

## Early day History of Pleiades.

Jennie June Croly's History of the Woman's Club Movement in America, published by Henry G. Allen & Co., New York, 1898, says that Pleiades Club was founded by seven wives of Faculty members in 1892 at the home of Mrs. Gault, wife of the University of Idaho president. They met regularly once a week to read and discuss books. On March 1, 1894 they formally organized and adopted a constitution. This information was sent by the club itself to Jennie Croly, and as such would be authentic.

The Historical Club also sent in their club history and Miss Croly's book says that it was organized August 1895 with 30 active members by Mrs. C. W. McCurdy "who was a charter member of Pleiades". This establishes beyond doubt that the seven Faculty wives who were charter members of Pleiades were Mesdames Gault, Henderson, Ostrander, Aldrich, Bonebright, Fox, and McCurdy. Miss 'Cushman' and Miss 'Pol' were not charter members. (They were unmarried and not wives!) They evidently joined the book club soon after as active members when the limit of seven was raised. They became Associate members at their own request, Feb. 27, 1896. Mrs. E. R. Chrisman was not a charter member as she and Lt. Chrisman came to Moscow Mar. 9, 1895; three years after Pleiades Club began and a year after the adoption of the Constitution.

One of the first acts of the young club was the furnishing of the Gold and Silver Book for the Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. Made by Tiffany from Idaho metals and set with Idaho



semi-precious stones, it was saved from the <sup>1906</sup> fire which destroyed the old Administration Bldg., and is a treasured possession of the University.

Pleiades Club joined the General Federation of Women's Clubs Nov. 30, 1895, organized the Third District Federation at Moscow April 24-25, 1902 at a meeting called by Mrs. L.F. Henderson, a charter Pleiades. She served as chairman of the two-day meeting. Pleiades joined the State Federation soon after its organization, Jan 30-31, 1905 in the City Council Chambers in Boise. No delegate attended the meeting from Pleiades but a letter from the club favoring the forming of the State Federation was read at the meeting. Mrs. Butterfield of Weiser succeeded Mrs. Standard of Pocatello as president of the S.F.W.C. and was in turn succeeded by Mrs. J.H. Forney a member of Pleiades, who served 1908-10.

Columbian Club of Boise claims to be the oldest federated club in the state, having been organized May 2, 1892. Unfortunately the exact date in 1892 when the seven Faculty wives met to form the club is not known, as early secretary minute-books have disappeared, but Mrs. Henderson, a charter member, and Mrs. Forney who joined Feb. 13, 1896 told members repeatedly that Pleiades was the "oldest federated club in the state in continuous existence. Idaho Springs Shakespeare Club, for example, was started in 1888 but soon lapsed. Columbian Club did federate first (1894); Pleiades Nov. 30, 1895; so they may be <sup>the</sup> oldest club in point of federation, but not the oldest organized club in continuous existence.

Genevieve Axtell



I The first 60 years — are the hardest!

In 1898 Henry H. Allen and Co. of New York published a book entitled: The History of the Federated Women's Club Movement in America. It was authorized by the Council of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and was to have been written by the first Gen. Fed. president. However she died in 1895 and the task was given to Mrs. Jennie June Coody, a well-known clubwoman of the day who had made the original suggestion. You will see how near we were to the beginnings of club work when I point out that the first Gen. Fed. convention was in 1890 and the first time any state federation sent delegates to a G.F. convention was in 1894, when 5 eastern states did so. <sup>On Nov 30, 1895</sup> Pleiades joined the Gen. Fed. directly, the only way it could join, as there was no state federation in Idaho till 10 years later.

Mrs. Coody was an officer of the G.F. at the time the book was compiled. She had been the founder in 1868, (and first president) of Sorosis of New York, the first women's club in America. She invited every federated women's club in the United States to send an account of its origin and history for inclusion in the proposed volume. There were only 6 in Idaho in 1898 — <sup>one each in</sup> Idaho Springs (probably the present Idaho Falls), Pocatello, Boise, Coeur d'Alene and the two in Moscow, Pleiades and Historical. Like Pleiades, the other five belonged directly to Gen. Fed. and obtained program materials from it, — a service it is still happy to render.

