

# The Junior Iris Club - 1916-1926

*By Miriam Eyde Bixler, Iris Club Historian*

The Iris Club, a women's club of Lancaster, Pa., organized in 1895, is well known for its cultural and civic activities. There is no record of it offering a similar program to children and young folks until 1916. However, the club's 1915-1916 yearbook notes a children's Christmas entertainment featuring a sleight of hand artist and refreshments of cake and candy. Also, there is a photograph of costumed older boys and girls which is labeled, "First Junior Bal Masque - 1914."

The January Issue of "The Pennsylvania Club Woman," reported that on January 8, 1916, Miss Susan Frazer, president of the Iris Club, appointed Miss Rebecca Slaymaker to organize and conduct a young folks department. Meetings would be held alternating Saturday afternoons beginning January 15th. The official club year would begin in October and end with one May meeting. (During the 1918 influenza epidemic no meetings were held for a month and a half.)

Miss Rebecca Slaymaker, member of a well known Lancaster family, lived at 230 E. Orange St. She had been educated in private schools, graduating from Millersville Normal School in 1898 and Columbia University in 1909, studied music at Sacred Heart Academy, and Art with Baron Von Osk. Rebecca taught in Pennsylvania, New York, and Maine. During the years 1903 to 1905, she supervised the first playgrounds in the United States adapted from those of Germany, sponsored by a Pittsburgh civic club. When she returned to Lancaster she became interested in Presbyterian missions, history and civic affairs, serving on many boards. The Red Cross was a particular interest and as a Junior Club project, she organized the first Lancaster "Civic Dinner," with displays from merchants, bankers, industries and newspapers. She was well qualified to or-

ganize the new club.

The officers of this new department were: president, vice president, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, treasurer, and six directors. Sarah Hartman, press chairman, wrote that the purpose of the group, which had twenty-five "alert" Committee chairmen, was civic, philanthropic, social, and educational. Committees reflected various projects and interests: domestic, art, sewing, knitting and weaving lessons, civic, war stamps, music, dance, travel, birds, entertainment and garden. The latter committee planted pussy willows in the club house garden. She reported that by December, 1916 there were 168 members five to eighteen years old, with a waiting list.

A mother's council of one hundred members was formed, three were required to be Iris Club board members, three Iris Club members at large and the remainder were not necessarily members of the senior club. Soon the total Junior membership, including mothers, was 300. Dues were fifty cents a year paid semiannually. In 1920 it was voted that twenty-five cents of each annual dues be paid to the Senior Club. The 1918-1919 annual report stated that there were two hundred girl members. Four were married and two had "passed beyond us to that better land from which no traveler returns." At the November 1916 meeting it was announced that President Wilson's first grandchild, Eleanor Sayre, was now an honorary member of the club through the courtesy of the Iris Club founder and first president, Alice Nevin, the great aunt of the baby. Mr. Francis Sayre, the child's father, met with the Juniors to thank them.

At the first meeting elected officers were: President, Rachel Prizer; First Vice President, Mary Shaeffer; Second Vice President, Deldee Groff; Third Vice President, Dorothea Herman; Recording Secretary, Charlotte Appel; Corresponding Secretary, Margaret Lincoln; Treasurer, Margaret Kinard. Rachel Prizer resigned at the second meeting, and Margaret Lincoln, third cousin of Alice Nevin, was elected to that office. Appointed directors served one, two, and three years "like the Senior Club." The President's first agenda noted twenty-six committee chairmen to be called upon for reports. It was ruled that chairmen not responding with reports would be fined twenty-five cents, but by March the agenda noted only five due to report. The president also noted that her second election had been "short and crafty." She wrote that "Miss Becky" had told her she would be elected again and so she suspected "much graft." However, "Miss Becky" warned her to improve. Though she was told to begin more promptly, "Miss Becky" had ignored her presence and called the meeting to order. Hedwig Mass had been asked to be secretary pro tem because secretary Emily Bidlack had written the minutes on scrap paper and then threw them away. Margaret noted, "I had to write them in and be the goat." Later, Martha Bowman threw up her job as chairman as she "was forced." Robert's Rules of Order were to be used.

In the beginning Miss Frazer appointed the following assistants to Miss Slaymaker: Mrs. V. W. Dippel, Mrs. L.C. Dyer, Mrs. Jane E. Slaymaker, Mrs.

