

A Short History of The Cosmopolitan Club

The Cosmopolitan Club, approaching its centennial in 2009, has had three different headquarters, has modified its name several times and undergone many other changes, but has always retained its original purpose: to provide fun for serious women, and to offer the widest of intellectual hospitality and congenial companionship in an attractive gathering place.

In 1909, sponsors of an organization for governesses that met on weekends in the Froebel League's schoolrooms decided that the group should become the Cosmos Club. They leased an apartment in the Gibson Building on East 33rd Street. The rooms were on the second floor and overlooked a stable yard; the buzz of horseflies was frequently heard during Board meetings, lectures, meals, receptions and livelier diversions. By 1910, the group's name had been changed to the Women's Cosmopolitan Club, and it was to benefit all women, self-supporting or not, who were engaged or interested in the liberal arts or professions. The following year a constitution was adopted and the Club was incorporated. Members paid yearly dues of twenty dollars and forty cents for a lunch. Helen Gilman Brown was the first president of the incorporated club. Distinguished members in those formative years include Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, Grace Dodge, General Custer's widow, the violinist Katherine Parlow, the sculptor Anna Hyatt, and the ballet dancer Adeline Genee. The first of many costume revels, *An Evening in a Persian Garden*, was held in 1913. There were Club members in ravishing costumes, snake dancers and a poet who read Persian verses. The Club's fame spread after that, and a larger home was needed to accommodate a growing number of members and a busier program of activities.

The new clubhouse was on Lexington Avenue at 40th Street. Part of it was located in a garage that had formerly been a stable, inspiring the Club to adopt its Pegasus logo. In March of 1914, the Club celebrated its move with a Roman Revel, and the following year changed its name to The Cosmopolitan Club. During World War I, the Club had many members in uniform, raised money for Belgian Relief and for the purchase of an

ambulance in Italy, and installed machines that every week knitted hundreds of pairs of socks for our troops. Club members were active in the suffrage movement and demonstrations in the years before 1920, when American women won the right to vote. Among the speakers at the Club in this period were Amy Lowell, Vachel Lindsay, Siegfried Sassoon, George Kennan, Maria Montessori and members Cecilia Beaux and Mrs. Herbert Hoover. The now traditional and popular members' lunch talks began in 1918, calling upon a member to give a short account of the special public or emergency war work she was doing.

By 1926, the Club was outgrowing its second home and began to consider a new clubhouse further uptown. The vote to move passed in 1930. A site, then occupied by a stable, was found on 66th Street. Despite the deepening Depression, funds were raised to construct a clubhouse. It opened its doors in December 1932, in a building designed by Thomas Ellett, for which he won the following year's Gold Medal of the Architectural League of New York.

The larger clubhouse made it possible to expand programs and events. During the 1930s, performers and speakers at the Club included Paul Hindemith, Nadia Boulanger, Sergei Prokofiev, Count Basie, Lotte Lenya, the Trapp family, poets Robert Frost and Padraic Colum, journalists and authors Dorothy Thompson, Edward R. Murrow and Pearl Buck. Soon, war began again in Europe, and again the Club responded actively, establishing a War Relief Committee and raising money for the war effort. A workroom produced 4000 garments and assembled kits for refugee women. The Club sold war bonds and installed a radio so members could listen to broadcasts on foreign policy sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Parties for service men and women were held every Monday. Classes were given in first aid, home nursing and nutrition, and a victory garden was planted on the terrace.

After the war, Club member Eleanor Roosevelt became the United States' representative to the United Nations. Notable national and international figures came to the Club and spoke about everything from the Marshall Plan and recovery in Europe to current trends

in domestic policy to Chinese pottery. The Club welcomed, and still does, many foreign members, and formed an International Visitors Committee.

By the 1950s, members were taking Club-sponsored trips throughout the city, and eventually further afield in America and Europe. During the last half of the 20th Century the Club enlarged its membership and eclectic program of activities. Today, the Club offers lectures and concerts, exercise classes, reading groups, bridge games, foreign language lessons, a computer room, meals, movie nights, dances, and much more. The many social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, in particular the new professional opportunities open to women, affected but did not significantly alter The Cosmopolitan Club. It continues to be an inviting place for women seeking good company and cultural and intellectual stimulation.