Pleiades sent in an account of itself, and pictures of two charter members, Mrs. F. B. Gault and Mrs. Sarah Ostrander, and of Pres. Gault's home, the first meeting-place of Pleiades. I mention the book, the author's qualifications and the method of acquiring the material, to establish its authenticity, since I am quoting from it directly. It takes up the clubs by states and the brief paragraphs on Idaho furnishes a background.

Quote "Sixty years ago the present state of Idaho was first entered by white women. Mrs. Whitman and Mrs



II Spalding came with their husbands to labor as missionaries among the Indians crossing the Rocky Mts. six years before Genl Fremont, "the Pathfinder." Thirty miles from the place where the Spaldings began their work is the city of Moscow, second in size in the state, and the home of the State University. The principal growth of the place has been attained in the last decade since the advent of the railroads. Consequently the social life has been of a very different character from that of older states. Lacking everything (if the environment had to be created, but with the fertility of resource for which the American people are famous, the task was begun. The advent of the University was a powerful aid to the creation of an intellectual atmosphere. Graduates from the best schools became numbered among the residents and brought with them the culture and aspirations of the older states." End quote.

Regarding Pleiades it says "In 1892, the Pleiades started with seven wives of the faculty of the university, who met once a week to read and discuss in a somewhat informal fashion the books that were read. It was not however until the autumn of 1895 that a constitution was adopted (It was spring, not autumn Mar. 6, 1895) and an organization effected (March 1, 1894 the date we are celebrating) which soon passed beyond the early limit of membership. The Pleiades joined the Gen. Fed. of Women's Clubs and set itself to serious work. The object is still literary and social. But its work is scholarly and its social events of a highly interesting and refined character. The study of Shakespeare has been the special work of the club for the past two years, supplemented by discussions upon the general topics of the day. The membership is still small, but it is now organized under four departments, - literature, home, education, and philanthropy. It meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. The president (1897-8) is Mrs. K.R. Henderson." End quote.

I want to call attention to two or three things in



III the above. (1) The book seems to be trying to tell clubs in other states that Idaho really does have some cultural and intellectual attainments, I'm sure it was necessary then and still is. Mrs. Henderson went on a trip to Cambridge, Mass. about this time and reported on her return that easterners just couldn't believe Idaho women could be so intelligent and actually have the vote. (2) Notice the date 1892 when the book says Pleiades started as a book-reading and discussion club. We really could be celebrating 62 years. However all the early yearbooks since 1898 have put the later date of formal organization, Mar. 1, 1894. At times I wish they had kept the extra two years, especially when some member of the Historical Club tells me as one did again recently, that the two clubs are the same age within a few months, and should celebrate together.

Notice too, that the work of Pleiades was 'serious and scholarly', its social events 'refined' and that this small club had four departments of work just like the big clubs. I can still hear Mrs. Fomey and other pioneer Pleiades say: "We're small in numbers but we always do our share. We will pay an equal sum with Historical Club, not a percentage based on membership." We backed the projects of the Gen'l Federation 100%, but now the pendulum has swung over to the opposite end and I wonder if we aren't the losers. After all, Gen. Federation is the largest, strongest, woman's organization in the world with over 10,000,000 members, and branches in many countries of the world. Korea has many clubs and some of the countries behind the iron curtain, and for the most part, Gen. Fed. programs are well thought out, and while I wouldn't go back to the old days and adopt everything 100%, I do think we should have their letters read by someone before the meeting and presented clearly so that when we vote down a proposal or ignore it, it is not just because Gen. Fed. proposed it, but because we don't agree that it is necessary or desirable. Since it is a part of our history I'd like to quote the brief paragraph in the Historical Club



IV From Mrs. Cooly's history. I quote: "The Ladies Historical Club of Moscow (I asked their president the other day when they ceased to be ladies! she didn't know that their name had ever been anything but Moscow Historical Club) was founded in August 1895 with 30 members. There are the warmest club fellowship and intercourse between the Historical Club and the Pleiades many of the women being members or officers in both clubs. Mrs. J. H. Forney, president of the Historical Club is one of the Board of Directors of the Pleiades and there are other interchangeable relations. The founder, Mrs. C. W. McCurdy is now honorary president," and quote. A picture of Mrs. Forney follows. She was first a charter member of Historical Club, joining Pleiades 7 months later on Feb. 13, 1896. Taking our later date, Mar. 1, 1894 which we are celebrating today, we are still 1 year + 5 mos. older than Historical Club, and if we accept the 1892 date we would be about 3 1/2 years older, - a consummation devoutly to be wished!