Edward Goodell, Miss Elizabeth Steinman, Mrs. John Hertzler, Miss Margaret Campbell, Miss Katherine Bedlack, Mrs. L.M. Heitschu, Mrs. Koneita Straub, Miss Harriet Honoman, Miss Helen Holbrook, Mrs. George P. Brown, Mrs. Harry Baumgardner, Mrs. John L. Atlee, Mrs. Lloyd Geyer, Miss Elizabeth Falck, Mrs. Sumner Brown, Mrs. Frank Williamson, Mrs. John Wickersham, Mrs. Charles Hagar, and Miss Margaret Humphreville. She urged them to support the Junior's establishing a juvenile department in the public library.

The Juniors selected the motto "Opus," a slogan, "Work Together in Harmony," a club pin which sold for twenty-five cents, and a seal which disappeared shortly after it was made. White gloves were worn to meetings. Mary Black Diller, a Senior, wrote two Junior Club songs, one to the tune of *Poor Butterfly*, the other to *Old Black Joe*. Margaret Lincoln wrote, "she tried to get us to sing them at one of the meetings when several tableaux didn't come off, but both were so weird, and the members showed such a lack of enthusiasm that we gave up in disgust." Another try for a club song was written to the tune of *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, The Boys are Marching*. The Title was *Working for the Soldier Boys*, and it repeated the words "Knit, Knit, Knit" in the chorus.

Club colors were orange and black. The club seal was round with the word "Opus" in the center and "Junior Iris Club" around the rim. Refreshments were weak tea and wafers, sometimes tailor cakes and sugar buns, but during the war only "war biscuits." Once, to the disgust of the girls, there were "nigger babies and lime drops." By 1917 the Senior advisory committee had taken over serving tea.

In time the five to twelve year olds were called the "Girl's Division" and those to eighteen, the "Young Lady's Division." However, they did meet together at times.

The first three months of 1918 attendance "was a fizzle" for only about thirty "little kids" attended. Most of the older members had skipped the January election of officers, including the retiring and succeeding presidents. They'd all gone to the Shippen School—Linden Hall basketball game at Lititz.

During the first year, Margaret Lincoln, President, spoke on the work of the Juniors at the district Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs in Lancaster. The speech was given later in Reading and Wayne as the Federation hoped to organize more Juniors in the state.

## Programs

The club's programs were varied. A short business meeting concluded, most often the younger girls met in another room for games, songs, stories, domestic arts, and riddles. Prominent citizens gave lectures to the older members, supplemented by girls assigned to write and read essays on the topic of the day. Miss Rebecca Slaymaker lectured on "Poets" at the first meeting and four girls read poetry.

Some of the lecturers and their subjects were: Postmaster L.N. Spencer, "The U.S. Mails"; Frank Eshleman, Esq., "Local Inventions"; Charles S. Foltz, "Early Newspapers"; Dr. H.H. Apple, "Prominent Men"; Andrew Frantz, Esq., "Modern Inventions Brought Out by War"; Professor H.H. Beck, "Birds"; The Reverend George Ely, "The American Army"; there were talks on women's job opportunities and foreign countries. Occasionally non-members were admitted to a special lecture and were charged fifty cents.

Instruction in knitting and first aid was offered during program time. Drills were practiced at the Y.W.C.A. and for the first few years there was a maypole at the last spring meeting. One year Roth's orchestra was hired for the event. The younger girls played musical games and the five year olds led the grand march, all in costume. There were outings to Carlisle and Valley Forge.

A 1917 program included a paper by May Gabel and Mary Black Diller on "Our Heroes." There were also five vocal solos, three piano solos and two more vocal solos that same meeting. Miss Alice Fegley, kindergarten teacher, superintended special parties such as Christmas and May Day for the "Children."

There was usually a joint meeting for the musicals. At one, sixteen girls sang "Blowing Bubbles" and blew real soap bubbles. At another, dolls were brought and lullabies of many nations sung. A sixteen year old French pianist was brought to the Fulton Opera House by the Juniors under the direction of the Iris Club's Junior music committee mentor, Miss Margaret Humphreville. Next day the public was invited to a reception for the artist at the club house; fee thirty five cents.

There were playlets, interpretive dancing and tableaux. One member recalls that one of the girls danced the *Awakening of Spring*. She reclined on the floor and gradually rose, revealing a pink bloomer leg which had escaped it's elastic and hung to her ankle Unfazed, she finished her dance by hitching it up each time it skidded down her leg, ignoring the giggles of her audience.

