

A History of
The College Club of
Fanwood-Scotch Plains

Compiled in Sept. 1983
and revised in Oct. 2008
by Helen Aron

Organization

In February 1933 Miss Lillian Virginia Hope brought ten other college women together in her home on Martine Avenue to discuss the possible organization of a college club. The objectives of the club would be (1) to increase the interest of local young women in going to college, (2) to “eventually prove of material aid” since a scholarship fund would become a primary purpose for the group, and (3) to be a source of pleasure to the women themselves.

A committee was appointed to draw up a constitution. This constitution was adopted, and officers were elected at the first meeting of the Fanwood College Women’s Club on March 13, 1933. Miss Hope, later to become Mrs. C.A. Powell, was chosen to be the first president.

In its early years the Club met monthly at the homes of members. For many years College Club meetings were held at the First United Methodist Church in Scotch Plains. Refreshments after the meeting were elegantly served on china and silver, and tables were covered with linen cloths. In 2001, as membership declined, the Club’s budget could sustain only a nominal fee for a meeting room. The meeting venue was moved first to the United National Bank in Fanwood, then to Union Catholic High School in Scotch Plains, and finally to our present location, the Forest Road Park Recreation Room in Fanwood.

The objectives of the organization have remained the same over the past seventy-five years. The name, however, underwent a change in May 1970, when it became the College Club of Fanwood – Scotch Plains. At that time the Club seal was also created. For tax and bulk-mailing purposes, College Club became incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1977.

Membership

The Club was organized by 12 original members. By the group’s fifth anniversary the president reported “...membership has increased from the original number to 45 and has retained this number despite many changes. This membership represents colleges from Idaho to Nova Scotia and from Montreal to South Carolina...” The colleges from which those 45 members had graduated included many of the traditional women’s colleges, such as Wellesley, Barnard, Vassar, and Simmons.

College Club’s tenth year took place during very difficult times. In 1942 – 1943 several meetings were cancelled due to the ban on pleasure driving, and membership stood at only 43. By 1953, however, College Club had 107 members, and by our thirtieth anniversary in 1963 membership stood at 218 members.

The largest number of members College Club ever had was 224 in 1971. However, with so many women entering the workforce, almost immediately membership began to decline. For our fortieth anniversary in 1973 we were already down to 189 members. At our fiftieth anniversary in 1983 membership

stood at 135, and currently, in College Club's 75th year, we have 92 members (66 active and 26 sustaining).

In 1964 a new membership category, associate membership, was adopted. Anyone who had been a regular member for ten years could apply for this status. Associate members had to pay dues and had voting privileges, but they were relieved of committee responsibilities and fundraiser ticket purchases. Because of the Club's need for actively participating members, no new applications for associate membership were accepted after May 15, 1978. The last associate member was Jean Winsor, who had been president from 1965–1967 and a continuous College Club member for 52 years. Jean passed away in 2005, and thus ended the category of associate member.

In 1989 the membership category of sustaining member was inaugurated. This status is open to former active members who have moved from the Fanwood - Scotch Plains area. Sustaining members pay a membership fee and have all membership privileges except voting.

Fundraisers

Fundraising for the scholarship fund has been crucial to College Club since its inception. During the organization's first year, for instance, three fundraisers were held. The first daytime bridge games in 1933 earned about \$20 for the scholarship fund, and an evening bridge later that year cleared another \$27. For its third project, the Fanwood College Women's Club sold tickets for 40¢ each to two benefit performances of the Plainfield Players. The Club was able to keep 10¢ from each ticket sold and earned \$8.50 toward the first scholarship!

In the 1930s fundraisers included a box social, various dances, a historical tour to points of interest in neighboring towns, the sale of tickets for a benefit movie in Westfield, and the sale of a cleaning fluid. The first fashion show/bridge was held at School 4 in 1936. Members modeled old-time fashions, and the event provided \$123.50 for the scholarship fund. This event developed into the dessert bridge and fashion show, which was an annual College Club fundraiser for many years. It was also the precursor of our current fashion show and luncheon.

The 1940s were lean years for fundraising. For example, in 1945 it was decided to sell chances for nylon stockings. After calling six stores, the Club was able to purchase four pairs of stockings in four different sizes. Chances were sold for 10¢ each or three for a quarter, and a profit of \$50 was realized on those four pairs of nylons!

By 1950 College Club again had two fundraisers, a bridge/fashion show, which earned \$331 for the Scholarship Fund, and a book sale, which realized a profit of \$250. By college Club's 25th anniversary in 1958, the organization raised \$1,470 for the Scholarship Fund and had voted to limit fundraising projects to two in addition to round robin bridge. From about 1958 to 1963 one of the projects, which was both a fundraiser and a community service, was the presentation of a Children's Theater production.