~~Two~~ <sup>One</sup> charter member of Pleiades Mrs. C. W. McCurdy, and Mrs. Millicent Bonbright, <sup>an early member of Pleiades,</sup> became charter members of the Ladies Historical Club. Mrs. Jay Woodworth, another charter member, remembers well the morning Mrs. McCurdy called on her to say that Mrs. McCurdy had asked her why she didn't start another club in Moscow open to townswomen as well as Faculty women and not so limited in the number of members. The Pleiades had thought it an excellent idea and she had come to ask Mrs. Woodworth if she would like to join the proposed club. Apparently Mrs. McCurdy was quite successful in her rounds for on July 31, 1895 they met in the parlors of the Moscow Club House. This was later the Carithers Hospital and (is now) the Lambda Chi Alpha house. Harold and Myra Moody told me where and what the Moscow Club House was, and each remembers going to dances there.

There were 30 charter members. They adopted a constitution and by-laws, prepared and presented by Mrs. Forney, and elected officers, voting to meet on alternate Saturdays.



I The names of the charter members wouldn't mean much to you but I was interested to note that five of them later joined Pleiades: Mrs. Forney, Mrs. <sup>Woods</sup> Kaufmann ~~who owned the house~~, Mrs. Spotswood, who built the house where Catherine Frantz grew up, Mrs. Gertrude McBryde, first wife of the dentist, and Mrs. Gritman. Mrs. McCurdy soon resigned from Pleiades to devote all her time to the larger club, but several kept their dual membership for a time. The only one I know of in <sup>recent</sup> ~~many~~ years who was brave enough to belong to both clubs was Mrs. Stinson who now belongs to neither, but there is nothing in either constitution to prevent it.

But let us get back to our own club beginnings. The seven Faculty women who met in the home of the first President of the University were his wife, Mrs. McCurdy, Mrs. Bonebright, Mrs. Ostrander, Mrs. Aldrich, Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Ches. Fox. Mrs. E. R. Chrisman is in the earliest pictures which we have of the founders and the question which has arisen whether she was a charter member is settled by a look at the dates. Pleiades was formally organized Mar. 1, 1894 and the date of its first constitution is given as Mar. 6, 1895. It was three days later (Mar. 9, '95) when Lt. & Mrs. Chrisman stepped off the train and saw Moscow for the first time. However she was asked very soon to join and was the first addition to the original seven. She told me once that she didn't stay long in the club and why. She mentioned Puerto Rico in a Pleiades meeting and someone corrected her pronunciation and said it should be Porto Rico and she resigned. After all, she was right and it was that same independence of spirit combined with extraordinary loveliness which so endeared her to us. As you know, various tours of duty took the Chrismans from Moscow and it was not until 1928 that she re-joined the club.

I think you all know how Pleiades got its name: Pres. Gault came into his living-room as the seven were about to disperse one afternoon and asked if they had selected a name. When told that they had not, he



VI said gallantly: "You should call yourselves the Pleiades for that too has seven beautiful stars." The club motto: "For present comfort and for future good" from The Winter's Tale, club colors, and a club flower were chosen early for the 1897 yearbook has this poem:

The golden sunset to each and to all  
A promise of beauty brings: -  
The fair white snow as the flakes gently fall,  
A soft song of purity sings.

Then the tint of the golden sunset ray,  
And that of the snow as light: -  
We take for our colours, knowing you'll say,  
Behold the yellow and white.

The flower is next to be chosen, too,  
But no need to please all creation,  
So without more ado, we present here to you,  
The choice of our club - The Carnation.

