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## The women's division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1922-1976

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**THE WOMEN'S DIVISION  
OF THE OMAHA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
1922-1976**

A Thesis  
Presented to the

Department of History  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Sharen A. Rotolo

May 2001

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**THE WOMEN'S DIVISION  
OF THE OMAHA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
1922-1976**

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Masters of Arts,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Date April 12, 2001

**THE WOMEN'S DIVISION  
OF THE OMAHA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
1922-1976**

Sharen A. Rotolo, MA

University of Nebraska, 2001

Advisor: Dr. Harl Dalstrom

In 1922, a group of 121 business and professional women, members of the Omaha Business and Professional Women League, became the first women members of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, a civic group that had been promoting the growth of the city since 1893. As women across the country, fresh from winning a seventy-year suffrage fight, were trying to move ahead yet in other areas, politically, professionally and legally, the women in the Omaha Chamber hoped to be treated as equals in the Chamber organization. They believed that when the Senior Chamber established a separate Women's Division, one in which they, the women, could administer their own projects, they would also be cooperating with the men in areas important to the city. Looking back, this cooperation turned out to be significantly gender-related.

The membership of the Division grew from 121 in 1922 to over 1,000 by the mid-fifties and then began dropping. The members also changed: more were married and fewer were professional. Many joined but did not participate in committees or on projects. Initially, the group willingly took on the sponsorship and management of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra, a heavy commitment. Later projects were much less involved and time-consuming.

The association of the Women's Division and the Senior Chamber was a long one: fifty-four years. During the time, the relationship changed until the Women's Division

emerged as a clearly subordinate, even auxiliary, group. While contributing much to their community, the women rarely got involved in the complex management, strategy and goals of the businessmen who made up the Chamber. They were, yet were not, legitimate Chamber members.

When an order from the Senior Board in 1976 terminated the Division as an economic measure, the surprised women tried to convince the Chamber of the value of their projects. However, the decision was made leaving the women with a choice of joining the full Chamber or quitting their Chamber association altogether. Some, not appreciating either option, formed the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce, which still exists today.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis project involved a great number of people who have encouraged me since I first undertook the project, through all of my research until the completion of the paper. Additionally, I want to thank those who encouraged me earlier, those who knew I could and should pursue writing of paper of this scope. I want to thank my thesis committee: Dr. Sharon Wood, Dr. Charles Gildersleeve, and Dr. Harl Dalstrom. Dr. Dalstrom, as my thesis advisor, suggested that there could be a thesis in the years of microfilmed Chamber of Commerce records that are housed in the University of Nebraska at Omaha library. He helped me narrow down my topic to the Women's Division and his assistance kept me from being overwhelmed with the amount of information available in those records.

Although the University library houses the original copies of the Chamber of Commerce records, much of my research was conducted using the microfilmed copies on the first floor—hours, days, weeks, months, spent reading microfilm records. I want to thank the library staff for the help with sometimes uncooperative microfilm readers, damaged copy cards, and patience with the filing and refiling of the Chamber microfilm rolls. And thanks to Les Valentine who was instrumental in saving the records and getting them on microfilm instead of letting the Chamber toss them out. What a loss that would have been.

I want to acknowledge the cooperation I received from women who had been members of the Women's Division, several who are now in their eighties, and those employees of the Chamber in the 1970s who shared some memories with me. Their recollections added to the official records of Division minutes and helped me think of these women as more than names on paper.

Also, thanks to Joe Rotolo who spent hours reading and proofing, and for listening to my ideas, my complaints, my frustrations, and my finished paper.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In a speech titled “Citizenship in a Republic,” Theodore Roosevelt stated that “it is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who strives valiantly . . . because there is no effort without error and shortcoming.” Roosevelt praised the man who strives “to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.”<sup>1</sup> In 1922, the Omaha Chamber of Commerce first opened its membership to women—a new arena for them. These most recent members, formerly belonging to the Business and Professional Women's League, were segregated into a separate Women's Division, but they had faith in the Chamber which stated that they, the women, in their new Division would be “identical” to the men. Even with the women's “enthusiasm” and “great devotion,” this did not happen. Although women were eventually accepted—decades later and unceremoniously—into the full chamber itself, the Division continued as a separate entity for fifty-four years. The organization came full circle when in 1976 over 150 Division members separated, not by choice, from the Chamber and formed the Omaha Women’s Chamber of Commerce. It is not the aim here to point out where the women stumbled or where they could have done better, not even to decide if they triumphed or failed. Instead, it is to enter the story of the Women's Division to its appropriate place in history.

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic.” Speech delivered at Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910. *Autobiography: Condensed from the Original Ed., Supplemented by Letters, Speeches, and Other Writings, and Edited with an Introduction by Wayne Andrews.* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 317.

They may not have called themselves feminists, at least not on record, but the 121 charter members of the Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce advanced to a new level influencing both women's position in Omaha as well as the city's history. The business and professional women who joined the Chamber asked for the chance to participate with the men in Chamber programs. The story is all connected—the time, the city, the women, and the advances they were making towards equal status with men. The Division's history began in the early twenties but the story goes back much farther.

The campaign for woman suffrage in Nebraska had been a long one, as it had been in many other states. A woman suffrage amendment was presented to the voters of Nebraska in 1871, but lost by a margin of four to one. When “activists,” both women and men, recognized a need to be better organized, they formed the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association in 1882. As the state House and Senate had passed a suffrage amendment to the Nebraska Constitution in 1881, these newly organized reformers campaigned vigorously to convince the electorate of the justice of women's voting rights before the November 1882 election. Again, the measure was defeated, with 56,693 voting against and only 25,756 in favor of suffrage. It would be thirty years before the male electorate of Nebraska saw the suffrage amendment again on their ballot. And when they did, they voted it down by 10,000 votes. Finally, in 1917, a partial suffrage bill passed the Nebraska legislature allowing women to cast ballots in municipal and presidential elections but not, however, giving them the right to vote in any state elections. Full suffrage only came to the women of the state with the passage in 1919 and the ratification in 1920 of a national suffrage amendment to the United States Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Laura McKee Hickman, “Thou Shalt Not Vote: The Struggle for Woman's Suffrage in Nebraska,” (Masters Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1997). Even the passage of partial suffrage was the target of an anti-suffrage campaign. The 1882 voting totals are from *Omaha Weekly Republican*, November 17, 1882, 12.

During the course of those many years and long decades, the state attracted some of the prominent women in the movement. Amelia Bloomer, a neighbor from Council Bluffs, Iowa, had been in Omaha in the mid-1850s and almost induced the territorial legislature to adopt woman suffrage.<sup>3</sup> Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucy Stone made speaking tours in the later part of the nineteenth century, and Carrie Chapman Catt came to promote the issue in the early twentieth century.

Residents of Omaha, both men and women, played a significant role in the state suffrage effort. Both the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association—before they merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association—held national conferences in Omaha. There were suffrage and anti-suffrage groups active in the city. However, with the passage of a national suffrage amendment in Washington, D.C., in 1919, the suffrage supporters were clearly the strongest as both houses of the Nebraska legislature unanimously voted in favor and Nebraska became the fourteenth state to ratify.<sup>4</sup>

Omaha's roots go back to 1853 when it became a landing point for a Missouri River ferry crossing from Iowa. The following year, with the ratification of a treaty with the Omaha Indians, the area was opened to settlement. Omaha was named as the site of the first legislative session in Nebraska and after 1863 the Union Pacific Railroad was built west from the town. Despite losing out to Lincoln as the permanent state capital, the growth that

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<sup>3</sup>Louis Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II, The Suffragist of Council Bluffs," *The Annals of Iowa* 47 (Spring, 1985), 586-587.

<sup>4</sup>Hickman, "Thou Shalt Not Vote;" Thomas Chalmer Coulter, "A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856-1920" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1967); Ann Wilhite, "Sixty-Five Years Til Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 49 (Summer 1968), 149-164. It is not necessary to describe here all the details of that struggle. Several historians have written the story of how the women in Nebraska fought for the vote and how they met resistance along the way. Hickman, in her 1997 Master's thesis, "Thou Shalt Not Vote," does an excellent job of telling the story from 1864 to 1920. She not only describes the fight for the vote but also of the determined effort of the anti-suffrage movement in the state. Thomas Chalmer Coulter's earlier Ph.D. dissertation, "A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856-1920," is also helpful.

the railroad brought to the city made that loss seem less significant. The economy prospered in the early 1870s, and although the city suffered a setback with the national panic of 1873, it recovered and by the eighties, both the city of Omaha and the state of Nebraska flourished.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing to expand westward from the banks of the Missouri River, Omaha had grown to a city of 191,601 by 1920. Its position along the Nebraska-Iowa border put it in the midst of two very important agricultural states and gave it an advantage in processing agricultural products. Additionally, the young city was located in the heart of the Missouri Valley where ninety-three percent of the area was farmland, corn and livestock being the chief sources of income for the rural residents. Omaha was one of the leading grain markets with thirteen grain elevators in the city. In the early twenties these elevators received sixty-eight million bushels of grain annually. Additionally, there were six milling companies and an important bakery and cracker operation. With the advent of the trucking industry and improvement of public highways, Omaha became a major distribution center for processed food products. Also having an impact in Omaha was the refining plant of American Smelting and Refining Company, which during the war years had produced 15,000 tons of treated lead per month worth forty to sixty million dollars. The value of Omaha's wholesale business was approaching \$400 million in the early twenties, making the city important as a manufacturing and distribution center.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922, the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, originally called the Omaha Commercial Club, had been a part of Omaha for twenty-nine years. The business men who made up the Chamber had established a goal of working for the “common good in all

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<sup>5</sup>Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha*, revised edition, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>Ella Bartlett Knight, “Geographic Influences in the Location and Growth of Omaha” (M.A. Thesis, Clark University, 1924), 62-66; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Basic Nebraska Statistics 1920* Vol XIV (Washington: Government Printing Office), 8.

matters touching the general welfare of the city of Omaha.” This included attracting manufacturers and other business enterprises in the city and promoting the city in such a way as to increase trade and industry.<sup>7</sup> The Chamber in the early twenties had offices on the seventeenth and eighteenth floors of the Woodmen of the World Building at 17th and Farnam Streets. The over 2,000 member group accomplished its purpose through a score of committees; members worked on everything from their Membership Councils and Civic Improvement to Conservation and Agricultural committees. Another way of boosting the city was through the group’s publication, the *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*, where one can find enthusiastic reports about the economic conditions of the city. Hoping to reach prospective business owners looking at Omaha, the Chamber bragged about the city's expansive retail market. There were 154 towns and 29,330 farms with 500,000 prospective customers within a fifty-mile radius of the city. The Chamber claimed that the shopper from the country or small town could arrive in Omaha on one of the ten bus lines or twenty-two branch railroad lines. If the rural resident owned a car and roads were passable, he could drive into the city on the highways that connected Omaha with its trade territory.<sup>8</sup>

Omaha was home to the Union Stockyards Company of Omaha, which, with its fifty-six livestock commission firms, served 50,000 farmers and shippers each year. The Stockyards and the seventeen packing plants in the city employed 12,500 workers with a payroll of thirteen million dollars and receipts of 6,859,593 head of cattle, hogs, and sheep. Western Union located one of its seven area headquarters in Omaha where it employed 600, bringing a payroll and retail income to the city of \$865,248.<sup>9</sup> The retail business in Omaha totaled \$115 million annually. Overall business had increased 263 percent in the ten years

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<sup>7</sup>Louise Gilmore Donahue, *Pathways to Prosperity: A History of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce* (Omaha: Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 1993), 3.

<sup>8</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* X (March 18, 1922), 17.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, April 1, 1922, 1, February 4, 1922, 1.

from 1910 to 1920 giving the city a rank of from sixteenth to eighteenth in business, according to the growth of bank deposit volume, while the population ranking was thirty-fourth.<sup>10</sup>

Father Flanagan's Boys' Home was four years old and a campaign was underway to raise \$300,000 for a new home. Construction had begun on a new Commercial High School that was promised to be among “the largest and best buildings of the kind ever erected in this country.” Plans called for a four-story main structure, large swimming pool, two gymnasiums, a running track, large stadium, and classrooms for shop work, sewing, and cooking besides the normal departments. The city had set aside \$10,000 for establishing a “first class auto tourist camp” at Elmwood Park on the west end of the city. Omaha, in fact, led the eighteen cities in the Tenth Federal Reserve District in new construction in July 1921, with 165 permits issued having an estimated cost of \$1,497,930.<sup>11</sup>

The Chamber boasted, as was the tradition of such organizations, that Omaha was a very welcoming city. Another 1922 *Journal* article told of the 200 restaurants in greater Omaha. These employed 2,000 workers, served 70,000 meals each day, and represented an investment of two million dollars. A past president of the National Restaurant Men's Association reported that the prices were “at least as low as the same quality served in any other city of its size or larger.” He continued that the “average quality of the food and the service in the restaurants is a[b]ove the average of similar cities.”<sup>12</sup> Omaha also had thirty modern hotels with 5,000 rooms and the “lowest hotel rates” of any city of similar size.<sup>13</sup> Nearly half of the people living in Omaha in 1922 owned their own homes, which ranked the city fourth in a comparison of home ownership percentages. According to the rose-colored picture that the Chamber presented, the city had thirteen playgrounds, twenty-three

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., October 29, 1921, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., October 29, 1921, 18; July 23, 1921, 5; April 15, 1922, 7; September 3, 1921, 16.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., September 5, 1922, 12.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4.

parks, 170 churches, and was “without slums and tenements.” The Chamber also bragged that ninety percent of Omaha children attended the city's public schools.<sup>14</sup>

Times for some Omahans were prosperous enough that they could plan for recreation when not thinking about business. The ads in the newspapers promoted vacations—“Minnesota . . . The Land of Sky Blue Waters;” sail by “Fortnightly Service” to Japan, China, or the Philippines from Vancouver; take a train to Denver; or book an “Ideal Vacation Route to Europe on the White Star-Dominican Line.” An Omahan could travel to the Ozarks or New York; go on a Caribbean Sea “outing” or take a summer excursion to the Grand Canyon, California, Colorado, or the New Mexico Rockies.<sup>15</sup> All in all, the *Chamber of Commerce Journal* in September 1922 reported that “never in Omaha's history was there a more favorable outlook for the future.”<sup>16</sup> Did the women of the city share, or share in, that favorable outlook?

Although it is virtually impossible to classify a generation of women, the urban female of the 1920s most likely fell into one of the following categories: single young women, wives and mothers, active feminists, working women (mostly unskilled, working in factories, as domestics, etc.), and business and professional women. There was much overlapping, of course, and a woman's position was not stagnant but fluctuated as time passed.

