rummage sales raised money for war bonds, and because members believed that music improves morale, they sponsored a sing-along of old war songs and uplifting tunes at the high school. The women also participated in a national campaign to raise money to buy musical instruments for hospital ships bringing wounded Americans back from foreign fronts. For \$125, each ship could be equipped with a guitar, a banjo, a ukulele, violin nose flutes, song books, pitch pipes, a phonograph and records.

Changing times

Eventually, many organizations began to question their single-sex status, and the Music Club was no exception. Jane Landon, a 60-year member of the club, remembers being president when the contentious question came up. She even received an irate letter accusing her of wanting to ruin

a wonderful women's organization by including men.

Landon observes that the Williamsport Music Club has changed with the times, adapting programming, becoming more casual and including outside musical groups. Long gowns are no longer worn and men are members, too. After meeting at the YWCA for many years, the group now gathers at Robert M. Sides Family Music Center because of its convenient location. As activities for children increased, especially athletic opportunities for girls, junior music clubs came to an end. However, the club stays true to its original purpose of promoting the culture of music to our area and to young people.

February is founder's month for the organization. With its rich history, The Williamsport Music Club continues to be a gift — a valentine — to the community.

Janet McNeil Hurlbert is Professor Emeritus of Library Services, Lycoming College. She continues her interest in the Lycoming College archives by working on a limited basis as Archival Project Specialist and being an advisor to the Lycoming County Women's History Collection.

Mary Sieminski, the regular author of the Williamsport women series, is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Her column is published the second Sunday of each month and she can be reached at lcwhcmanager@gmail.com.