I have the complete file of yearbooks since 1897 ~~except~~ for the one club year 1932-3, and I hope some day one of these ~~will turn up~~. I don't know if the club had a printed yearbook (or any yearbook, for that matter) before 1897. Mrs. Forney joined Pleiades in Feb'y 1896 and it would seem logical that she would have had a yearbook for that year if the club had any, as she gave me the first 10 yearbooks before I joined, for my collection. I have had to depend on these yearbooks, the two beautiful leather books Miss Sweet gave the club, and my memory of 45 years since I know the whereabouts of only 2 Secretary's books, with their recent minutes since 1942.

I hope some of the earlier ones may be found and preserved. <sup>apparently they were in Mrs. Truitt's care & destroyed</sup> <sup>after her death</sup>

From the beginning, the club read and studied Shakespeare, - often 5 plays in one year - with other topics, and answered roll-call at every meeting with a Shakespearean quotation. Each page of the yearbooks



VII For 40 years was headed by a quotation from the Board of Avon till 1934 when Shakespearean study and quotations ceased. Programs also included from the beginning discussion of current topics. For example in 1898-9 they studied 5 plays of Shakespeare and Franklin, Clay, Emerson, Greeley, Whittier, Holmes, Bryant and Eugene Field. The next year in addition to the plays there are listed Literature, Music, Art, Domestic Science, General Science, and Daily Events. Famous artists, Women's Colleges, Noted Cathedrals, Foreign Countries, Russian history, art, and literature, English, French and American history, Parliamentary Rules of Order, Municipal Sanitation, Civic Improvement — to mention but a few — were all grist for their mill. If a single year's program seems very full we must remember that there weren't many other organizations to divide one's time, and that <sup>the</sup> Plerades club year was much longer than now.

Even now our constitution says that we shall meet on alternate Thursdays except in June, July, and August. We really worked on our assignments! Bibliographies were printed in each year-book and we were expected to use them. It was almost the equivalent of a post-graduate education to belong to Plerades. We observed strict parliamentary procedure and I remember the occasion but not the culprit who first brought her sewing to a meeting!

One 'open <sup>afternoon</sup> meeting' was listed each year till 1906 and an annual banquet was also held every year for husbands of members. We made our own fun. Several of these evenings stand out in my memory. Harold recalls singing an aria from Samson and Delilah with Mrs. Eldridge as accompanist. I recall one evening at our house when Mr. Hulme who had been asked to sing a solo, brought what must have been his entire repertory and sang it all. No one knew quite how to stop him so that we could proceed to the rest of the planned entertainment. One year we got out a 'newspaper' for the edification of our husbands each member contributing some feature. I still remember the 'poem' which I wrote for the paper about Carl von Erd.



VIII. Mrs. von Ende was having difficulty finding a formula to agree with Carl and we heard a great deal about her concern even when his feeding difficulties were solved. With your indulgence I will share it with you though it reveals both that I am no poet, and the kind of mind I have for remembering trivia and forgetting essentials!

Mrs. von E. had a dear little boy  
Who refused to gain as he should.

She sterilized each little toy  
And antiseptitized his food.

But still the child refused to grow, -

His mother was in despair;

She sheltered him from wind and rain

And gave him the utmost care,

Till at last one day he turned about,

Grew rosy, fat, and well.

You'd think his mother with joy would shout -

But a strange tale I have to tell.

At once she began to worry the more -

Mothers are always such! -

And she spent her time pacing the floor

In fear lest he gain too much!

She may have continued to worry but she spared us the details after that!

Many of our afternoon meetings were light and gay. One such was at the von Ende summer home above Robinson Lake when we did the Pyramus and Thisbe scenes from The Midsummer Night's Dream in costume so realistically that their dog growled at our 'lion' and had to be tied up where he howled as a by-no-means flattering accompaniment to our histrionics.