## Dances

Ballroom dancing was very popular with the older girls and often after meetings chairs were pushed back to the walls and a record was put on the phonograph so the girls could dance with each other. The first spring of the club's existence a series of three dances was given. They were open to friends benefitting the proposed children's reading room of the public library. Admission was fifty cents and Eckenrode's orchestra provided the music.

Officers and chaperones were in the receiving line. At first the girls chose chaperones, but later Iris Club members served. At the March 1916 meeting of the Senior Board, it was decided that two of these dances would be free of room charges to the Juniors. Juniors were charged full price of admission for Senior entertainments. Later in the same minutes, it was noted that the twelve dollars paid by the Juniors for the Valentine dance would be returned.

In the fall of 1916, dancing and cards were offered with Brubaker's Orchestra providing music. The "young ladies" savored Saturday evening dances from seven to eleven thirty. "Outsider's" admission was fifty cents. A 1918 holiday dance was attended by one hundred and fifty dancers, dancing to the music of Roth's orchestra. At a December meeting of that year, Miss Slaymaker urged the Juniors to insist that the semi-annual dues be paid before admission to the January and May dances.

The 1921 club year opened with a New Year's night dance. Younger members danced and played games from seven to nine. The older girls were allowed to dance from eight to twelve. A newspaper clipping of that year tells of the Annual Spring Dance held from nine to one o'clock, music by the Alpine orchestra. In the receiving line were: Mrs. Paul Ryder, Miss Frances Hosterman, president, Mrs. Cyrus Meminger, and Miss Bernice Reiker, dance chairman. All who attended were named, including the boys and out-of-towners. At an earlier dance the chaperones were: Miss Laura Watt, chairman of the advisory board of the Junior Club; Miss Jane Bower, Mrs. Edwin Hartman, and Mrs. Scott Baker. Thirty eight girls and ten boys were noted.

Chaperones at a later Christmas dance were: Mrs. Wm. Shand, Miss Laura Watt, and Mrs. B.C. Atlee, as well as president Virginia Straub. Evidently the boy/girl ratio was improved because forty-four girls and thirty boys were listed. Miss Straub wore a gown of yellow, trimmed in flame. Mrs. Atlee wore white, Miss Watt a purple appliqued gown, and Mrs. Shand, one of red.

## Civic Affairs

In the first year of its existence, the Juniors had a Valentine's Dance for the benefit of a new children's room at the Lancaster Public Library. Admission was thirty-five cents. Tickets were sold at A.J. Miller's drug store, J.B. Miller's drug store and Fondersmith's book store. The profit was sixty dollars. The girls "worked among the shut-ins," supplied drinking cups to the Day Nursery and collected two hundred toys for the Home for Friendless Children. The Eastern District of the Federation of Women's Clubs awarded them ten dollars "on behalf of the club's work." This was donated to the General Hospital, noting that the same amount would be given to St. Joseph Hospital in the future.

Christmas, 1919, "Sunshine Jars" were filled for fifteen institutions. Children and women there received candy and cookies; men, cigars and tobacco. Christmas trees were trimmed for "inmates of the almshouse." That year sixty girls dressed in the Red Cross "uniforms," marched to the General and St. Joseph hospitals and presented blankets. The Senior club had established the Rainbow Inn Coffee House in a vacant saloon as a prohibition alternative to after work drinking. The Juniors gave the sugar used there.

In December, 1919, the Juniors sponsored the first civic luncheon ever

held in Lancaster. It was held at the Stevens House with an attendance of three hundred. There were twenty-four tables of displays and samples from local manufacturers and businesses. Speakers were Dr. W.K. Heister, Dr. H.M.J. Klein, Dr. J.C. Bowman, and Dr. Isadore Rosenthal. There was music and Mary Elizabeth Strickler, dressed as a Hershey chocolate bud, distributed candy courtesy of "Mr. Milton Hershey, the chocolate king."

An early Settler's Tea in 1920 made possible eight sunshine boxes and sixteen boxes of cake distributed to the sick. Eleven Juniors staged a vaudeville show at the Y.W.C.A., admission fifty cents. The forty-six dollar profit was divided between the General Hospital and the camp fund of the "Y."

Little community activity is noted for 1921. Money was collected for the Senior project, the China famine fund. There is just a mention of a Christmas bazaar. A bandage roller used during World War I was presented to St. Joseph Hospital. The last known Junior activity was the presentation to the clubhouse of a framed photograph of former president Miss Susan Frazer.

The 1922-23 Senior yearbook notes a bazaar given by the Juniors and Seniors. Baskets, woodcarvings and other handwork of patients of Mount Airy and Hamburg Hospitals for the Tubercular were offered as a special attraction. Fifty dollars was sent to them, fifty dollars to the Occupational Therapy Center of Philadelphia and two hundred dollars was put into the club house mortgage fund.