The most colorful individual, often identified with prohibition, speakeasies and a spirited reputation, was the flapper. She could be recognized by her bobbed hair that was as

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., March 18, 1922, 5. The 1920 census showed that 95.3 percent of Omaha children aged 7 to 13 attended school, while 86.5 percent of the 14 and 15 year-olds, 44.1 percent of the 16 & 17 year-olds, and 14.2 percent of those aged 18 to 20 were enrolled. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population* Vol III (Washington: Government Printing Office), 604.

<sup>15</sup>*Omaha World-Herald*, May 15, 1922, 15-16.

<sup>16</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* X (September 16, 1922), 1. However, in contrast to this healthy and vigorous picture, Orville D. Menard describes an Omaha teeming with gambling, prostitution, corruption of city officials, and bootlegging in *Political Bossism in Mid-America: Tom Dennison's Omaha, 1900-1933* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America: 1989).

short as a man's. She had been accused of invading the barbershop with her short skirt, her unrestricted underwear (corsets were out), and her stockingless legs. She was enthralled by the new cosmetics that became a “hot” business. She wore perfume, face powder, and rouge, used face cream, and dyed her hair. Sales of these products soared from \$17 million in 1914 to \$141,488,000 in 1925.<sup>17</sup> She was the picture of the Roaring Twenties.

Still, in the 1920s, a majority of women preferred marriage and family to a career. Women were getting married younger and in greater numbers. Although many young working women would keep their jobs after marriage, most intended to quit when they became mothers. Even those young women with the potential for better jobs, the college-educated, were marrying and doing so at a younger age.<sup>18</sup> In response to a 1923 poll, ninety percent of the students at Vassar stated that they wanted to be married. Only eleven of the 152 questioned admitted that they would prefer a career in business or in a profession.<sup>19</sup> Describing the complexity of women's options in the 1920s, Dorothy Brown wrote about the “array of expectations, responsibilities, choices, and roles” the homemaker faced while advertisers in women's magazines led “a commercial campaign to keep women at home.”<sup>20</sup>

The feminist did not vanish with the ratification of suffrage, but moved on to other issues. The National American Woman Suffrage Association became the League of Women Voters. Its purpose was to build an informed citizenry with education, lectures, and the mobilization of new voters. The National Women's Party, a “single-issue pressure group” organized in the late teens to push for a constitutional settlement of the suffrage

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<sup>17</sup>Preston W. Slosson, *The Great Crusade and After: 1914-1928* (New York: MacMillan, 1929), 153-155.

<sup>18</sup>Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 148.

<sup>19</sup>William Chafe, *The American Woman Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 102.

<sup>20</sup>Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting A Course: American Women in the 1920s*, *American Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Barbara Haber (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 39; 101.



issue, saw its membership drop from a high of 50,000 in 1919 to just 151 paid members in 1921.<sup>21</sup> Yet it still sought reform both in a quest for sex equality as in the introduction of an Equal Rights Amendment, and sex differentials by protecting the “sex-based labor laws.” The Women's Joint Congressional Committee, a lobbying group formed with representatives of ten organizations such as the National League of Women Voters and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, had a six-point program, the most important of which was child protection.<sup>22</sup>

The working woman of the 1920s held a job, most frequently in manufacturing, a service area or as a domestic. She did not hold a “career” job but worked out of necessity. If she were single, she worked to support herself, or if married, her income helped provide a little more security to her working class family.

The business or professional woman was typically a physician or a lawyer; she owned her own business or held a managerial or executive position in an insurance or banking firm. In most cases she was not married but was working at a job that could be considered a career. These business and professional women often wanted to be recognized as such and felt they were entitled to a position of respect in the business community.

The Bureau of the Census considered both the working class women and the professional women as gainfully employed, and counted both groups in record numbers in the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> Of the 68,516 women in Omaha in 1920, 21,004, or 30.7 percent were gainfully employed in occupations from artist to lawyers, and nurses to servants.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 56-57; 72.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 120; 97-98.

<sup>23</sup>Joseph A. Hill, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870 to 1920: A Study of the Trend of Recent Changes in the Numbers, Occupational, Distributions and Family Relationship of Women Reported in the Census as Following a Gainful Occupation*, (Washington: Government Printing Office: 1929), 2.

<sup>24</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 572.

Of those nearly seventy thousand women in Omaha in the early twenties, many had the time and desire to actively participate in various community organizations. Anne Firor Scott, in doing research on women's associations, found that these groups were “literally everywhere; known or unknown, famous or obscure, young or ancient, auxiliary or freestanding, reactionary, conservative, liberal, radical, or a mix of all four.”<sup>25</sup> Karen Blair writes about thirteen basic categories of women’s organizations, including benevolence, culture, sororities, peace, race, patriotic, religion, suffrage, temperance, work, youth, politics, and miscellaneous.<sup>26</sup> Although not all thirteen were present in Omaha in the early twenties, there was an extensive assortment of such groups according to listings in the city directory and the women's pages of the newspaper. Among them were the Ladies of the Elks, American War Mothers, Catholic Daughters of America, Omaha Story Tellers, Daughters of the American Revolution, P.E.O. Sisterhood, American Legion Women's Auxiliary, Omaha Spanish Club, Sermo Club, Omaha College Club, Junior League, and the Omaha Walking Club. There was also an American Red Cross, League of Women Voters, Associated Charities, Christ Child Center, Bohemian Catholic Sokol, Jewish Welfare, Scandinavian Young Women's Club, Danish Sisterhood of America, Nebraska Audubon Society, Omaha Women's Clubs, and a Theosophical Society. Omaha had eight chapters of the Order of Eastern Star; four different Odd Fellows Rebecca “lodges;” four Royal Neighbor “camps;” nine “groves” of the Woodmen Circle; four “camps” of Royal Neighbors; the Douglas City Association of Nebraska Pioneers, and the Concordia Singing Society.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2.

<sup>26</sup>Karen J. Blair, *The History of American Women's Voluntary Organizations, 1810-1960: A Guide to Sources* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989), x.

<sup>27</sup>*Evening World-Herald*, 1922; *Greater Omaha City Directory 1923* (Omaha: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1923), 33-38.

Women's involvement in the issues and problems of the day can be tracked by the growth of these kinds of women's organizations. In 1916 Winona Reeves wrote, "there is nothing more significant of the progress made by women than the evolution of the club idea and the club ideal!"<sup>28</sup> What began as study clubs evolved into social organizations; then, many of the women in these organizations turned to social service work. In the history of women's voluntary organizations can be tracked the experiences that moved the women into a position of influence on issues from antislavery, moral reform, and temperance through suffrage and to concerns for children, family life, and social welfare.<sup>29</sup> In these clubs, the women gained valuable leadership experience, developed organization skills, made important connections, and learned how to set goals and meet them.<sup>30</sup>

The typical club woman was white, middle-class, and married with her children already in school. If she were not employed outside the home, she could enjoy the wide variety of daytime social, cultural, and civic club activities. She would be able to attend afternoon card parties; get away to daytime educational lectures; was free for lengthy luncheons, afternoon style shows, or visits to area children's homes, museums, and such. But there were clubs for other women too. The single career woman might be interested in such an organization but she would not be available during the day. For her a club might be important to provide a "family's warmth and companionship."<sup>31</sup> Additionally, some of these women wanted to participate with a group that recognized them as professionals. Before 1922, while the Chamber was a "men only" organization, these business and professional Omaha women still had choices. There was the Business and Professional Women's League, established in 1919, and the Omaha Business Woman's club that was affiliated with the YWCA. Another group was the Altrusa club, whose membership was

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<sup>28</sup>Winona Evans Reeves, *The Blue Book of Nebraska Women: A History of Contemporary Women* (Mexico, MO: Missouri Printing and Publishing Co., 1916), 234-5.

<sup>29</sup>Scott, *Natural Allies*, 176-177.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>31</sup>Blair, *American Women's Voluntary Organizations*, ix-x.

limited to one member from every phase of business and professional activity and whose object was to “search out and organize women in the business and professional world who represent leadership in their lines of endeavor.”<sup>32</sup>

The members of the Business and Professional Women’s League who requested the merger with the Omaha Chamber of Commerce expressed a desire for equality in that male institution. It is hard to know what they actually expected. However, there are some indications that the merger, first and foremost, was a financial arrangement that both groups hoped would solve some fiscal difficulties. Yet these women lawyers, business owners, and bankers were promised that the new division would be “placed on an identical footing with men members.”<sup>33</sup> Even though the women were tucked in a separate division, the Chamber did record and keep the minutes of their meetings. As a result, historians have fifty-four years of separate history to examine and from which these women's programs and activities can be followed.

Historian Estelle Freedman bluntly described what she called the “new women” who were “attempting to assimilate into male-dominated institutions. At work, in social life, and in politics . . . middle-class women hoped to become equals by adopting men's values and integrating into their institutions.” She states further that these women were content to see the “self-consciously female community” begin to “disintegrate.”<sup>34</sup> However, there is no evidence that the Omaha women who joined the Chamber in 1922 were looking for a disintegration of any female community. They just wanted to “work to a definite end more effectively” and saw a merger with the men’s group as a way to do that.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>*Evening World-Herald*, April 14, 1922, 21.

<sup>33</sup>*Morning World-Herald*, January 4, 1923, 2.

<sup>34</sup>Estelle Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,” in *Women Together: Organizational Life*, History of Women in the United States, ed. Nancy F. Cott, vol. 16 (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1994), 447.

<sup>35</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League, Annual Meeting Minutes, June 7, 1922. Included with Chamber of Commerce records, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

The number of “professional” women in the city was growing. There were enough to support a Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce plus the several other organizations for business women in the city, such as the Omaha Business Woman's Club and the Altrusa club. Not surprisingly, the largest single group of females under the heading of “Professional Service” occupation in the 1920 census was teachers with 1,354—this group, however, was not even eligible for membership in the Division according to the 1922 bylaws. Women bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants numbered 1,476 while 739 nurses resided in the city. There were twenty-eight physicians and surgeons; four dentists; six lawyers; five clergy; fifteen college educators; twenty-four journalists; and thirty-three librarians.<sup>36</sup> Looking at the occupations of the 121 charter members of the Women's Division, secretaries were the most represented with eighteen, but there were also seven involved in banking; four in the life insurance field; a court reporter; an undertaker; three hospital superintendents; two doctors; one optician; three school principals; an advertising director; two deputy county clerks, plus an assistant superintendent of schools. Many charter members were employed in retail businesses, either owning, managing, or as buyers.<sup>37</sup>

In her 1991 book on women’s associations in America, Anne Firor Scott encouraged the study of local women’s groups because of the “waiting” data. She hoped that as scholars “go seeking local records, oral histories, [and] private correspondence,” they would be able to discover new perspectives to women’s history. Learning more about women’s history then would lead to a better understanding of “the society that has shaped us all.”<sup>38</sup> Studying the Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce can lead

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<sup>36</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population*, Vol IV (Washington: US Government Printing Office), 201-202.

<sup>37</sup>Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors Minutes, June 13, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

<sup>38</sup>Scott, *Natural Allies*, 183.

to a new perspective of Omaha's history and the progress the women made as they reached out for equal status with the men of the Chamber.

Initially, there are two ways of looking at the merger of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the Omaha Business and Professional Women's League in 1922. First, was it a step forward? The women expected the men to be true to their word.<sup>39</sup> The women were equal in vote; now they could be equal in an organization that promoted the city, encouraged business development, and served to strengthen business ties and social relations between members. By being affiliated with the Chamber they felt Omaha businessmen would take them seriously. They were furnished a meeting space in the Chamber headquarters and welcomed in the Chamber dining room. They were able to get advice from a group that was well acquainted with the city and with financial and business matters.

Or was it a move backward? As a separate entity, the Omaha Business and Professional Women's League had been able to make their decisions regarding fund-raising or civic projects without having to get approval from a board consisting of all men. They did not have to recognize a male councillor's presence at their meetings who would report back to the Chamber's all-male Executive Committee. They did not have to submit the names of potential members to a men's Membership Committee group for approval. Their own decisions were final.

What may be more important is a look beyond those 121 women who signed on with the Chamber. In 1922, that group thought it a great opportunity and even with a few difficulties, it was a partnership which satisfied them. But in the ensuing fifty-four years did the arrangement get too comfortable as the women slipped into a role that was different than promised? Did the character of the "business and professional women" change as the years passed? Although the women's group remained an active, separate Division of the

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<sup>39</sup>*Morning World-Herald*, January 4, 1923, 2.

Chamber until 1976, would the 121 charter members have still recognized it in its latter years? And in the end, did the 1976 announcement that the Chamber was terminating the Division mean the women were successful in finally being accepted into the full chamber? For whatever reasons, a group of women organized the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce rather than join that men's group. So whether the members of the Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce knew the “triumph of high achievement” or failed “while daring greatly,” these questions make their story worth telling.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic” speech, 317.

## CHAPTER 2 - ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

In the winter of 1893 amid a grave national economic depression, a group of twenty-five Omaha businessmen met to consider the future of their city. Recruiting another 175 like-minded men, the group organized as the Omaha Commercial Club. Its purpose was “to work for the common good in all matters touching the general welfare of the city of Omaha . . . .” The group was interested in promoting the growth of the area by bringing new industry and business to the city.<sup>1</sup> The Commercial Club was an independent organization until 1912 when its governing body, the Executive Committee, voted to become a member of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States yet retaining the Commercial Club name. The Chamber idea was spreading; upon joining the national organization, Omaha became the 148th local Chamber of Commerce, trade organization or commercial club across the United States to affiliate with the national group.<sup>2</sup> The Omaha men continued to call themselves the Commercial Club until 1918 when the Executive Committee recommended an official change. Keeping in line with the other commercial clubs that had already done so and feeling that it would be to their benefit to be identified with the larger organization, the Omaha club became officially known as the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.<sup>3</sup>

As a member of the national Chamber, the Omaha men were influenced by changes in the larger organization. In March 1920, Clarence Howard, a director of the United States Chamber of Commerce, spoke to the group about “the work of the Boy Scouts and the Junior Chamber of Commerce.” The Junior program began in St. Louis, growing out of an effort to “take care of the boys” in the Scouts. Having completed an “apprenticeship”

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<sup>1</sup>Louise Gilmore Donahue, *Pathways to Prosperity: A History of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce*, April 1993, 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Commercial Club of Omaha Journal* I (October 12, 1912), 64.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, VI (February 2, 1918), 1.



with the Scouts, the boys would graduate to the Junior Chamber on the way to full Chamber membership. Howard said that steps were being taken to organize the Junior Chamber of Commerce nationwide.<sup>4</sup> In May 1921, the Executive Committee of the Chamber unanimously adopted a recommendation from the Membership Council to establish a Junior Division in Omaha. At the December 1921 meeting the committee unanimously approved the Constitution and Bylaws of the new group. The Chamber invited “any business or professional man between eighteen (18) and twenty-seven (27) years of age, of good character and standing. . . .” to become a member of the Junior Division.<sup>5</sup>

The following month, a group representing the Omaha Business and Professional Women's League asked to be admitted as members of the Chamber. The League had organized three years earlier to help the business women in Omaha become better acquainted and to keep them apprised of the business problems of the city. The women believed that by being affiliated with the Chamber they could “work to a definite end more effectively.”<sup>6</sup> The proposal was first discussed at the Chamber’s Membership Council meeting on January 13, 1922. The secretary of the Council wrote to Chamber Commissioner J. D. Larson telling him of results of that discussion. She said that “[t]hose being heard from were in favor of such a division.”<sup>7</sup> The women's request was also brought up in a meeting of the office staff at the Chamber headquarters the following day, January 14, 1922. At that meeting, Commissioner Larson argued that “95% of all organizations in the country admit women.” Although many Chamber groups accepted women into full membership, he suggested organizing the women as a separate Division

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<sup>4</sup>Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, March 16, 1920, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., May 17, 1921; December 20, 1921.