The 1960s brought two innovations in fund raising. The first was the addition of Couples' Bridge to the already-existing round robin bridge as a permanent fundraiser. The second innovation of the 1960s was the Community Date Calendar, initiated and developed in 1963-1964 by Marion Hobart Butler. The calendar was made a permanent College Club fundraising project in 1965, when it netted \$775 for the Scholarship Fund.

In the 1970s College Club members put together Creative Cuisine Cook Boxes of recipes, which were sold at the Fashion Show/Bridge to earn additional money for the Scholarship Fund.

From 1981 to 1988 the women of College Club held a Winter Fantasy each December. Over 60 local organizations decorated trees and displays, which were exhibited to the public for a modest admission charge. In addition, Club members offered a light lunch and sold baked goods, other homemade foods, and many craft items.

When the recycling facility opened in Fanwood in 1986, College Club began its participation. Recycling has been a continuous fundraiser for us since that time. Other fundraisers in the 1980s included a raffle, a book sale at the Martine Avenue Bookstore, and the sale of Entertainment Books for Central NJ and Northern NJ.

Many small fundraisers were attempted in the 1990s as College Club cast about for a replacement event for Winter Fantasy. We sold more Entertainment Books, had another book benefit at A Novel Place (formerly the Martine Avenue Bookstore), ran a spring plant sale, sold raffle tickets, and held a yogurt night at a store in Westfield. In 1993 the fashion show was reinstated for the spring, and has been a successful fundraiser ever since.

In 2001 College Club held its first book fair at the Barnes and Noble store in Springfield. The Club received a percentage of the purchase price of most items if the purchaser presented a College Club voucher. This fundraiser was held each November for seven years. After 2007 the guidelines were changed so that a book fair was no longer advantageous for us. Instead, we occasionally wrap books and gifts at Barnes and Noble during the Christmas/Hanukah season, and in exchange patrons make a small monetary donation.

Currently College Club's two major fundraisers are the Community Date Calendar in the late summer and the fashion/show luncheon at Shackamaxon Golf and Country Club in the spring. Through the efforts of Mari McDevitt, the number of local advertisers on the calendar has risen to one hundred, the maximum possible. Among the advertisers in 2008-2009 are 18 businesses that have supported the calendar for at least 25 years. In 2007 Dorothy Lusk initiated a calendar design contest in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood elementary schools. The winning design is featured as the cover of our Community Date Calendar. For 2007-2008 calendar sales netted the College Club Scholarship Fund just under \$7,500.

For the past three years the fashion show has included a silent auction of weekend getaways, a cruise, and other expensive items. As a result, in 2008 the

Fashion Show and Luncheon earned a record \$13,300 for the Scholarship Fund. For both 2007 and 2008 Miss New Jersey added glamour to the event and served as a fashion model.

Scholarships

The Club awarded its first scholarship of \$200 during 1936 – 1937. The recipient was Selma Peterson, who attended the New Jersey College for Women (later called Douglass College). Miss Peterson was also the 1937 – 1938 scholarship winner, but she left school due to a lack of funds.

The first time more than one annual scholarship was awarded was in 1949. That year two scholarships, each for \$300, were given.

The amounts that College Club was able to give in scholarships grew steadily. We were able to award over a thousand dollars in scholarship money for the first time in 1955, when a total of \$1,100 was distributed among five recipients. In 1961 a policy change was enacted so that four-year renewable scholarships could be given. For the golden anniversary in May 1983 College Club awarded more scholarship money than it had in any previous year: \$9,000 to a total of 12 young women. In May 2008, College Club's 75th year, \$23,500 in scholarship funds were presented to 11 female students residing in Fanwood and Scotch Plains. Since the first scholarship in 1936, the College Club of Fanwood-Scotch Plains has awarded just under \$450,000 to approximately 425 students.

The policy of presenting an engraved silver bowl to the top female graduate of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School was approved by the membership in 1961. In keeping up with changing lifestyles, by 1989 the Club began discussing replacing the silver bowl with a cash award to the top female graduate. At first both the silver bowl and a token amount of cash were given, but by 1992 the recipient received cash only.

For many years the members of College Club cooked and served a hot, multi-course dinner on the evening of the scholarship awards in mid-May. Eventually fewer and fewer members had the time to prepare the dinner, so for ten years, from 1987 to 1997, the May dinner/scholarship awards night took place at various local restaurants. However, this became too costly. Beginning in 1998, the event evolved into a scholarship reception and catered supper held at the Scotch Hills Country Club with members providing only the homemade desserts.