Enough of reminiscence and back to history. The first constitution adopted Mar. 6, 1895 records that the club met fortnightly, not weekly as at first, in all months except July and August; that the dues were \$1.50 a year, payable in three instalments at the first meetings in Oct., Jan., and April, and if a member didn't pay within the month, his name was quote 'to be stricken from the rolls.' Also quoting, 'any active member who fails to perform his duties for 2 consecutive meetings shall be passed upon by the Board of Directors.' Changes in the constitution have been made several times



but in the essentials it remains much as first written. The original constitution did not limit the membership, but a limit of 12 was set Dec. 1, 1898. By this time there had been added in this order Mrs. Kaufmann, Mrs. Reed, Mrs. Forney, - two associate members Miss Sara Ellen Poe and Miss Harriet Cushman, - Mrs. Spotwood, Miss Florence Corbett, Mrs. Clement and Mrs. Truitt. Two of these passed away <sup>only</sup> last year, - Miss Poe, Louise Carter's aunt, and Florence Corbett Johnston, the University's first graduate. Although the limit was set at 12 in 1898, 14 or 15 names are listed in succeeding year-books but <sup>others</sup> some of these may have been Associate members, ~~and~~ the limit was <sup>surely</sup> not to be retroactive. In Jan'y 1940 we raised the limit to a 'possible 15' where it now stands. The original constitution provided for honorary members and there have been three: Mrs. Gault, Mrs. Henderson, and Mrs. Little.

In 1902-3 the custom of President's Day began, the first Library Committee was appointed, and that, too, was the first year-book to list separately the meetings, hostesses and programs. Previously all subjects for the year were put at the beginning and apparently the topic, hostess, and 'victim' selected from meeting to meeting. If my count is accurate there have been 72 different members in 62 years with 6 resignations for ill-health or other reasons. I notice in the minutes for Dec. 2, 1943 that Mary Banks was accepted as a member, on Dec. 16, she gave us a musical program, and on Dec. 30 she 'quote' 'regretted that she couldn't accept membership. I didn't include her in the 72. The fact that so few resign except when moving from Moscow, seems to prove that we like Pleiades and <sup>each is</sup> ~~are~~ willing in the words of the initiation pledge adopted as a part of the original constitution "to promise to perform as punctually and faithfully as possible all the duties that may devolve upon me as a member (or officer) of this society." At least there is no record of anyone being "stricken from the rolls" for non-payment of the modest dues, or being brought before the Board for disciplinary action.

Members have been active in state club work since the beginning. The State Federation was formed in Boise in 1905 and the second meeting after this organizational meeting was held in Moscow in <sup>October</sup> 1908. I attended the sessions as



X  
an invited guest having arrived in town just seven weeks before I have that program. In 1910 Mrs. Forney was elected state president. Pleiades helped to entertain the State Federation in 1924 and in 1938 and will again be co-hosts in May 1954. The Third District was organized in 1902 at Moscow by a charter Pleiad, Mrs. L.F. Henderson, who served as ~~the first~~ <sup>the first</sup> president. We have helped entertain the Third District 8 times, and Mrs. Truitt served as district president from our club. Up till recently we never failed to have a delegate at state and district conventions and we are proud that we are the oldest federated club in the state in continuous existence. We have given time and money to <sup>such</sup> charitable and civic purposes, contributed toward ~~such as~~ Red Cross, Cancer Control, War Relief when we sent basic school supplies, yard goods and notions to devastated Europe, and in 1946-7 we helped support two French orphans sending many gifts of clothing + food. We have the correspondence and records on this latter project showing that the contents of the seven large boxes were worth at least \$200.

A paper on the history of the Pleiades would not be complete without a summary of its greatest achievement, the Moscow Public Library. I am going to compress 53 years into a very short space since you are familiar with it. I have recollections of conversations with Mrs. Forney, Mrs. Truitt, Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Little, filled in later by Mrs. McBryde, and two years ago I read all the minutes of the library since its founding. Briefly then: the impetus came from Pleiades. In the fall of 1901 they voted to start a movement for a library, appointed Mrs. Henderson, Mrs. Truitt, and Mrs. Theodore Reed a committee of three to work on the project, and voted to ask Historical Club if they wished to co-operate. They accepted and appointed Mrs. R.V. Cozier, Mrs. E.T. Barton and Mrs. Henry Coats as their committee. The first meeting to start, quote, "a free library and reading-room" was held at the home of Mrs. Reed. It was unanimously agreed to make a personal canvass of the town to see how much money could be raised, and to start with the business firms. Don't they always?! Pleiades took the west side of Main St., Historical Club, the east side and \$340 was subscribed.