<sup>6</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League, Annual Meeting Minutes, June 7, 1922. Included with Chamber of Commerce records, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

<sup>7</sup>OCC, Membership Committee Minutes, January 13, 1922. Letter to J. David Larson from Miss L. Bellman, Chamber Membership Secretary, dated January 17, 1922. Included in Chamber minutes file.

similar to the Junior group. The women would have their own projects and policies, subject to the approval of the Chamber. The “matter was discussed at length” and that group made a recommendation to the Executive Committee that the women of the League be admitted.<sup>8</sup>

At the Executive Committee meeting on March 14, 1922, the men listened to the Membership Council’s proposal that the committee give “careful consideration” to establishing a Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. The membership group had already designed a working plan for such a Division, setting out procedures for membership, government, officers, dues, and policies.<sup>9</sup> Questions were raised concerning the suggested financial arrangement, especially waiving the initiation fee, which had not been done the previous year for the Junior Division. One member of the Executive Committee argued that the clubrooms on the seventeenth and eighteenth floors of the Woodmen of the World Building at 17th and Farnam Streets were already too crowded, and he was worried there would not be enough room to accommodate everyone. Another committee member suggested letting the women use the Chamber facilities, even providing them with desk room for a secretary, but not actually making them a part of the Chamber. In postponing its decision, the committee requested the secretary contact other chambers of commerce that had already admitted women to inquire how they managed such a Division.<sup>10</sup>

There was more discussion at the Executive Committee meeting on April 4, 1922, concerning the request, some of it again negative. But when a vote was taken, the motion to admit the women passed with just two “no” votes. Another motion was proposed that the vote be made unanimous and this was passed. The group would form a Business and

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<sup>8</sup>OCC, Office Staff Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1922.

<sup>9</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, March 14, 1922.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. Two members stated that the general feeling when “this matter had been up before was opposed” but there is no reference in the minutes of any of the meetings of a previous request by the women to be allowed to join.

Professional Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.<sup>11</sup> In relaying this information to the League members, Commissioner Larson congratulated the women for gaining this recognition from the businessmen of Omaha. He called them business partners of the men who employed them.<sup>12</sup> However, this was not an accurate statement. The actions of the men would soon prove they never saw the women as partners. In addition, those women in the Division who were business owners could hardly have been "employed" by any member of the Chamber.

In working out the details, the Executive Committee agreed that the Division would become active when one hundred business and professional women submitted applications and fees to the Chamber. The committee presented a "memoranda" which would form the basis for the women's constitution. Accordingly, the object of this new division would be:

. . . to foster among the business and professional women of Omaha the spirit of commercial progress, to encourage good will and fellowship and enable them to take their part in cooperating with the Chamber in the promotion of commercial, industrial, civic and educational development in the community.<sup>13</sup>

Qualifications for membership had to be cleared up. The initial proposal was that:

Any business or professional woman of good character who is continuously engaged in business pursuits in an executive or managerial capacity shall be eligible to membership.<sup>14</sup>

When the women on the Board of Directors of the League met to discuss the tentative constitution, one board member pointed out that the present League was "open only to *white* women (emphasis mine)."<sup>15</sup> Consequently when the final Constitution and Bylaws were submitted to the full League membership for approval, in Section I of Article III describing membership requirements the limiting word "white" was added. The final

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., April 4, 1922.

<sup>12</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League Minutes, April 5, 1922.

<sup>13</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, April 4, 1922.

<sup>14</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League, Board of Directors Minutes, April 10, 1922.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1922.

version read “Any white woman of good character who is actively and continuously engaged in business or a recognized profession in an executive or managerial capacity. . .

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It was not difficult to obtain the required one hundred applications. Most League members were willing: 117 of the 127 members plus four new applicants signed membership cards by the June 7 meeting. According to the new Constitution, these applicants to the Women's Division also had to get final approval from the Executive Committee of what was referred to as the Senior Division. Once this was done and fees paid, the women officially became members of the Business & Professional Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. At the final meeting of the Omaha Business & Professional Women's League held at the Fontenelle Hotel, reports were given describing the activities and accomplishments of the past year, 1921-22. The treasurer submitted her final report showing a balance of \$1,004.78. This money was turned over to the Chamber in lieu of initiation fees for the new Division members.<sup>17</sup>

The women were assured in Section 4 of Article III of their new Constitution that their membership would “carry with it all the privileges afforded by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce” except for Chamber elections. As with the Junior Division, the women would only be voting for officers and directors of their own Division. The women would be governed by an Executive Council of twelve members, similar to the Executive Committee that managed and made decisions for the Senior Chamber. Eleven members of the new Division's Executive Council would be women elected by the members of the Division. The twelfth, a man, was to be appointed by the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Chamber, and he would act as the chairman of the women's Executive Council. This Chamber member would also be the women's representative to the Executive Committee.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., Annual Meeting Minutes, June 7, 1922.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

When questioned why the women could not have one of their own members representing the Division, the Commissioner from the Chamber told the women that this was “not possible at this time.”<sup>18</sup>

A welcoming comment in the *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* confirmed that while the Executive Committee of the Chamber had voted unanimously in favor of establishing the Women's Division, there were some who were not as enthusiastic as others. “There were prominent members who advocated the admission of women for some time,” read the article, but “others were doubtful about the proposition. The advocates are urging the doubtful ones to be patient and they assure them that when the Division has been established and working committees formulated, even the doubtful ones will be pleased with the arrangement.”<sup>19</sup>

On June 19, 1922, the first meeting of the Directors of the Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce was held and the Constitution was officially adopted. The first officers were elected unanimously, including as President Fay M. Watts, the owner of her own company, Watts Reference Company, and president of the now defunct League; Buelah Hall who worked for a life insurance company, as First Vice-President, and Emilia Brandt, a physician and surgeon, as Second Vice-President.<sup>20</sup> Besides a business owner and doctor, other occupations of the women included buyers, secretaries, social worker, juvenile officer, bankers, lawyer, undertaker, employment supervisor, school principals, and nurses. Membership began to grow right from the start. Thirty-seven new members were added by the end of the first year. After the membership drive of November 1925, the

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Board of Directors Minutes, May 29, 1922.

<sup>19</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* X (April 15, 1922), 10.

<sup>20</sup>Women's Division of Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as WD-OCC, Directors Minutes, June 19, 1922.

number of women had grown to 172. In 1928, the Division had a membership of 237 with the women pursuing a goal of 300 by the end of that year.<sup>21</sup>

Most Division meetings, both Executive Council and regular committee, were held at the Chamber facilities. Although the men had promised the women their own meeting area, there was a shortage of space. By December 1922, however, plans were made to remodel a portion of the Chamber offices for a lounge area for the women. Commissioner Guy Kiddo told the women they would have a comfortable place of their own where they could meet and feel at home. Though the renovation at the Chamber headquarters was ultimately paid for by the women from the profits of their first concert series, the result seemed to satisfy everyone.<sup>22</sup> The women's quarters opened in early summer 1923 with an official reception to which the Division invited women from other groups in town and the men on the Executive Committee of the Chamber.<sup>23</sup>

The Women's Division set up its own operating committees separate from the men's. Initially, these were Hostess, Membership, Feature, Group Arrangement, Music, and Publicity. A total of fifty-five members were appointed to these different committees, with almost one-half of the membership being involved in some kind of committee work.

As with the Senior Chamber and following the tradition of the League, the women members were divided in various groups according to the type of company for which they worked. Initially these were:

Retail and Wholesale  
Finance  
Medical  
Telephone and Telegraph  
Manufacturers

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<sup>21</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* XI (June 9, 1923), np; XV (November 6, 1926), 1; XVII (December 1, 1928), 1.

<sup>22</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 8, 1923. The women had understood that upon becoming affiliated with the Chamber, a lounge area would be provided and they should not have to use their ticket sales money to pay for the area.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, May 14, 1923. Other organizations mentioned were the Altrusa club, Big Sisters and the YWCA.

The Division's bylaws stipulated that each occupation could not represent more than fifteen percent of the total membership—this was amended to twenty percent in March 1923—so there was the possibility of a woman not being allowed to join because her job field was at the twenty percent limit. Board members were also nominated using the same principle resulting in a balanced representation from all groups.<sup>24</sup>

A current member usually nominated a prospective member. The Division's Executive Council submitted these names to the Membership Committee whose job it was to investigate these women. They would look over the names and if any member was familiar with one of the women, she could speak up for her. Otherwise names were given to committee members for the purpose of "finding out whether they are eligible for membership as to their personal character and their qualifications from an executive standpoint, since every one must hold an executive position." Those women who passed the scrutiny of the Membership Committee and received the okay of the women's Executive Council also had to be approved by the Executive Committee of the Senior Division. The applicant was then invited to become a member. Not everyone was anxious to join even once they passed the investigation. At a spring meeting in 1923, for example, twenty-three names were recommended for solicitation. Of these, two accepted immediately; one said she would in June; eight replied they would "perhaps" be interested in the fall; four others were more vague saying just "perhaps" or "later;" two were leaving town, and six simply said "no."<sup>25</sup> A year later, the chair of the Membership Committee in her year's end report to the Executive Council meeting said that at the beginning of her term she had received a list of fifty names who had been approved for membership. These women had not yet accepted so the order of business for the committee was to contact them personally. The women succeeded in that of the fifty, each one was contacted at least once. However, of

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<sup>24</sup>This practice did not seem to continue, but there is no specific mention in the minutes of its elimination.

<sup>25</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Committee Minutes, May 9, 1923.

these fifty prospective members, only three ultimately joined the Division. The chair of the committee did not identify any reasons given by the forty-seven—at least not in the minutes—whether it was a lack of time, the \$15.00 dues, or some other explanation.<sup>26</sup>

Until the 1950s, each month's meeting minutes contained a list of names approved for membership solicitation. In addition, there was usually another list, albeit shorter, of names of new members. There was frequently a third group of names whose “resignations were accepted with regret.” Some months, there was a name of a member or two, who “on account of delinquent dues” had their membership “declared at an end.” This was after the name of the dues-owing member was posted in a prominent place at the women's lounge. Some years when the group conducted major membership drives, there would be pages of names listed as “approved for membership solicitation” with eighty, ninety, one hundred or more names.<sup>27</sup>

From the beginning, one of the expectations the women had was that they would be participating on the men's committees. Although some women had been named to various committees, they were generally not very active. However, in 1924, the Women's Division was given responsibility for the Senior Chamber's Health Committee. Dr. Emelia H. Brandt and Inez Bolen, two of those appointed to the group, explained the goals of the committee to the women. They voiced their hope that the entire Division would get behind the Health Committee mission which was “to establish a permanent organization to assist the city authorities in keeping Omaha clean and making it more healthful and more beautiful, the primary function being to cooperate with the Health Department of the City and charitable organizations.”<sup>28</sup> The first project the committee took on was a “campaign against

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<sup>26</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 7, 1924.

<sup>27</sup>For example, figures in the WD-OCC Executive Council Minutes for the year July 1946-June 1947 indicate that 160 new members—124 at the October 14, 1946 meeting alone—signed up while 127 resigned. In the same year, the Division suspended the membership of seven women because of delinquent dues and one member died.

<sup>28</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Committee Minutes, November 5, 1924.



expectoration.” There was a city ordinance against spitting on sidewalks, but it was not enforced. The Health Committee proposed to work with other clubs in the city to educate the community on the hazards of public expectoration.<sup>29</sup>

In March 1924, the president of the Women's Division, Dr. Brandt, was invited to attend the Senior Division's Executive Committee meetings. Two months later she was given the right to vote at those meetings. The men's division set up all budgets: the dues paid by the women went to the Chamber treasury. Expenditures by the women had to be approved by the men's Executive Committee or its representative. The Executive Committee also retained the final word on all “functions and policies” and proposed changes to the constitution.<sup>30</sup> In 1925, the women were able to eliminate initiation fees for new members because the Chamber had done away with them for the Senior and Junior Divisions.<sup>31</sup> The list of five employee categories was expanded in 1927 to include the following: banks, financial, railroads and public utilities, insurance, educational, building, automobile, manufacturing, real estate, wholesale, department stores, specialty, newspapers, employment, doctors, hospitals, and printing groups. The committee framework was also expanded for the 1927-28 year to include Better Omaha, Dining Room, Hostess, Membership, Membership Activities, New Activities, Orchestra, Program, Public Affairs, Reception, and Acquaintance.<sup>32</sup>

The women had been referring to themselves and their group as simply the “Women's Division” since 1923 but in May 1928, they made it official. The Division voted for a revision to their constitution which would change the name from the “Business and Professional Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce” to simply the

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<sup>29</sup>WD-OCC, Health Committee, January 10, 1924.

<sup>30</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League, Board of Directors Annual Meeting Minutes, June 7, 1922.

<sup>31</sup>WD-OCC, General Meeting Minutes, May 6, 1925.

<sup>32</sup>By this time, the women were sponsoring the Omaha Symphony and in charge of the Chamber dining room.

“Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce.” The women's Executive Council approved the proposal and it was, of course, then sent to the men's Executive Committee for a final okay.<sup>33</sup> At that same meeting, the women voted to change the wording of Article IV of their women's constitution—regarding the Chamber's representative to the women's Executive Council. Initially a member of the men's Executive Committee was appointed by that group to be chairman of the women's Executive Council with his duties being to “preside at meetings of the Council, and [he] shall be the representative of the Executive Committee of the Chamber.” The revised version changed his title to “councillor” and narrowed his responsibilities. The elected president of the Executive Council, one of the women, was named chair of the Executive Council meetings instead of the councillor. The president could also call Special Meetings, not just the councillor; the president was responsible for appointing the Nominating Committee, not the councillor, and the president would appoint the election board. Importantly, *she* would now be the representative of the Council at the Senior Executive Committee meetings.<sup>34</sup>

In the spring of 1930, the councillor told the women that due to changes in the Chamber of Commerce's Constitution and Bylaws, the Women's Division was being deprived of its vote at Executive Committee meetings. This committee was concerned about the extremely large size of its Governing Board that had grown to 102 members. The men proposed scaling down the group to twenty-one members. As a measure to reduce that number, the committee proposed changes in their bylaws recommending that “the active president of the Business and Professional Women's Division and the active president of the Junior Division of the Chamber, shall meet with and participate in the deliberations of the Board of Directors, but shall not have the right to vote.”<sup>35</sup> In response, the women

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<sup>33</sup>WD-OCC, Special Meeting Minutes, May 2, 1928.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, May 6, 1930. The Women's Division had officially shortened their name two years earlier, but the men's proposed change still referred to them as the Business and Professional Women's Division.

passed a resolution that requested the Board of Directors of the Chamber pass an amendment to that new constitution returning the vote and full membership on the Board to the president of the Women's Division. This was presented to the Executive Council on April 14, 1930.<sup>36</sup> The next day, the Chamber committee held another meeting and the following recommendation was read:

“In order to satisfy the Women's and Junior Divisions with respect to their respective power to vote on the Board of Directors, the Committee on Organization recommends the following: . . . The president of the Women's Division and the president of the Junior Division shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Directors with full voting power.” The article in the bylaws that took away the vote was rescinded and replaced with the amended article.<sup>37</sup>

The women's voice was heard on this issue. In most cases, however, the president of the Women's Division attended the Chamber's Executive Committee meetings, but participated infrequently. Initially, when the women were heavily involved with the Symphony Orchestra concert series from 1922 to the early 1930s, she was always asked about the arrangements and finances of that project. She usually replied that ticket sales were slower than hoped for and asked that the Chamber help by encouraging members to support the series. During the Division's tenure as managers of the Dining Room, the representative from that committee gave detailed reports on the financial condition of that facility. In later years, the president reported on the Division's latest concert or speaker but, judging by what appeared in the minutes, she would make no other comments on any other topic discussed.

In 1931, the women again rewrote their Division's Constitution and Bylaws. As the number of members increased, so did the areas in which the women were holding their

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<sup>36</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 14, 1930,

<sup>37</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, April 15, 1930.

“executive positions.” Occupation classifications were increased to include: Banks; Financial and Investments; Railroads and Public Service Corporations; Insurance; Grain; Manufacturers; Real Estate; Wholesalers, Jobbers and Brokers; Live Stock; Packing Houses; Educational; Federal County and City Government and Administration; Building Industries; Attorneys; Automobile Trades; Department Stores; Specialty Shops; Cafes, Restaurants and Hotels; Newspapers; Employment; Doctors and Dentists; Nurses and other Professional Women; Photographers; Printing, Duplicating, Stationery and Office Supplies; and Miscellaneous.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Constitution, the Division was governed by an Executive Council made up of the retiring president, the councillor (from the Chamber), and twelve members elected by the entire membership. This group operated similarly to the Senior Executive Committee. Decisions were made at these meetings rather than by a vote of the General Membership. The entire membership was involved in nominating members for the Council but the elected Council then nominated and elected from among themselves the new president, first vice-president, and second vice-president. Most years, nominations consisted of one name for each office. And, of course, officers had to be approved by the Senior Executive Committee. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce appointed and paid the Division's secretary.<sup>39</sup>

The minutes of all the women's meetings held during their first several years as a Chamber Division are included in the official record. These included both business meetings and dinner meetings where there would be a short business meeting followed by some kind of entertainment. The different occupation groups took turns sponsoring these meetings. Some evenings the entertainment consisted of a speaker who talked on matters of interest to the business women such as at the January 17, 1923 meeting:

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<sup>38</sup>WD-OCC, Constitution as revised March 27, 1931.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

Mr. Joseph Mazer was the principal speaker of the evening, giving special stress to the importance of women in the business world and how in his opinion they are helping to improve the general business standards of men.<sup>40</sup>

Other times at these twice-monthly evening meetings, the women listened to “vocal selections” from area glee clubs or music from local orchestras. The hosting group might put on some kind of skit or invite a dance group to perform. The women also held many special meetings, especially when the Division was making major decisions regarding the Omaha Symphony Orchestra. Even then, the Constitution declared that “All policies of the Women's Division shall be subject to the approval of the Board of Directors of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>41</sup>

By the 1930s, the Division’s list of committees had expanded to meet the current needs. Although several committees were dissolved as the women were no longer involved in applicable activities, such as the Dining Room Committee and those related to the symphony, many additions had been made to the list of committees. Several, such as the Eye Glass Fund, from which donations were made to local schools to provide glasses for needy children, were added in response to the conditions brought on by the Great Depression. By 1938, women's committees included:

- Book Club
- Civic Affairs
- Eye Glass Fund
- 4-H Girl Project
- Good Will
- Highway Beautification
- Hostess
- Membership
- Membership Activities
- Noonday Luncheon
- Programs.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., General Membership Minutes, January 17, 1923.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., Constitution as revised March 27, 1931. This was basically the same wording as in the original Constitution approved June 7, 1922.

<sup>42</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, July 11, 1938.

During the early 1940s, the women again responded to events and the international situation and this was visible in the working committees of the Division. In June 1941, the women arranged their committees in such a way that one member of their Executive Council had no specific committee assignment. This left her free to take charge of a new committee “to meet any affairs arriving under national emergency.” The following month a National Defense Committee was formed.<sup>43</sup> A year later, it was renamed the War Service Committee. The Civic Committee, in charge of fund-raising, was called the War-Civic Fund Committee until August 1945. And as war-related projects and activities wound down, the Good Will and Service Men's Committee was changed back to the Good Will Committee in March 1946. In June 1946, the women replaced the War Service Committee with an Agricultural Committee, the purpose of which was to cooperate with the Agricultural Committee of the Senior Division.<sup>44</sup>

The financial records of the Division were not included in the Executive Council minutes until the 1960s. The president did appoint a special Finance Committee each year and the members of that committee presented reports, but the details were generally not included in the minutes. However, profits and losses from events the women sponsored were always recorded as well as the dollar amounts contributed to various causes. By 1946, the financial status of the group was such that they were able to withdraw money from various savings accounts and invest \$5,000 into United States Series “G” Savings Bonds. The first mention of an Auditing Committee was in 1956. The auditors examined the Division’s vouchers, deposit slips, bank statements, cancelled checks, and method of bookkeeping. The report was that the “material was inadequate and inaccurate.” None of the balances of the various accounts matched with that of the bank. Deposits had been made to the wrong account, and some vouchers were not even found in the Division’s

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1941; July 1, 1941.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., June 10, 1946.

books. The Auditing Committee prepared a five-point recommendation concluding with establishing “a set of books showing 1956 business” and recommending “that this procedure be continued.” In addition, annual audits were recommended.<sup>45</sup>

During the winter of 1947, the women began to plan their twenty-fifth anniversary dinner, which was to be held at Chamber headquarters in the Woodmen building. The committee in charge was composed of past presidents and the special dinner meeting was to be a “members-only” event.<sup>46</sup> Speaker for the dinner was Nebraska Governor Val Peterson. Guests besides the Governor and his wife included the Mayor of Omaha, Charles W. Leeman; Robert Storz, president of the Chamber of Commerce; Oliver Roberts, general manager of the Chamber; and past presidents of the Women's Division, including the first president of the Division, Fay Watts Potter.<sup>47</sup> An article in the *Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* about the event described the Women's Division as “the oldest organization of its kind in the country affiliated with a Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>48</sup>

During the 1930s, the women began visiting other area Women's Divisions. The Omaha group visited the Lincoln Women's Division often and made trips to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1935 and 1937, and traveled to Kansas City in 1936. They also entertained these groups in return.<sup>49</sup> In 1947, one finds the first mention of the women attending a convention held by the Mid-West Conference of Women's Divisions of Chambers of Commerce. The president and secretary went as delegates to that year's convention held in Lincoln, Nebraska. Trips to other conventions followed. At the 1948 meeting in St. Joseph, Missouri, the Omaha Women's Division extended an invitation to host the Conference convention the following year.<sup>50</sup> As a result, twenty-six chambers in the Midwest area were

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1956.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., February 10, 1947.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1947.

<sup>48</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* VI (March 28, 1947), 3.

<sup>49</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council, July 8, 1935; May 25, 1937; December 14, 1936.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1947; May 10, 1948.

invited and 175 women from the Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska chambers attended the weekend convention in Omaha. Saturday's events began with a luncheon in the Chamber dining room. A business meeting was held that afternoon followed by a banquet at the Fontenelle Hotel. Sunday morning the visitors were given a tour of Omaha. The convention concluded with a brunch early Sunday afternoon.<sup>51</sup> The Conference was described as "still in the baby stage" and a plan was formulated to better organize the women's divisions throughout the states on a local, state and regional basis.<sup>52</sup> The Omaha Division members continued to attend regional meetings. Twenty-eight members attended the convention in Topeka, Kansas, in 1952 and fifty-nine traveled to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1953.<sup>53</sup> Omaha hosted the Conference convention again in 1954 and according to the assistant manager of the Omaha Convention Bureau, the Omaha meeting was one of the best attended. The Bureau tried to convince the Women's Division to consider hosting another Midwest meeting.<sup>54</sup> Omaha welcomed Conference members both in 1962 and 1971. In 1955, the Division first sent a woman delegate from the Omaha Division to the National Chamber of Commerce meeting in Washington, D.C. President Martha Bohlen recommended that past president Margaret Fischer, an attorney, represent the group.<sup>55</sup> Omaha members continued to travel to area conventions, including those held in Hastings, Nebraska; Des Moines, Iowa; Lincoln; Garden City, Kansas; Topeka, Kansas; and Grand Island, Nebraska, and two delegates attended the 1970 meeting in Amarillo, Texas. In 1974, the women's Board questioned whether the Division was profiting from the conventions. According to the minutes of the Executive Council meeting held after the 1974 Lincoln Convention, the meeting left "much to be desired and with the increased proposal in fees

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<sup>51</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* VIII (May 20, 1949), 4.

<sup>52</sup>*Morning World-Herald*, May 30, 1949, 1.

<sup>53</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, May 12, 1952; June 8, 1953.

<sup>54</sup>Letter from Matt Jaap of the Convention Bureau to Mary-Jane Peterson of the Women's Division, April 19, 1957. Attachment to the minutes of the WD-OCC Executive Council, May 13, 1957.

<sup>55</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, March 28, 1955.



serious thought should be given to future participation in this.” The group decided to do an involved study before the next convention.<sup>56</sup> The Omaha Division was represented at the 1975 Midwest meetings, but with the comment that the “final decision on whether to stay in the Conference or not will rest with next year's Board of Directors.”<sup>57</sup> In February 1976, the Board members carried out a “lengthy discussion” and finally voted to drop their membership in the Midwest Conference of Women's Divisions of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>58</sup>

For years, the official publication of the Division was the *Clarion* which kept the members posted on events and news. Beginning in the early 1950s, the publication became the subject of much discussion at Executive Council meetings. The Council instructed the Publicity Committee to initiate changes so that this monthly bulletin could be supported by paid advertising.<sup>59</sup> Two months after being so instructed, the first issue of the newly named *Omaha Civic Woman* was mailed out, but problems arose with the new name. Responding to a request by the Women's Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City, Missouri, the name *Omaha Civic Woman* was dropped—no further explanation on why, and the members were asked to vote for a new name.<sup>60</sup> The results:

The Clarion	38 votes
Chamber Chatter	18 votes
Petticoat Press	13 votes
Commerce Comet	5 votes <sup>61</sup>

The publication was again called the *Clarion*. Plans were made to increase the size to eight pages, with additional paid advertisements, photography and art work. However, there were still problems with the publication. In January 1953, the Publicity Committee heard complaints from members that several important committee notices had not appeared

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<sup>56</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Director Minutes, June 25, 1974.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., June 17, 1975.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1976.

<sup>59</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, October 22, 1951.

<sup>60</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, May 12, 1952.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., October 13, 1952.

in the bulletin while fashion and recipe features did. The chairman of that committee explained that this was due to “circumstances and misunderstandings.”<sup>62</sup> The committee in return complained about not getting copy from the other committees. A special meeting of the Council was called in December 1953 to review the guidelines for the *Clarion*. There were three problems discussed: a lack of copy from the committees to fill up the pages of the newsletter; the amount of work involved and the lack of enough skilled volunteers to get the job done, and that the mailings were often so slow that announcements of events reached the members after the event had taken place. The Council recommended that paid advertising be discontinued; the publication be changed to a one-sheet calendar of events issued twice monthly; the publication be prepared in the office of the Division's executive secretary; the name *Clarion* be continued, and that any remaining advertising funds be used to defray the cost of printing.<sup>63</sup>

At the beginning of the 1955-56 business year, the Publicity Committee pledged that the *Clarion* would be issued twice monthly, on the first and the fifteenth. Six months later, the committee chair said that the newsletter would be published only once a month for the rest of the year. In total, there were only ten issues for the 1955-56 year.<sup>64</sup> The Division continued issuing the publication regularly for the next several years, but in 1962 the women faced a real problem. The Publicity Committee could not find anyone willing to serve as editor. Even bringing up the matter before the Executive Council for two straight months did not recruit a volunteer to take over the task. A team of editors finally tried to publish it. Two years later, the minutes reported that only “several editions of the *Clarion* were published during the year.”<sup>65</sup> In 1965, there was a recommendation that the

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1953.

<sup>63</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, December 4, 1953.

<sup>64</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, September 12, 1955; January 9, 1956; May 14, 1956.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1964.

membership be encouraged to place ads in the publication.<sup>66</sup> For the 1965-66 year, there were plans to publish quarterly *Clarions*— in October, January, April, and July. This was at about the same time when the membership chairman reported the members were having a problem knowing what was going on in the Division.<sup>67</sup> More problems arose in 1966, when the January issue did not come out until the end of February. Barbara Botsch, the Division's Executive Director, representing the chair of the Publicity Committee, recommended that the women look into having the Chamber's newsletter, the *Profile*, sent to all of the Women's Division members and “doing away with our *Clarion*” completely.<sup>68</sup> After investigation, this idea seemed the best solution. The Executive Council instructed the Publicity Committee to send Division news to the editors of the *Profile* and request that it be sent to all women members.<sup>69</sup>

Coverage of the Division's activities in the *Profile* was excellent. Many times, pictures of members and events such as the Rural Leadership Awards Day or the City Beautification Award winners appeared on the front page of the magazine. There was also a “Calendar of Women's Division Events” each month. However, some women still felt the group lacked good communication with members. In 1971, one member volunteered to write and print a newsletter “so that the membership may be aware of what is going on.”<sup>70</sup>

In the late 1950s, the women began to experiment with different locations for their business and social meetings. Even with the rising membership, participation at these functions was mediocre. To increase attendance at the noon lunches, which included a short program along with the meal, the chairman of the Noonday Luncheons Committee suggested that as weather permitted, the women should meet at various restaurants throughout Omaha. This way, they would be more accessible to women working in areas

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1965.