Community Service Projects

Over the years College Club has made many donations for worthwhile purposes in the local area. For instance, in its early years the organization gave the high school library a subscription to *National Geographic*. Among the civic activities of the 1940s were a magazine subscription for Camp Kilmer, participation in a patriotic rally, work on a special drive for fat salvage, and staffing the USO Center in Plainfield. In the 1950s and 1960s the Club made annual contributions to Camp Endeavor, a local camp for underprivileged

children. Money was given to the local libraries, and members volunteered their time for clerical duties at the libraries. When Union Junior College (now Union County College) constructed its first building in Cranford, College Club donated \$200 for furniture.

In October 1969, as a community service, College Club sponsored an address by noted anthropologist Margaret Mead, who spoke on the generation gap. The event was held at Terrill Junior High School, and no fee was charged.

Three community committees owe their existence in large measure to College Club. First, the Joint Civic Committee, founded by Marie Leppert, was established in 1966 and remained active for over ten years. Local clubs and organizations sent representatives to the Joint Civic Committee, which screened and endorsed candidates for the Board of Education. Second, College Club was instrumental in the formation of the Scholarship Clearing Board (a.k.a. Clearinghouse) in 1962. The Clearinghouse enables local organizations that award scholarships to work together and keep each other informed. Third, beginning in 1978, in conjunction with the PTA, College Club sponsored the Volunteer Resource Directory, which provided a roster of speakers and programs for local schools and organizations. The Volunteer Resource Directory was taken over by the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system in 1986.

For many years College Club held a High School Night at which parents and students could hear a speaker in the field of higher education and ask him/her questions. In 1963, under the leadership of Louise Anderson, the format was changed to College Night. In addition to hearing a speaker, parents and college-bound teenagers could meet informally with graduates from over 60 colleges and universities. In 1968 it was decided that there would no longer be a speaker, and the format that we use today began to take shape. Local students are able to meet with and get information from representatives of colleges ranging from Vermont to Virginia and beyond. In 2007, 116 colleges and universities sent representatives to College Night. Over the years many of the costs of College Night were shifted to the Board of Education, and the high school has become a partner in preparations for this annual event.

June 1978 saw the launching of another community project, the Paperback Lending Library. The Library, which continues to function actively, is located at the Fanwood railroad station. College Club members donate paperback books to be placed on the Library shelves for commuters to read.

Interest Groups

Interest groups within the Club were originally called study groups. Begun in the 1960s were House and Garden, Drama, International Relations, Home Decorations, Music, the Art Circulating Library, and Literature. Only Literature, currently called the Book Group, remains. However, Drama and International Relations were active for many years. International Relations sponsored several foster children overseas. The Art Circulating Library circulated

prints of paintings by famous artists, and then the prints were sold at a general meeting.

Four interest groups were added in the 1970s: Gourmet Lunch, Couples' Dinner Group, Creative Arts, and Recent Grads. Recent Grads was originally intended as an interest group for women who had graduated from college within the last ten years and who were under 35 years of age. In the 1980s we added Ladies Who Lunch and a women's evening cultural group that attended plays, went to museums, and visited historic sites. Because our lives in the 21st century have become so busy, only three interest groups remain in 2008: Book Group, Ladies Who Lunch, and Recent Grads.

Anniversaries

College Club made 1983 a special year as it celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The mayors of Fanwood and Scotch Plains declared the week of March 14 – 19, 1983 to be College Club Week. On March 15, 1983, the Club's actual anniversary date, Jane Clausen arranged a Scholarship Brunch and Fashion Show at Hahne's Department Store in Westfield. All proceeds (\$800) went to a special anniversary scholarship fund. That year three special anniversary scholarships, based solely on merit, were awarded. Members celebrated at a Golden Anniversary Ball in April, and Marie Leppert and Mary Ann Jacobsen planned a reception for previous and current members as well as previous and current scholarship winners. The Eastern Revue, a barbershop quartet, entertained at the reception, and a light supper was served. A fifty-year history of College Club was prepared by Helen Aron.

For our 65th anniversary in 1998 we celebrated with a wine and cheese party. Current and former members as well as current and former scholarship recipients were invited. Senator Donald DiFrancesco, President of the New Jersey Senate at that time, was the keynote speaker. Past Presidents Marie Leppert and Jean Winsor presented an anecdotal history of the Club. At the conclusion of the program an auction was held to benefit the Scholarship Fund. The auction raised nearly \$7,000.

College Club celebrates its 75th anniversary in this year of 2008, and we are giving ourselves a birthday party in October to celebrate 75 years of service, friendship, and commitment to education, especially for women. Wine, cheese, and light refreshments will be served. Those who attend will receive an engraved wine glass to keep as a memento. For 2008 the College Club of Fanwood-Scotch Plains has been named the Scotch Plains Volunteer Organization of the Year and will be honored at the Mayor's Charity Gala on December 5.