A room was rented for \$3 a month upstairs in the Brown Bldg. over the old Owl Drug Co., - the present location of Firstover and Asbury's stores. The room faced east upon the alley. A



XI <sup>3</sup>/<sub>2</sub> stove was secured for \$15 thro' the generosity of Mr. Frantz. 10<sup>c</sup> was paid for a coal-shovel, \$4 for a half-ton of coal, 35<sup>c</sup> for a lock for the coal-room door, \$2 for lumber for table top, \$2 for a small table, and \$4.70 for 12 chairs. Some donated shelving completed the furnishings. On Sat. evening, Jan. 4, 1902 a Book Social and Opening, - well advertised - was held and pronounced a 'perfect success', 115 volumes being donated. Members of the two clubs continued to raise money with food sales, suppers, ball-games, and many other devices. A canvass of the entire town was made, Pleiades taking all west of Main St., Historical Club all east. Many voluntary donations of books and money were received. Members of the two clubs also served as librarians keeping the room open two afternoons and two evenings a week. Later they hired a young man and a young woman, - names not recorded - for \$6 a month but this didn't work out, and on Nov. 18, 1903 they hired Miss Etta Maguire at \$20 a month. The library room adjoined Dr. McBryde's dental office and the romance began which ended in the divorce of the first Mrs. McBryde, a member of Pleiades, and his marriage to Miss Maguire, who served a total of 40 years as librarian.

This first committee of 6, with Mrs. Bonbright, a member of both clubs, replacing Mrs. Coats almost at once, met weekly for 2 1/2 years until April 1904 when it was replaced by the first Governing Board: Mrs. <sup>C.M.</sup> Little and Mrs. C. L. Butler from Pleiades; Mrs. Char. Shields and Mrs. <sup>G.H.</sup> Forney (who belonged to both clubs) from Historical Club, and Mr. Patten from the City Council. Many of you have served on the Library Board since then and know first-hand what serving involves, but hard as it may be, I'm sure you will agree that these early years were the hardest. In 1903 they began correspondence with Andrew Carnegie, secured his promise of \$10,000 purchased the site for \$1150, secured a millage tax of ~~\$1000~~ <sup>to insure</sup> \$1000 a year support (from the City Council) and constructed the present building which has been changed only by enlargement to the east and new steps. It was finished and accepted in Jan'y 1906 just four years after the 'grand opening' of the upstairs room. Wages remained low for years: The man who supervised construction of the building received \$1.50 a day, the janitor was paid \$10 a month and the librarian \$20. If Ada were here she would recall that her sister Mary Burke was librarian for a while



XII and wanted to resign but was induced to stay when her salary was raised to \$35 a month and she was given her sister as assistant at \$10 a month. Pleiades presented an art cabinet filled with etchings to the library in July 1913. I presume it is still there though I haven't thought about it for years.

In conclusion, I wrote letters to a dozen former members and received eight replies. There may be other former members living whose addresses I do not have. In the early year-books a page was given to a black-bordered In Memoriam for any member who passed away during the preceding year, but the practice was discontinued and we do not record deaths. I would like to know how many of the 72 members are still alive cherishing fond memories of Pleiades, as I have for 45 years. I know of four who preceded me in membership: Margaret Henderson Strong, Rosa Torrey Harrison, Mrs. Herbert Condon, and Mrs. F. M. Padelford. So I'm still not the 'last leaf' and I'm sure future members will carry on their heritage, and the club will never become just 'an old forsaken bough.'

Gentle B. Astell

I am sure many things have been omitted which should have been included in our club's history.

One of these is the beautiful 'gold and silver' book displayed at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, as part of Idaho's exhibit.

According to Miss Sweet, Mrs. Gault suggested the idea to Pleiades in 1892 (the year they started); it was adopted as a club project; Miss Annette ~~Bowman~~ aided in the design, and Tiffany's of New York fashioned the book from Idaho gold, silver, and semi-precious stones. It is now a treasured possession of the University of Idaho library.