<sup>67</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Director's Minutes, September 13, 1965.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1966.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1966.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1971.

other than downtown. Because of weather, winter meetings would be at the downtown Omaha Athletic Club.<sup>71</sup> This did not seem to help much. In 1965, the Chamber moved to a new location without dining room facilities, so the women approved a motion to use the facilities of the YWCA at 17th and St. Mary's Street in downtown Omaha.<sup>72</sup> They continued having what they called "Area Luncheons," but these were limited to several times during the year. Getting away from downtown, the group met in South Omaha or the central part of the city at restaurants such as Johnny's Cafe, the Sparetime Cafe, the Livestock Exchange Building, and the Kiewit Plaza.

Some of the members also complained that the semi-monthly luncheon programs were too long, and they were having problems getting back to work on time. Again, the Division attempted to hold the luncheons at the downtown Athletic Club, but ultimately the best place, because of the food and the service, seemed to be the YWCA. In early 1968, the Noonday Luncheon Committee decided to hold the luncheons there indefinitely.<sup>73</sup> "Indefinitely" lasted until September when the group decided to schedule the luncheons for the 1968-69 season in the remodeled Hill Hotel. One year later, the women voted to hold one meeting a month at the Athletic Club and the second meeting to be held "elsewhere around the city."<sup>74</sup>

The Division also agreed to change the locations of their Executive Council meetings. Instead of holding all these meetings at the Chamber offices, they too proposed to meet in various restaurants. They selected places in the downtown area such as the Sheraton Fontenelle, Paxton, Castle, Regis, and Blackstone Hotels, Lamplighter Inn, and the Diplomat Motor Inn. The Program Committee chair suggested that the group hold all

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<sup>71</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, July 13, 1959.

<sup>72</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 8, 1965.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1968.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1969.

meetings at the same hotel each month, but the Division's Board of Directors agreed that business should be spread out among the area hotels that were members of the Chamber.<sup>75</sup>

The women developed a new method of nominating a president in 1963. The four Executive Council members who were serving their third and final year were all nominated for the office. One of these was elected.<sup>76</sup> In 1965, the Chamber of Commerce considered a proposal to change its name to the "Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce." When it passed, the Women's Division, of course, had to change their name too.<sup>77</sup> In 1966 the Women's Division bylaws were amended to change the fiscal year of the Division from July 1-June 30 to January 1-December 31 to match the Senior Division's year. At the April 12, 1965 meeting, the women began calling their governing body the "Board of Directors of the Women's Division, Chamber of Commerce" rather than the "Executive Council." No explanation for this change can be found in the minutes.

Late in 1965, the Executive Vice President/General Manager of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce was a guest at one of the women's Board of Directors meetings and remarked that the Division was important and "an integral part of the Chamber of Commerce," and he assured board members of full support and cooperation. At the same meeting, the president of the Women's Division spoke on the Chamber's intent to develop a ten-year plan, called the "Spirit of 76" Program. That would be interesting to remember ten years later in 1976 when the men dissolved the Division.<sup>78</sup> Still, in the late 1960s, the Division received a "number of requests . . . from Chambers of Commerce throughout the country" wanting information on how the Omaha Division was organized. The other groups were interested in also starting such a division.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., August 9, 1965.

<sup>76</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Election Meeting Minutes, May 7, 1963.

<sup>77</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, April 12, 1965.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., September 13, 1965.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1969.

In the meantime, two new committees, “Convention and Tourism” and “Omahaland,” were established in 1966. Members of the Convention and Tourism Committee would work with the Senior Division's Convention Bureau. The women would staff a booth set up at major conventions in Omaha and distribute information about the city. However, because Division members were working women, there was a problem getting volunteers who were able to cover afternoon hours at the booth. The problem was solved by occasionally using retired members. The purpose of the Omahaland Committee was to staff an information center at Eppley Air Terminal.<sup>80</sup> In November 1966, a new Parks and Recreation Committee held its first meeting.<sup>81</sup>

In 1972, a major milestone was reached—the Division celebrated its Golden Anniversary. The sum of \$150 was allocated to pay for decorations and favors for a special dinner that was held honoring all past presidents. Ten of these women, including one who was elected to her office in 1949 and four who served in the fifties, attended the banquet at the Hilton Hotel. A photograph of these women along with a lengthy article appeared in the *Profile*.<sup>82</sup>

In 1974, the Division organized a separate group called the X Club. Realizing that past officers could continue to contribute, this new group consisted of former board members and was led by the immediate past president as chairman. This chairman would report Board activities to the Club and would take suggestions and ideas from the group back to the Women's Board.<sup>83</sup>

Also in 1974, the women discussed the fact that many of the current Division members were not aware of the group's past accomplishments. A motion was made to compile a history of the Division.<sup>84</sup> The members of the X Club, who changed their name

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., August 8, 1966.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., November 14, 1966.

<sup>82</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXXII* (March 22, 1972), 2.

<sup>83</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March, 19, 1974.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1974.

to the Priors Club, decided that they would compile a scrapbook from old files in order to document the history of the organization. The Priors scheduled their next meeting at the Chamber Conference Room so that they could go through old files and select what they felt was important to the “historical record of the Women's Division.”<sup>85</sup> It is not reported in the minutes whether this was actually done or not.

The Chamber of Commerce eventually began admitting women as full Chamber members. When that was, exactly, is unclear. There are no reports in the minutes of either the Senior Division's Board of Directors or Executive Committee or the Women's Division Executive Council nor is anything mentioned about such a change in the Chamber news letter. Most likely this occurred some time from the middle forties to the mid-fifties. Qualifications for active membership described in the Chamber of Commerce bylaws presented to the Senior Board in 1945 read “Any business or professional *man* of good character and standing. . . .” With the amended bylaws adopted in 1955 one finds the wording has been changed to “Any business or professional *person* of good character and standing.”<sup>86</sup> In between 1945 and 1955, there were several reports in the minutes about “prolonged discussion in regard to matters relating to the membership.”<sup>87</sup> There is no hint of what the discussion was about: it could have been accepting women, or even the question of the membership of blacks.

At the December 15, 1972 meeting, Chamber President Morris Miller introduced the new officers. “He announced for the first time in the history of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce we have a woman Vice President starting her term January 1, 1973, and he

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., November 19, 1974. A search of the Douglas County Historical Society Library archives could produce no such “history.” No history can be found in the records of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce or the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>86</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, August 9, 1945; February 18, 1955.

<sup>87</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, October 30, 1945; October 6, 1949.

presented Mrs. Madeline Jacobson of Madeline Jacobson Properties, Inc.” However, Miller did not mention the year she first joined the Chamber.<sup>88</sup>

The records of the Division ended, as the Division ended, in November 1976. Earlier that year, the Board of Directors of the Chamber had “examined all the Chamber programs” to “identify those, which while they may have merit, do not contribute directly to major goal achievement. The Women’s Division is considered to be in this group.”<sup>89</sup> According to the speculation as evidenced in the Women’s Division’s minutes, the group had little warning of its impending end. A paragraph in the September 1976 minutes reported the discussions by the Senior Board regarding a possible merger of the Chamber and the Division. The women were concerned by the rumors they heard and requested a meeting with the Board of Directors of the Chamber because they felt that “the Women’s Division has been around long enough and has enough worthwhile projects.” The group wanted a chance to explain their projects, but being realistic, they also discussed how they were going to handle their finances. A motion was made that “if we are merged we take our Certificates of Deposit and put them into our General Funds for use in paying bills, etc.”<sup>90</sup>

The negative decision had already been made. At the Senior Board of Directors meeting in October 1976, President Howard P. Doerr “reminded the Board of the discussion that took place at the Board retreat on September 10, 1976, concerning the future of . . . the Women’s Division.” Doerr told the Board that he had scheduled meetings with the Board of Directors of the Women’s Division and the Chamber’s Executive Committee “at which time [the women] will be given an opportunity to discuss their future” as a part of the Chamber.<sup>91</sup> The women were to meet with the Executive Committee of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday, November 3, 1976, at 7:00 a.m. to “discuss

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1972.

<sup>89</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXIV* (November 29, 1976), 3.

<sup>90</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, September 20, 1976.

<sup>91</sup>Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as GOCC, Board of Directors Minutes, October 15, 1976.



the future of the Women's Division.”<sup>92</sup> That meeting was held, but according to Anita Purdy, who was the manager of the Division and an employee of the Chamber in 1976, it was a “done deal.” There was nothing the women could have said that would have changed the decision of the Chamber Board.<sup>93</sup>

At its November 12 1976 meeting, Doerr summarized the situation for the rest of the Senior Board. The cost to the Chamber to maintain the Division was approximately \$15,000 per year. Only about 95 to 100 of the women paid the yearly dues of thirty dollars; the rest were eligible due to “the supporting funds paid to the Chamber by their firm.” He allowed that the Division was responsible for sponsoring three main functions each year—the Eighth Grade Honors Luncheon, the annual Beautification Awards, and the Rural Homemakers' Recognition Day, but he did not say what would happen to those events. After discussion, the motion to terminate the Division as of December 31, 1976 was passed unanimously.<sup>94</sup>

At the conclusion of the Women's Division meeting on November 16, 1976, President Phyllis Conner read a letter she received from Doerr “in answer to her letter. It was very unfavorable.” The president of the Division acknowledged that she would send letters to the sponsoring firms and to “our members.”<sup>95</sup> There are no more Division minutes in the Chamber collection. The women of the Division, who numbered several hundred at the time, were given an opportunity to join the full Chamber. Some did, but others were not ready to give up any autonomy they had. Some members did not look favorably on the idea of serving alongside men on Chamber committees. For others, it was simply a financial decision. If a member was not sponsored by her employer, she may not have been willing or able to pay the difference in membership dues. A year as a member of

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<sup>92</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, October 19, 1976.

<sup>93</sup>Anita Purdy interview, by author, April 14, 2000.

<sup>94</sup>GOCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 12, 1976.

<sup>95</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 16, 1976.

the chamber in 1976 cost \$125.00, while as Division members, annual dues were only thirty dollars.<sup>96</sup>

With sadness and tears, not unusual considering the long history of the Division, a group of the women, the ones who chose not to join the Senior Chamber, collected the property of the Division—from membership records to the silver service. The women rented some office space in West Omaha and eventually organized as the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce, an organization that has continued serving Omaha since that time.<sup>97</sup>

The last mention of the Women's Division in the Chamber minutes was very matter-of-fact. Early in 1977, the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce had to take care of some “housekeeping” duties that included “deletion of all reference to the Women's Division” in the Chamber's Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Marian Ivers interview, by author, April 19, 2000. A sponsoring company contributed a certain dollar amount to the Chamber. The employer could then nominate employees as members up to that dollar amount. A \$1000 contribution, for example, could support seven senior division members at \$125 each and four women at \$30 apiece.

<sup>97</sup>Purdy interview, April 14, 2000.

<sup>98</sup>GOCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March 18, 1977.

## CHAPTER 3 - MEMBERSHIP

One hundred twenty-one Omaha women signed application cards in 1922 requesting membership in the city's Chamber of Commerce. These women believed that by becoming members of the Business and Professional Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber, they would be able to take an equal role in promoting their city. The minutes of the Women's Division's Executive Board tell an extensive, if not totally complete, story of the women's "role" in city development during the fifty-four years the Division existed. Changes are clearly evident as the years passed. The types of civic projects varied with the times. The group's social activities changed to follow the moods and interests of the members over the years. The women's elected board, which they called their Executive Committee, named working committees. Some of these endured for decades; others served a specific and temporary purpose, then were either renamed or abolished. The times and locations of Division meetings changed.

Also important, the make-up of the membership, the characteristics and status of the women themselves, evolved over the many years. Obvious developments occurred in the women's marital status, their occupations, and their commitment to the Division. An organization initially composed of a group of 121 professional and business women expanded by the 1970s to include almost any woman who worked outside the home. The strict membership requirements that the Business and Professional Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce adopted in their 1922 Constitution were no longer in force. By 1976 a prospective member no longer had to be a "... white woman of good character who is actively and continuously engaged in business or a recognized profession in an executive or managerial capacity," but any woman who was employed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Business and Professional Women's League, Board of Directors Annual meeting, June 7, 1922. Included with Chamber of Commerce records, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

The Executive Committee of the Senior Chamber had to give its consent to all applicants to the Division. Therefore, the 121 members of the Business and Professional Women's League who signed Chamber applications in 1922 had to be presented to the Senior Board for approval. The list of applicants was published in the men's Executive Committee minutes but that list does not reveal much about the women beyond their occupation or employer. According to the information provided on that list, the largest group held positions in the secretarial field, with nineteen applicants listing that as their occupation. However, at that time a secretary was a respected occupation, "usually reserved for college graduates and at the upper echelons frequently reserved for men."<sup>2</sup> Other women held unmistakably "executive" occupations. Six were managers or assistant managers and eight women worked in banking. There were three school principals, two doctors, five nurses, one optician, and nine cashiers. Eight were employed in retail business and four said they owned or were presidents of businesses. There was an undertaker, a lawyer, an employment supervisor, a photographer, a court reporter, an assistant superintendent of Omaha schools, and a masseur. The men's committee approved them all.<sup>3</sup>

Of those 121 charter members of the Division, eleven are listed in a *Who's Who in Omaha* book published in 1928. These eleven, who may or may not have been typical of the total membership, were very active women in the Omaha area. The first president of the Division, Fay Watts, had worked for Northwestern Bell Telephone for two years, and followed that with four years at Woodmen of the World. She became an employment manager of Remington Typewriter Company and after five years with that company she opened her own personnel specialists business called the Watts Reference Company. Dr. Emelia Brandt, elected as Second Vice-President, was a physician specializing in internal

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<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*, American Women in the Twentieth Century, ed. Barbara Haber (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 96.