## Patriotic Projects

Miss Alice Nevin, Iris Club founder and first president, was also a founder of the Lancaster Red Cross Society, a branch of the Washington, D.C. chapter. The first local meeting was held at the clubhouse in 1914. Miss Frazer, president of the Senior Club, was an enthusiastic supporter also, and the Juniors were recruited to do Red Cross work during World War I. They applied for and were given the first institutional life membership in the United States. The certificate was framed and hung in the clubhouse. They also gifted a life membership to Miss Frazer in 1916 on her retirement as president of the Senior Club.

One former member recalls that her aunt had made her uniform consisting of a white apron, a headband stitched with a red cross and an arm knitting bag of white linen with a red cross applique. At one regular meeting, members, some only five years old, dressed in these uniforms, presented a knitted blanket to a red cross official to be given to Percy Lord, the second black man from the city and county to enlist. Speakers were Dr. H.M.J. Klein, B. C. Atlee, and Rabbi Isadore Rosenthal. Later a "Festival de Mayo" was held at the clubhouse. There was a bazaar and entertainment from eight to nine o'clock and from nine to twelve, dancing.

It was decided to ask Mayer Trout to secure ten soldiers' names and

find their wants and fulfill them. Junior president Margaret Lincoln notes, "This never materialized, as usual."

Professor Globisch of the Y.M.C.A. consented to teach the girls to drill. For several meetings half were to knit while the other half drilled. Margaret Lincoln wrote, "Mr. Globisch was a martyr to the cause, for we drilled about as orderly as a pack of hounds." Later "Mr. A. W. Globisch, physical director of the Y.M.C.A., gave us military drilling twice, but the club members were so unmanageable and stamped around the auditorium in such a disorderly manner that he never appeared a third time. I certainly pitied him when he tried to hold our attention and teach us the mysteries of right about-face and wheeling. The perspiration coursed down his furrowed brow and he shouted like a major general. The girls just giggled and did the very opposite of what they were ordered to do, of course. Miss Becky (Mentor, Miss Slaymaker) was wild."

In 1918 the Juniors were awarded a new 1918 United States flag for their services in selling war stamps. The club had bought its third liberty bond and three hundred and sixty stamps for itself. A final report in 1919 showed that the group had sold almost five thousand dollars worth. That year an Easter dance benefited soldiers' gifts. Roth's orchestra played for the sixteen dances of the "program dance." The last World War I project was known as an "Ally Tea." New teapots and small tea cups that the Juniors had purchased were used. Five dollars was sent to help war convalescents in France.

## Last Years

The first hint of "trouble in paradise" is noted in 1920 when the Junior board acted to limit Junior age to eighteen and a Senior committee conferred with Miss Slaymaker about the Juniors. It was decided that the Mothers' Council should have twelve members, three from the Senior board and nine members at large. It was also decided that the Juniors pay room rent for two Saturdays a month beginning January 1921, at the regular member rental price.

Miss Slaymaker wrote a protesting letter, and a special meeting of the Iris Club was called. A committee was appointed to call on Miss Slaymaker to discuss desired changes: the Mothers' Council must be Iris Club members but, if wished, four honorary members could be added, age limit should be eighteen, the Juniors may write only two pages in the Senior yearbook, twenty five percent of their income should be given to the upkeep of the club house, and four dances a year would be allowed, one rental free, three half price of club member's fee.

The executive board regretted that Miss Slaymaker understood that Juniors were to be eliminated from civic and philanthropic work and that only children of club members could join. It was voted that there would be no refunds of membership fees or calling off of memberships of the Mothers' Council or the Girls' Division, as they planned to call it, but membership would continue

until the end of the Junior year, January first, 1921.

At the June first meeting of the Senior Board, the resignation of Miss Slaymaker was read and accepted. The minutes of the Girls' Division were read, showing the organization had permanently disbanded. In September, Mrs. Sumner Brown was appointed to organize a department for fifteen- to twenty-one-year-olds. Those who had been Juniors and were at least eighteen could join the Seniors without any initiation fee. Dues were four dollars, to be paid half in April, half in December, with fifty cents going to the Senior Club treasurer. By December seventh there were twenty-nine members.