<sup>3</sup>Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, June 13, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library. Full list of presidents is included in the appendix.

medicine. Besides national, state, county, city, and women's medical associations, she was a member of the YWCA, Red Cross, City Mission, and the National Geographic Society. She also lectured on health topics for the YWCA. Other Women's Division members included in the *Who's Who* were Leah Bellman, the membership secretary for the Chamber itself, who was also a member of Temple Israel, American Legion Auxiliary, the Red Cross, Delphian Society, National Geographic Society, and the Altrusa club; and Inez Bolen, president and manager of Bolen Manufacturing Company, a firm making surgical bandages. Bolen was also a member of the Red Cross, the YWCA, and the Garden Club. Edith Beckman, an attorney, was a piano teacher before studying commercial design. After taking a business course, Beckman became secretary to a lawyer and under him began to study law. By 1928, she was a member of the Nebraska, Omaha and Douglas County Bar Associations, the National Association of Women Lawyers, and the Douglas County Law Library. Later, Beckman would become the first woman representative to the state legislature from Douglas County. She was appointed to the Nebraska House of Representatives in 1935 but lost in 1936 and 1938 when running for the office. Blanche Fuller was a graduate of the Cincinnati Missionary Training School and the Christ Hospital School of Nursing. She had been president of the Nebraska Red Cross nursing service during World War I and was a member of many hospital associations.<sup>4</sup>

Margaret Fischer, an early member and president of the organization in 1936, recalled in an interview that members were “some of the early pioneers in the life insurance business, women salesmen . . . lots of the heads of the departments in Brandeis, Kilpatricks, . . . a good many from the banks.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Sara Mullin Baldwin, ed., *Who's Who in Omaha: Biographical Sketches of Men and Women of Achievement: 1928* (Louisville, KY: R.M. Baldwin Corp., 1928).

<sup>5</sup>Typescript of Interview by Dr. Dennis Mihelich with Margaret R. Fischer, Douglas County Historical Society, 1985.

Many of the early presidents, some of whom were not charter members but were recruited for membership in the first years of the Division, were also women of note in Omaha's history. Dr. Brandt, vice-president in 1922, succeeded Watts as president in 1923. Grace Roberts, 1926, was the founder and president of Graystone Dairy. Later Roberts was business manager and owner of Roberts Dairy. The 1927 president, Mary Austin, was principal of Miller Park School while the 1931 president, Maude Compton, was the principal of Benson West. Genevieve Guiou, president in 1929, the widow of a prominent lumberman, was in charge of the “newly created women's department of First Trust Company.” In addition, she was the president of the Community Playhouse and a well-known lecturer on current issues.<sup>6</sup> And Fischer, president in 1936, was a graduate of the University of Omaha Night Law School and practiced law along with her father and brother.<sup>7</sup>

These were “professional” women and they thought themselves capable of sharing in the work of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. However, shortly after accepting their new Constitution and Bylaws, the women felt that the definition of “professional and business women” was not clear.

As names of prospective members were given to the Division, the women's Executive Council turned these over to the Membership Committee for review. In October 1922, that group asked the Executive Council for a better interpretation of eligibility for factory workers because “Factory and manufacturing” was one of the broadly designated occupational groups. In response to that request, the women's Executive Council concluded that “an employment or personnel manager in charge of a large industrial institution” would make an acceptable member.<sup>8</sup> In 1925, the committee raised a question regarding

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<sup>6</sup>*Omaha World Herald* Clippings File, Douglas County Historical Society. A list of all presidents is included in Appendix.

<sup>7</sup>Margaret R. Fischer Interview.

<sup>8</sup>Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 9, 1922.

women employed in education. Although school principals and superintendents were eligible with several women in those positions already members, the women wanted to expand the educational category. The Division's Executive Council appointed a special committee to investigate and the following month that group declared the phrase “engaged in business or a recognized profession” should be interpreted to include “heads of departments” of high schools. Once official, the Executive Council approved the applications for membership of five women from area schools.<sup>9</sup>

In 1926, membership qualifications again came to the attention of the women's Executive Council. This time the group discussed replacing the word “executive” relative to membership in the Women's Division with the term “responsible.” However, the women's Executive Council decided against making that change.<sup>10</sup> In 1928, the Membership Committee asked to expand the teaching field again, suggesting that all teachers, not just those that were heads of departments, should be classified as professionals. The Executive Council instructed the committee to “include teachers in academic institutions in the membership of the Women's Division within the quota of the Education classification.”<sup>11</sup>

If a broadening of membership requirements did not require a bylaws change, the women could act on it themselves. However, if it did require such a revision, the Women's Division had to submit the recommended change to the Board of Directors of the Senior Chamber. In 1931, one of the proposed changes again involved that difficult word, “executive.” This time instead of replacing it with “responsible” as they had discussed in 1926, the Woman's Board recommended eliminating it altogether. The women proposed that the article on membership which read “Any business or professional woman of good character who is continuously engaged in business pursuits in an executive or managerial

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., February 2, 1925.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., November 15, 1926.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1928.

capacity shall be eligible to membership” be changed so that the Division would be open to “Any business or professional woman . . . who is engaged in business or a recognized profession. . . .” The women argued at the men's Board of Directors meeting that it was difficult to correctly define “executive.” In some cases, they said, the title held little meaning. “Often a stenographer for a small firm will be eligible under the title of 'secretary' while some woman holding a responsible position with a larger firm may carry no title, and her employers do not consider a title necessary.” There was some discussion among the Senior Chamber Board members causing one to ask if that would then allow clerks or stenographers to be eligible for membership. The women answered that it could but often that person really was an executive, but did not have the title. The men's Board approved the change.<sup>12</sup>

In 1931 the women's Executive Council, the Division's general membership, and the men's Executive Committee approved a new Constitution and Bylaws for the Division in which the membership requirements no longer limited applications to “white” women.<sup>13</sup> But the issue of black applicants was not settled until the 1950s. According to the minutes of the Senior Division's Board of Directors meeting, in December 1953 two “negro applicants” filed applications, one applying for Junior Division membership and one for the Women's Division. This caused considerable discussion among the Senior Directors. Apparently the Senior Division had two Negro members at an earlier time and the Junior Division still counted two among its membership, but there was no official policy. At that December meeting “several members expressed the opinion that the Chamber is not yet ready to accept colored memberships.” Frank Fogarty, the Board president, argued that sentiment along those lines was changing and the two memberships should be considered. However, there were still those who thought that the Chamber should not approve the

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<sup>12</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, April 28, 1931.

<sup>13</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, March 27, 1931; WD-OCC Regular Minutes, April 8, 1931.



applications. Others felt that the problem should “be resolved definitely at this meeting.” A motion was made and seconded that the applications be declined. Fogarty offered a substitute motion suggesting that the applications be referred to the Board of the Junior Division and the Executive Council of the Women's Division where those groups could decide. After still more discussion Fogarty withdrew his motion and a vote was taken on the original. Results were eight for declining membership to the two and one vote (Fogarty's) for accepting.<sup>14</sup> The following year, Fogarty again announced two applications from “members of the negro race.” At the Board meeting in December 1954, Fogarty “expressed his personal views that the Chamber, as an organization of businessmen, needed the help and support of all businessmen in the community regardless of race or color.” The president of the Junior Division added that his group's Religious Activity Committee and the Junior Board had adopted a resolution favoring Negro members. More discussion followed and this time the motion to accept the applications passed.<sup>15</sup> However, no mention of this action was made in the women's minutes. Two years later, at the December 1956 meeting, the Women's Division Executive Council discussed having received an application from “Adelaide Turner, colored.” A motion was made and seconded to accept her “as approved by the Senior Board of Directors.”<sup>16</sup>

Except that employment types expanded from five different occupational areas to over twenty over the course of time, there were no other changes regarding membership reported in the minutes until 1958. In February of that year, the women relaxed membership requirements to render “all those currently employed” eligible for membership in the Division.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, December 8, 1953.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1954.

<sup>16</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 10, 1956.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., February 10, 1958.

Some difference between the Division members of 1922 and those of 1956 can be seen by looking at the information found in *Polk's Omaha City Directories*. By comparing the names of the women who made up the 121 charter members of the Division in 1922 with the list of new members that appeared in the minutes in 1956—the last time a full list was included—one can see the changes in the women's occupations. They were becoming less professional and more clerical.

Of the 121 members in 1922, two of the women whose occupations were not listed in the Chamber's minutes also could not be identified in the *City Directory* either in 1921 or 1923—there was no directory for 1922. There were also nine others who, although were in the *Directory*, did not have their occupations published. That brings the number for comparison to 110 women. Of the 175 new members listed in the minutes of January 9, 1956, sixteen names were not in the *Directory* for 1956 or could not be identified—more than one listing with the same name, and twenty-nine women did not list occupations.<sup>18</sup>

**Comparison of the Occupations of Charter Division Members  
in 1922 and New Members in 1956**

	<u>1922</u>	<u>1956</u>
Women with complete Information	110	129
Accountant/Asst. Accountant	-	2
Auditor	-	1
Bankers/Tellers	5	-
Business Machine Operators	-	6
Buyers	5	-
Bookkeepers	1	8
Cashiers/Asst. Cashier	7	1
Chiropractor	1	-
Clerks/receptionists	7	28
Court Reporter	1	-
Deputy Recorder/Deputy Clerk	2	-
Dietician	-	1
Insurance Agents/Underwriters	3	2
Hairdresser	1	1

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<sup>18</sup>A woman might be missed as she could be listed under her husband's name as he would be head of household. Or if the name was slightly different, i.e. Johnson/Johnston. If a women were listed under her husband's name, only his occupation was identified.

Home Economist	-	1
Juvenile Officer	1	-
Lawyer	1	-
Managers/Asst. Managers	11	10
Milliners	2	-
Mortician	1	-
Nurse/Nurse Aides	-	4
Optician	1	-
Other Supervisors/Asst.Supr/Directors	7	16
Owners/Co-owners/Pres. of Co.	7	3
Photographer	1	-
Physicians	2	-
Reporter	-	1
Saleswoman	2	2
School Principals	3	-
Superintendent/Assist. Supr. of Schools	2	-
Secretaries	20	20 *
Stenographers/typists	2	10
Superintendents/Nursing, Hospitals	8	-
Teachers	-	7 **
Misc/massuer, character analyst, dance teacher, demonstrator,	4	
Misc/housekeeper, cafeteria, case worker, talent, audio	-	5 <sup>19</sup>

\*A secretarial position was a higher status job in 1922, a professional designation usually held by a man.

\*\*Teachers were not accepted as “professionals” into the Division until 1928.

Another interesting note, there were only two widows identified in the 1922 list, but twenty of the 175 women in 1956 were widows.

In 1956, as companies were sponsoring women employees into the Division, particular Omaha concerns were highly represented. Of the new members in 1956, fifteen were employed by Mutual of Omaha, nine by United Benefits Life Insurance, six worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, and six for Cudahy Packing Company.

Retention was always a problem. Of the 121 charter members of the Division, only fifteen were listed as members in 1932. However, it is possible that some of the women might have gotten married and changed their names yet still remained in the Division. Even considering that possibility, it seems to indicate there was probably a very high turnover.

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<sup>19</sup>*Polk's Omaha City Directory 1923; 1956, Omaha: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1923; 1957.*

There were other changes in the makeup of the women members over the years. In all early minutes, the group generally used the formal “Mrs.” when referring to a married or widowed member. Of the 121 charter members, the minutes identify only fourteen in that manner. But as the years passed, the number of married women increased. By the mid-1940s, about one-third of the women are identified as “Mrs.” Another change which seemed to diminish the professional status of the group was the way the women began referring to themselves in the minutes in the 1950s. The members called each other “the girls,” as in “We . . . will give the names of the girls to the instructors,” or a committee had “written Children’s Memorial . . . asking in what capacity the girls of the committee can be of assistance,” and the “telephoning project continues with several girls.” An orientation film that was shown to new members was called “What Do the Girls Do?”<sup>20</sup> By the end of the 1960s, the “girls” were all over the minutes and this practice continued until 1976.

The Women's Division, as with most other organizations, faced three problems regarding membership. The first was recruiting new members. Although the women turned over membership fees to the Chamber, all three Divisions, Women, Senior, and Junior, depended on the financial support that came from high membership. In addition, the Women and Junior Divisions needed new members to continue their projects and programs. Once enrolled, the second problem was to have these members participate in the activities of the organization and the third was to retain members year after year.

Initially, the women had no official membership campaign. Instead, they had a year-round unofficial one with everyone delegated to sign up new members. Included in each month's minutes until the 1950s was a list of names that were “approved for membership solicitation.” Once approved, the women were eligible to join. So again, there appeared in the minutes a long list of names of women who did join. The woman's occupation generally

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<sup>20</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, May 9, 1955; August 18, 1955; April 14, 1958; WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March 14, 1966.

was not stated but her place of employment was usually named. Along with those who joined and paid their dues there were occasionally the names of others who turned down the opportunity. Sometimes the women's reasons were given such as: "Cannot join at present, but intends to later," "Will send check June 4th," "Not at present a/c finances." Some just said "No."<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the Division was growing and proud of that fact. Membership records are not available from the Chamber, apparently having been thrown out, and the total membership for each year was not always stated in the minutes. From an initial 121 members in 1922, the group grew to 265 women by early 1929. In that year, they were boasting that they hoped to reach 300 by the end of the following year, but it took longer than that. After growing steadily, the numbers decreased in the early years of the Great Depression. By 1940, however, the group had reached a membership of 329.

The chairman of the Membership Committee in 1944 recommended that as "current conditions exist, the total membership of the Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce be limited to not more than 410 members." There was no reason given for this motion, nor where the number 410 came from, and the recommendation was not adopted. Instead, the annual membership campaign was canceled for the year due to World War II.<sup>22</sup> After the war ended, the women resumed purposeful efforts to recruit new members.

By 1947, the Women's Division membership was the largest in the United States according to the *Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*, but the women wanted to continue to enroll more members.<sup>23</sup> By this time, membership drives were conducted in the fall, in conjunction with the Senior Chamber of Commerce's main drive. The 1949 drive resulted in 192 new members to the Women's Division and these names were all listed in the minutes for the October 10 meeting. The fall drive of 1954 bettered that as 225 new

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., June 2, 1924.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1944; June 12, 1944.

<sup>23</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* V (May 30, 1947), 3.

members were added by October; thirty-nine more members were welcomed at the January 1955 meeting, and another fourteen were added in February. At the June 1955 meeting, the membership chairman announced that there were currently 921 members in the Division.<sup>24</sup> Still, in September when another membership campaign was about to begin, the chairman of the thirty-five person Membership Committee gave a report in which she stressed the “idea of every member of the Women's Division assisting in our membership drive because we WANT SO MUCH TO REACH OUR QUOTA.” (Their emphasis)<sup>25</sup>

From the first year of the Division, the names of new members were always listed in the minutes. After thirty years and with no explanation, that changed. Names of members approved for solicitation, new members, and those whose “resignations were accepted with regret” were no longer included in the monthly minutes of the Executive Council meetings. Instead, the names of 176 new members were listed as an attachment to the January 9, 1956 minutes. The following year, and continuing thereafter, the names of the new members were no longer included with the minutes, neither monthly nor annually.

In 1960 members of the Division were invited to join the Chamber's “President's Club.”<sup>26</sup> This was a group formed by the Chamber of Commerce to conduct year-round membership solicitation. Instead of hundreds of men involved in short-term membership drives, the President's Club formed committees of six to eight members each to sell new memberships year around. These teams would also focus on “re-selling those members who have given indications of withdrawing their support.”<sup>27</sup> The goals were always announced with plenty of hubbub and they sometimes set 1,000 new members as their objective for the year. The membership teams often met their goals. To keep interest up, the “Club” sponsored contests lasting six or seven weeks; members of the committees

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<sup>24</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, June 6, 1955.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1955.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1959.

<sup>27</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* XIX (February 1, 1960), 3.

were congratulated if the “new member” goals were reached, and the Chamber’s newsletter, the *Profile*, printed pictures of the top teams.<sup>28</sup>

These campaigns were complete with themes—pictures of members in Indian headdresses or Chinese costumes, campaign slogans such as the Green Thumb Campaign or Dizzy Dame Derby, Shooting for the Moon, or “Go Go Girls.” There were also catchy team names, as in 1965 when the women's teams were Baggy Maggy, Skinny Lena, Beetlebaum Beau, Goopy Loopy, Jerky Turkey, Whiney Tiny, Loose Goose, Fatty Hattie, Buggy Muggey, and Bony Tony.<sup>29</sup> Campaigns included kick-off cocktail parties, competition for points, award banquets, and prizes such as a mink coat or portable televisions. There were official “Rules and Point” schedules; points were accumulated in team or individual competitions for membership applications turned in—but only if “accompanied by money.”<sup>30</sup> In 1958 the Membership Committee of the Women's Division wanted to attract enough new members to put the Division over the 1000 mark.<sup>31</sup>

Many women who were recruited, joined, and paid the first quarter's dues never became active members. Many new members were recruited each year; many also left so that although there was a net growth for many years, it took a real effort from the membership teams. In the early years, the names of the women who dropped their membership were included in the minutes and their resignations “were accepted with regret.” At the October 11, 1943 meeting, the names of 123 new members were recorded. However, within six months twenty-eight of those members had already resigned—the first one having done so by the November meeting. But just as the Division no longer listed new members in their minutes after the fifties, there was no mention of members leaving. The

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<sup>28</sup>Letter written to the Board of Directors by Henry Roose, Chairman of the Chamber’s President’s Club, February 24, 1964.

<sup>29</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 8, 1965.

<sup>30</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes attachment, October 8, 1956.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., February 10, 1958.

total membership figures of the Chamber of Commerce or the Divisions were not routinely published in the minutes, the *Journal*, or *Profile*, or in the newspaper.

As the number of members increased, there was a heightened need for better communication and fellowship efforts. In such a large group, members were not able to get acquainted with each other. There was so many of them that even the members of the Executive Council did not know every Division member. As more committee chairs complained about a lack of volunteers for their groups, more members complained that they did not know what was going on with the Division.<sup>32</sup> Attendance at luncheons and dinner meetings dropped even though membership numbers were at an all-time high.<sup>33</sup>

Since neither membership rosters nor totals are available for most years one can only get a general idea of the number of members in the Women's Division. In many years the group signed up close to 200 members so one would expect their membership to have reached the sky. However, as the group signed up these new members, old members were dropping out as fast. The group reached their peak in the 1950s and then membership began to drop.<sup>34</sup>

Sometime between 1945 and 1955, the Senior Division of the Chamber revised its bylaws, changing the membership description from “any business or professional man of good character . . .” to “any business or professional person . . .”<sup>35</sup> Changing the word “man” to “person” opened up the Senior Division to women, quietly, and no

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<sup>32</sup>At the WD-OCC, Executive Council Meeting on November 12, 1954, the chairman of the Goodwill Committee reported she was having a problem getting members interested in Goodwill Trips; the Civic Service Committee described the trouble they were having getting volunteers for their projects; the Membership chairman said it was very hard to get captains and workers, and the Noonday Luncheon chairman also said she had a difficult time getting members to sign up for her committee.

<sup>33</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, May, 10, 1954. With a record membership of 750, Noonday Luncheons had an average attendance of 43. Dinners drew an average of 174.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., June 6, 1955. Official membership was 921 including 296 new members. Two and a half years later, February 10, 1958, the goal was 1000 members but the minutes do not report if this goal was met.

<sup>35</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, September 21, 1945; February 18, 1955.



announcement was ever made. According to members of the Chamber's staff in the 1970s, there were not many women who took advantage of the open Chamber, but it was still an option. Again, since membership records are not available nor is there an official description of who would be a proper Senior member, one must consider members' thoughts and recollections. According to those who were part of the Chamber organization in the 1970s, the tendency was for the "professional" woman to join the Chamber while the "secretarial" or "clerical" worker became a Division member. Looking at the presidents of the Women's Division during the final eight years, five were administrative assistants or secretaries. However, these women generally served higher echelon employers including the president of United of Omaha, S. Mickey Skinner of Skinner Macaroni Company, and the president of United States Checkbook.<sup>36</sup>

Retention was always a problem. Even in the twenties, women joined and served for a time and then left the Chamber. Of the 121 charter members of the Division in 1922, only fifteen are listed as members ten years later. Given that some of the women might have gotten married, changed their names and remained active in the Division, many did drop out before 1932.<sup>37</sup> Working to strengthen retention rates, the women's Executive Council established a Membership Maintenance Committee in 1947. Trying to make the women feel more comfortable at dinner meetings, the Executive Council discussed seating arrangements. Should an active board member be assigned to each table? Should a representative of the membership committee sit at each table to make new members feel more at home? Should name tags be worn? Should all members be called in advance of each meeting? In 1948, the women tried to solve the problem by presenting "rules" for seating at the meetings:

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<sup>36</sup>A list of presidents is in the appendix.

<sup>37</sup>*Polk's Omaha City Directory 1923* (Omaha: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1923); *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal XX* (December 1932), 35-36.

Dining room should not be open to general membership until 5:30 p.m. dinner nights; to permit all members an equal opportunity to obtain seats.

No places held after 5:45 to enable Hostess Committee to seat guests quickly.

At no time should more than 50% of a table be reserved.

No one member be permitted to reserve more than one seat.<sup>38</sup>

The Membership Committee began a program of contacting each new member to specifically “express an interest in her and ascertain whether she has become affiliated with committee work.” The caller would then “especially invite her to become active and take advantage of activities offered.”<sup>39</sup>

With membership at over 800, average attendance at the Noonday Luncheons and at dinner meetings in 1954 was only 43 and 174 respectively. Those numbers were similar to the 1930s when membership was considerably less than the 1954 figure. Most of the members did not have the same “professional” privileges that Senior Division members did. The women holding office positions were on limited lunch periods or, in the case of teachers and nurses, not able to get away for any kind of meeting during the day. A suggestion was made to mail post cards out to members instead of just listing the events in the *Clarion*, the newsletter of the Women's Division. A card could be kept “before them as a reminder.”<sup>40</sup> A Membership Activities Committee was appointed to design some kind of questionnaire which could be mailed to all members and that the women could then be classified according to business, firm, occupation and special talents.<sup>41</sup>

Late in the fifties, with membership still high, the group had problems getting enough volunteers for some of the Civic Service Committee's activities. Although the women had been volunteering at Veteran's Hospital for many years, a staffing problem

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<sup>38</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 11, 1948.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1952.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1954.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., November 29, 1954.

developed in 1957 as member participation dropped. Sometimes there were not enough volunteers to handle the telephone duties at the Red Cross on Friday nights.<sup>42</sup>

It is hard to determine precisely the reasons for the lack of attendance at meetings and participation on committees. More married members would certainly account for some of the shortage of women's free time and commitment. But a more definable reason could be location—where the women worked and where they lived. In the 1920s most of the women either lived in the downtown area of Omaha or in the immediate surrounding area. But even more relevant to their participation is that seventy-nine percent of them also worked downtown. To attend an evening dinner meeting, a woman could have gone home for a short time and still get to the meeting. Or she might have gone directly to the meeting from her nearby downtown office. Comparing the addresses and work locations of the original 121 members with the list of 176 women who were admitted for membership in 1956 makes this difference evident.

Marking dividing lines reaching out west from downtown Omaha—with 24th Street being the west edge of the downtown area—the table below shows the home and work locations of those members whose addresses are listed in the city directories for the years 1921 or 1923 and 1955 or 1956.

**Location of Residences of Members of the Women's Division  
East and West of 24<sup>th</sup> Street by Percentage of Membership**

	<u>1922</u>		<u>1956</u>
East of 24 <sup>th</sup> Street	30%	East of 24 <sup>th</sup> Street	15%
West of 24 <sup>th</sup> Street	39	West of 24 <sup>th</sup> Street	33
West of 36 <sup>th</sup> Street	12	West of 36 <sup>th</sup> Street	15
West of 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	18	West of 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	24
Carter Lake	2	West of 60 <sup>nd</sup> Street	5
		West of 72 <sup>nd</sup> Street	5
		West of 84 <sup>th</sup> Street	3
		Council Bluffs	3

(Totals do not add up to exactly 100.0% due to rounding.)

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1957; November 9, 1959.

**Work Location of Members of the Women's Division  
by Percentage of Membership**

	<u>1922</u>		<u>1956</u>
Downtown	79%	Downtown	57%
Midtown *	3	Midtown *	24
South Omaha	12	South Omaha	12
North Omaha	2	North Omaha	7
		West Omaha	1 <sup>43</sup>

(Totals do not add up to exactly 100.0% due to rounding.)

\*For this table, Midtown is the area west of 24th Street, extending to 50th Street. Mutual of Omaha and the Supreme Forest Woodmen Circle accounted for a majority of the midtown workers.

As Omaha grew, mostly westward after 1956, more and more women would be living and working away from the downtown area. The Senior Chamber became aware of the problem in its own Division. In 1976, at about the same time the Senior Chamber was ready to terminate the Women's Division, they saw the need to create Area Councils. According to President Howard P. Doerr, these subdivisions of the Chamber would help dispel the sentiment that the Chamber was a “downtown organization.”<sup>44</sup> The Women's Division was not large enough to support area councils but in 1965 the group tried to promote attendance at their luncheons by holding some away from downtown.<sup>45</sup>

In 1961, a questionnaire was sent to “over 900 members.” Of those who were considered “active” members, eighty percent felt their membership was worthwhile but so did seventy-seven percent of the “inactive” members. Both groups replied that they felt the Chamber played an important role in the progress of Omaha and that their membership was worthwhile. Seventy-four percent of the members who considered themselves “active” had served on committees and eighty-two percent had met new friends through the Women's

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<sup>43</sup>*Omaha City Directory: 1921; 1923; 1955; 1956* (Omaha: R.L. Polk & Co.), 1921 1923, 1956, 1957; COC, Executive Committee Minutes, June 13, 1922; WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 10, 1956.

<sup>44</sup>*Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXXVI* (October 15, 1976), 2.

<sup>45</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, September 13, 1965.

Division. Not surprisingly, only eleven percent of the “inactives” had served on a committee and the same percentage said they had met new friends.<sup>46</sup>

The Membership Committee continued to try to get members involved in programs. In 1962, this committee tried to contact every member to get their feelings about the organization. Most reported favorably, but attendance at the evening dinner meetings was still only around 150.<sup>47</sup> Also in 1962 the chairman of the Activities Committee recommended and the Council adopted a recommendation that that particular committee be dispensed with as “little interest was shown in social activities planned for the general membership.”<sup>48</sup> Although some women joined the Division and quickly resigned their membership for one reason or another, there were others who remained members for many years. In 1963 the Division held a Holiday Tea to honor sixty-seven women who had been members for twenty years or more.<sup>49</sup>

Two years later, the women were trying to solve a problem of delinquent members. The number of non-paying members reached fifty-five and the women were trying to “conserve” those members.<sup>50</sup> The Membership Committee chair explained at a “Speak Up, Ladies” meeting, that a large percentage of the membership “would like to be better advised on the business of the Division.” She recommended committee and Board members give short talks at the dinner meetings.<sup>51</sup> The talks did not help the attendance at the dinner meetings. In 1958 Chamber President J. Allan Mactier and his wife were guests at “the first dinner meeting of the year [which] was held at the Diplomat Hotel . . . with approximately 80 persons in attendance.”<sup>52</sup> By 1970, the Program Committee reported that

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<sup>46</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, February 13, 1961.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1962.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., May 14, 1962; June 11, 1962.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1963.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1964.

<sup>51</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, April 12, 1965.

<sup>52</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, February 12, 1958.

a dinner meeting with Keith Carter, Executive Vice-President of the Chamber, had “a good turnout of 60 members.”<sup>53</sup>

Although the Division boasted about its new members, attendance at the regular meetings in the late 1960s was not a source of pride. Luncheons “continue to draw between 40 and 50.”<sup>54</sup> The Membership Relations Committee took a poll to find out why women were not attending. Some of the reasons given were a “transportation problem: then cost . . . luncheons running over their one hour lunch limit; lack or cost of parking if the activity is downtown; the luncheon menu being too heavy.”<sup>55</sup>

By 1971, average attendance at luncheons remained low, so the Division decided to limit these Noonday events to just one per month.<sup>56</sup> Hoping to attract a higher attendance, it was decided to change the day of the luncheon from Thursdays to Wednesdays as “the later part of the week becomes more hectic; i.e., preparing for the weekend, hair appointments, etc.” and to decide on a centralized location for the luncheon instead of moving around to various Omaha restaurants.<sup>57</sup> It seems as if at this point most of the members were participating to the limit of their time or enthusiasm. When one member suggested establishing an Action Committee which would allow members to sign up to help existing Omaha organizations with their projects, the Board rejected the idea. Most of the members of the Board felt that the women “had just about all of the work that could be handled and still do a good job for our employers.”<sup>58</sup>

The chairman of the City Beautification Committee expressed feelings of frustration along these lines. She was concerned about the lack of attendance of members of the Senior Board as well as the Women's Division at the awards banquets. She felt that since

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<sup>53</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, January 12, 1970.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1968.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1971.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1971.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1972.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1971.

the committee was urging contractors, architects, and businessmen to attend, it should be more than just a women's function. She also was concerned about having a Noonday Luncheon on the same day as the banquet since this would cut down the number of Women's Division members able to attend as the cost of paying for two meals out in one day might be more than one could spend. The chairman continued with the recommendation that the "Board of Directors of the Women's Division seriously look at some of their current procedures and revise them drastically. If we hope to grow and obtain new members we are not going about it in the right way and changes should be made to reflect professional organization - not chaos. . . . If we are professional women—this should be reflected in our organization."<sup>59</sup> The next year, a proposal from the Membership Committee suggested that instead of a "full scale" drive for new members, the Division should work harder to get present members more involved in the Chamber activities.<sup>60</sup> A hint of a "new, and hopefully better, method of involving new members in Women's Division activities" was presented at an October meeting in 1974. Preliminary groundwork had been laid, according to those involved in the Membership and Membership Relations Committees and the Board members.<sup>61</sup> A new brochure was worked up for the Division describing the committees. Procedures for the Membership drive printed in the February 1975 minutes do not reveal much in the way of a "new" and "better" method. They included:

A flyer announcing the Membership Drive was sent out with monthly mailing.