In 1921 the Girls' Division gave one hundred and twenty-five dollars to finance Miss Mary Warfel's musical afternoon, "Perhaps boys would be admitted." Mrs. E.N. Stimson, who had been appointed new Girls' Division asked the board for guidance. She reported sixty-four members. An advisory committee was formed with approval of the Girls' and Senior boards. Some of the new rules were: fifty cents per member would be given to the Seniors, age limits would be fifteen to twenty-one, out of town guests may come to meetings and the official name would be "Junior Section."

Mrs. Stimson was reappointed at the end of her term but resigned. Miss Elizabeth Peale took over assisted by Mrs. Stimson and Miss Kitty Brown. There were only twenty-four dollars in the treasury. Representatives were sent to the Pennsylvania State Federation of Womens' Clubs convention. There were more "new rules." No married members allowed, the Junior membership committee would propose a new member endorsed by two Juniors and two Seniors. Those at college were charged half the regular dues. The club would reorganize (again) along the lines of the State Federation.

By October 1922, there was a balance of \$350.00 in the treasury and it was decided to publish a Junior yearbook. The 1923-24 Junior Iris club yearbook is lengthy. The Senior yearbook of 1924 lists the program for each of the younger and older girls' groups and a list of their members' names. At this time the Senior board voted that Junior age limits could be twenty-five years or a Junior could retain membership until there was a vacancy in the Senior club. At this point they would be eligible to enter the Senior club through the membership committee. In December, Miss Peale was asked to be present at a special Senior dance committee meeting when the social dancing rules of the American National Association of Dancing Masters were adopted. They were:

1. For social dancing, it is requested that the more exaggerated forms of syncopated music of the so-called jazz music not be used.

2. A couple dancing should always maintain a position in which neither one is appearing to be leaning toward the other. The only correct position is one in which a partner is not held tightly and is able to rest her arm on the other's shoulder and hold her head erect so that each may have freedom of motion.

3. The proper dancing step is not a jerky one but is the same as a natural



walking step, neither longer or shorter except in exhibition dancing, which belongs on the stage and not the ballroom.

4. The so-called dancing in which no progress is made on the floor is not dancing and therefore not permitted.

These rules were reprinted for rental dancing. In January the Senior board discussed how to enforce the rules.

By Spring 1923, the Senior advisory board said it needed a closer relationship with the Junior advisory chairman. The Senior board stated that it was the duty of the Junior chairman to attend Senior Board meetings, that dance chaperones should be approved by the Senior house committee, and that the Senior dance committee must attend every subscription dance. Meetings with regular programs were held Friday nights and were purely cultural though members looked forward to a "broader program."

There is little or no information on the further doings of what was now known as the Junior Section. Two members recently interviewed said they attended only the dances.

The Senior yearbook of 1925-26 notes, "Inasmuch as we, the Senior advisory committee of the Junior Section of the Iris Club feel that other agencies in Lancaster are taking care of what the Junior Section was meant to do, and also, as we do not consider it worth while to maintain a Junior Section for social purposes alone, therefore we recommend to the Senior board of management that the Junior Section of the Iris Club be discontinued." The Board so acted on the suggestion.

Interviews in 1970 with past president of the Iris Club, Mrs. George Mann, and former active member of the Juniors, Mrs. Richard Barr, revealed little more of the reason for the demise of the Juniors. Mrs. Mann felt it started with the dissatisfaction of the Senior Club with the leadership of Miss Slaymaker. The Juniors complained of her old-fashioned ways and strict rules. Mrs. Barr asserted that she had attended all the dances and never saw a liquor flask, anyone drunk, or improper dancing. Both felt the organizing of a Junior League in Lancaster in 1923 had a great influence in the disinterest and loss of Junior members.

This account gives us an insight as to how a group of middle and upper middle class Lancaster women furthered the social graces, motivated the civic and cultural activities of their young ladies. It is also a comment on the times of World War I, Prohibition and the Jazz Era.

Sources: Iris Club minute books, 1916-24; Iris Club Yearbooks 1916-24; Scrapbooks; Jr. Iris Club news clipping 1916-17; Margaret Lincoln 1916-17; Evelyn Pioso Davidson 1922-23; Interviews; Former Iris Club Members, Virginia Houser Esterly, Kitty Miller Finerock, Esther Stoll Lowry, Alma Sprecher Mueller, Mildred Hess Norton, Pauline Frantz Snavelly, Nancy Heistand Vanderslice, & Mary Fohl Witwer. Iris Club Members, Mrs. Richard Barr, Mrs. Geo. Mann.....Klein, H.M.J., *Lancaster County Pennsylvania* v. III, p. 33.