Membership Committee members were supplied with binders that contain the newly revised brochure, membership cards, committee checklist sheet and a "Question and Answer supplement."

New members would be "greeted" by a personal phone call.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1973. The Noonday Luncheon was not cancelled.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., February 19, 1974.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1974.

A Rush-Orientation for new members would be held at the Chamber with refreshments.<sup>62</sup>

By 1975, membership goals were set at fifty for the year, and even then, the Membership Committee said it would rather settle for fewer members if those new ones would be willing to participate on committees. They said they did not want to “just add names to our roster.”<sup>63</sup> An unconventional maneuver was utilized in 1975 to “deliver” an application when someone proposed as a “new member” a woman who had been a member earlier and who listed her current occupation as “retired.” Since the Division Bylaws stated that a retired woman was not eligible to join, the group accepted this recruit as a “renewed membership” rather than a new one.<sup>64</sup>

As late as May 1976, the women were planning new membership strategy including an orientation party in June for new and prospective members. However, by September they were talking about the rumors of a “merger” of the Chamber and the Women's Division.

The several hundred women in the Division in 1976 represented a decline from a peak of 1,000 members two decades earlier.<sup>65</sup> Yet the group was taken aback by the final decision of the Senior Division. The Chamber called it a merger, but the women did not see it that way. There was some animosity at the time, but as the years passed, some remembered it a little more kindly. Eleanor Rasmussen, the president of the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce in 1983 explained how the Women's Chamber had become separate and distinct in 1976. She said that the “break-away” came when the women had projects that the Chamber did not want “to continue.”<sup>66</sup> A 1987 article in the *Midlands Business Journal* described the Chamber's action as the “phasing out” of the

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., February 18, 1975.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1975.

<sup>65</sup>Estimates of the number of these members vary from 200 to 500 depending on different members' recollections.

<sup>66</sup>*Midland Business Journal* (Omaha), January 28, 1983, 9; February 13, 1987,



Women's Division instead of merging or terminating.<sup>67</sup> Whatever it was, the ex-Division members who formed the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce continued for some time the annual City Beautification Awards, the welcoming ceremony for new American citizens and the recognition luncheon for outstanding eighth grade girls. By the year 2000, the organization had endured, but membership had dwindled to fewer than sixty and several of those members, who once had belonged to the Women's Division, were in their eighties.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1987.

<sup>68</sup>DuanDean Leach telephone interview, by author, September 22, 2000.

## CHAPTER 4 - CIVIC PRIDE, PROMOTION AND SERVICE

One of the main objectives of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce was the improvement of the community. From large projects such as managing the operation of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra to ones that were more modest, like distributing Easter candy at the Nebraska School for the Deaf, the Division members deserve credit. In the early 1920s the Chamber of Commerce's Senior Division had committees working on transportation rates, advocating road improvements and the passage of a new City Charter. The group also promoted Omaha across the country, pushed for the establishment of Omaha as an air mail stop, and endorsed legislation in the Nebraska Statehouse. Different committees cooperated with the Omaha Manufacturers Association in advancing manufacturing interests with a "Buy Omaha Made Goods" slogan, investigated the city's disposal of garbage system, and worked with the police to improve services. The women sought to find their own role within the Chamber.<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably, there was no venture in the history of the Women's Division that required as much from the group as the founding, organization, and management of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra. The women were new to the Chamber when promoter Lucius Pryor presented them with such an opportunity at a special meeting on August 4, 1922. Both Guy Kiddo, a Director of the Senior Chamber, and J. D. Larson, the Commissioner and Secretary of the men's group, were also at the meeting. Pryor explained to the women that five artists had already agreed to perform, and he estimated total costs to be \$4,700. If successful, he continued, the women would earn a profit of at least \$1,300. Aside from being a money-raising proposition, he declared that the concert series would be a "cultural influence to the city." Larson said that the Chamber would stand behind the

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as OCC, Annual Report 1921-22, June 24, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

Division if they chose to sponsor the series.<sup>2</sup> The Business Women's Club, a separate group affiliated with the YWCA, had previously sponsored this “popular priced concert” series but withdrew their support because of the work involved. At another meeting of the women's Board three days later, Kiddo said that in his opinion the idea was a good one, as it would provide the public with five “excellent artists” at a small cost. He concluded by telling the women it was a “commendable” activity and, in addition, the Senior Division would cover any loss. Commissioner Larson said that in talking with “men familiar with such work that they advanced the idea that it could be done without too much effort.” So with this support, the Women's Division Board of Directors endorsed the project and put the vote to the full membership.<sup>3</sup> At a meeting of the entire membership on August 7, Pryor presented his proposition to the women. Kiddo was again present and told the women that though the Chamber had brought the series to the attention of the Women's Division, it would be their project, independent of the Chamber. Thirty-nine women voted for the concerts while thirteen did not because of the “great amount of work” connected with it.<sup>4</sup> Those thirteen naysayers were right. The concerts that Larson said could be done “without too much effort” grew by the second year into a major project requiring a great deal of work and a time commitment far beyond what Pryor or Larson had suggested.

The women began work on the concert series by assigning fifty members to six different committees: General Management, Finance, Auditing, Tickets, Newspaper and Display Advertising, and a House Committee. The Division sent out invitations to purchase

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<sup>2</sup>Business & Professional Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as WD-OCC, Board of Directors Special Meeting Minutes, August 4, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

<sup>3</sup>WD-OCC, Special Meeting Minutes, August 7, 1922.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., General Membership Special Meeting Minutes, August 9, 1922.

tickets to a select 5,000 Omaha residents. Season ticket buyers could pay from \$1.65 to \$3.85 for the series of five concerts, depending on the location of the seats.<sup>5</sup>

This first year's concerts were an unqualified success both financially and culturally. The Division earned over \$5,500.<sup>6</sup> Reviewing the initial performance, the *Omaha World-Herald* said, "the success of this first concert is a compliment to the managerial ability of this organization of music lovers, who should be encouraged in every way possible."<sup>7</sup> Commissioner Larson of the Senior Chamber congratulated the Division. He called the series a "community service that will long be remembered."<sup>8</sup> That first season presented few problems for the women although some of the preliminary work had been handled by Pryor before they took over responsibility. Nevertheless, the success so encouraged the women that they distributed survey cards at the final performance asking the concert audience if they would be interested in buying tickets for a second season.<sup>9</sup>

At a meeting of the women's Executive Council on June 15, 1923, the women voted unanimously in favor of continuing the series.<sup>10</sup> However, the second year's series was disappointing. The women sold one thousand fewer tickets than the previous year and had only \$862.85 left at the end of the concert season. Even so, the Division decided that with cooperation from all of the women, they would continue with the series.<sup>11</sup> At a March meeting in 1924, Kiddo introduced Herman Mansfield, a local businessman, and Ernest

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<sup>5</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, September 6, 1922. The five performers were Madame Schumann-Heink, Criteron Male Quartette; Paul Althouse, Tenor; Florence MacBeth, Coloratura Soprano; and Barbara Maurel, Mezzo Soprano.

<sup>6</sup>COC Report, 1922-23, June 9, 1923. The first year's profit was used to remodel a portion of the Chamber headquarters for a Women's Lounge, something the men had promised they would do. There was some discussion among the women about using "their" money to pay for something the Chamber owed them, but since the Chamber had agreed to cover any loss, the women finally decided that the Chamber did have some rights when it came to a profit.

<sup>7</sup>*Omaha World-Herald*, November 21, 1922, 2.

<sup>8</sup>COC Report, 1922-23, June 9, 1923.

<sup>9</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, March 19, 1923.

<sup>10</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, June 15, 1923. First, the motion had to be approved by the Executive Committee of the Senior Chamber.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, January 7, 1924.

Nordin, the musical director at the World Theater in Omaha, who proposed that the women “sponsor or underwrite an Omaha Symphony Orchestra.”<sup>12</sup> Again, the men's Executive Council approved the new plan. By the April meeting Mansfield and Nordin, who volunteered to serve as business manager and assistant conductor, respectively, had hired a sixty-man orchestra which was already rehearsing.<sup>13</sup> The women sponsored a final spring concert with the new orchestra and sold 2,900 tickets. The committee reported “we should at least break even as far as finances were concerned. Kennedy [John L. Kennedy, chairman of the Senior Executive Committee] was quoted as having said that we had put ourselves, as well as Omaha, on the map.”<sup>14</sup>

Each year thereafter, the project became more complex. For the 1924-25 year, the women found it necessary to raise a guaranty fund of \$30,000. They collected “pledges ranging from \$10.00 to nearly one thousand dollars” from “music-loving citizens” but hoped to have a capacity audience in which case the guarantors would not have to be called upon.<sup>15</sup> In February 1925, the women’s Executive Council decided to “procure 1000 - \$10 cash subscriptions to the Symphony, each subscription to include one season ticket. . . . [and] the best seats in the Auditorium be reserved for these subscribers.”<sup>16</sup> At the very next meeting, however, the women rescinded the motion about soliciting cash subscriptions. There is no explanation as to why the women abandoned that plan.

Up to 1925, the orchestra had been under the direction of volunteers. As the project expanded such an arrangement could not continue, so the women faced the problem of finding a resident conductor. This greatly added to the expenses of the concert series as the

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<sup>12</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, March 7, 1924; *Greater Omaha City Directory 1923* (Omaha: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1923).

<sup>13</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 7, 1924.

<sup>14</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Minutes, May 21, 1924.

<sup>15</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, September 7, 1924; *Omaha World-Herald*, December 1, 1925, 8. Artists for the 1924-25 season were Mme. Florence VanHoven, Renee Chemet, and Frances Nash.

<sup>16</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, February 24, 1925.

women had to budget \$4,500 for a conductor. The women agreed to underwrite the symphony for the \$4,500 with estimated total costs at \$15,000 for the season.<sup>17</sup> The Division hired Hungarian conductor Sandor Hermati who signed a contract on April 11, 1925. The Women's Division was responsible for contracting with the musicians while Hermati was responsible for the “rehearsing and artistic upbuilding of the Orchestra . . . and that he will exert his best artistic and personal efforts in behalf of this organization.”<sup>18</sup>

“Not too much effort” hardly described the women's absorption with the orchestra in 1925. The group employed a conductor, a part-time director of personnel and a publicity director. They hired soloists, rented the auditorium, procured advertising, found guarantors *and* sold tickets.<sup>19</sup> Culturally, the concerts were “one of the biggest things ever done for Omaha” and “had placed Omaha among the musical center[s] of the United States.”<sup>20</sup> The Orchestra added children's concerts both in Omaha and Council Bluffs, and the new conductor proposed taking the orchestra to Lincoln for a concert. Hermati established “himself immediately as a thorough musician of profound knowledge and strong individuality.” And the local musicians had developed into “a symphony orchestra of the very first rank.”<sup>21</sup>

In early 1926, Conductor Hermati presented a “list” of his recommendations.

These were:

1. Eight concerts instead of three.
2. Soloists at only three of the concerts.
3. An Orchestral night - one night per week set aside for orchestra business.
4. The auditorium should be secured free of charge. (He didn't say how.)

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<sup>17</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 6, 1925.

<sup>18</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, April 22, 1925.

<sup>19</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, June 1, 1925. Soloists for the year 1925-26 were Renee Chemet, William Gustafson (Basso) and Frances Nash.

<sup>20</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Minutes, September 28, 1925.

<sup>21</sup>*Evening World-Herald*, December 2, 1925, 9.

5. Scaling the price of the tickets.
6. A bulletin should be issued to the city announcing changes in policy.
7. Pressure should be brought to bear on the Chamber for their undivided support (\*an obligation for members to buy tickets.)
8. College credit should be given students at the University of Omaha.
9. Added twenty-four children's concerts.
10. The orchestra should be an artistic venture, not a commercial one.<sup>22</sup>

After listening to Hermati's suggestions, the women voted to continue sponsoring the orchestra for another season. The first task was negotiating Hermati's new contract. The Division offered him \$7,000, which the conductor said was impossible even to consider as he had been offered \$8,000 to return to New York. He would, however, "consider" a matching offer of \$8,000. The women referred the matter to the Senior Division's Executive Committee.<sup>23</sup> The men on the committee adopted a measure that would allow the women to go as high as \$8,500 if that became necessary but left negotiating up to the Women's Division. However, one week later, the chairman of the Senior Executive Committee advised the Division that Hermati had accepted the \$8,000 figure and would be returning to the symphony for the 1926-27 concert series.<sup>24</sup>

The *Omaha World-Herald*, in an editorial praising the classical music presented at one of the children's concerts, wrote about the four thousand youngsters who "sat in rapt attention throughout the program and then clamored for more" and called it "Beethoven year—in Omaha."<sup>25</sup> However, the concerts lost money. With ticket sales from four evening concerts, four children's concerts, and \$10,000 in subscriptions, there was still a loss for 1926-27 of over \$700. Hermati agreed to stay another year for \$10,000 but he wanted the women to hire a manager. This required budgeting an extra \$2,000 but the

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<sup>22</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, February 17, 1926.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1926.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., May 16, 1926; May 24, 1926.

<sup>25</sup>*Morning World-Herald*, December 2, 1926, 14.

women felt it was a sound idea as no member of the Division could devote the time needed to do the work of a manager.<sup>26</sup>

In the spring of 1927 the women's Executive Council met with a group of prominent Omahans to discuss the future of the orchestra. These men suggested forming an Auxiliary Committee that would raise \$12,000, assist in hiring musicians, and act in an advisory capacity. The rest of the management would be left to the Women's Division. After much discussion, the women accepted the offer. The Division would retain management of the orchestra, the Senior Chamber would cover Hermati's full salary and the Auxiliary Committee would help with securing additional funds.<sup>27</sup>

For the 1927-28 season, the Division offered one free ticket for each twenty tickets a member sold and began mail order sales. Discussions concerning the symphony series, the conductor, ticket information, deficits, etc. would fill five or six pages of the Executive Council meeting minutes. Bills "submitted for approval" now included charges for music, moving charges (from rehearsal hall to auditorium), rental of rehearsal hall, advertising, chair rental, electrical work, rental of palms, the purchase of an English Horn, music racks, and the repair of music racks. The group was paying the musicians, conductor, the personnel manager, and a publicity manager.

The first concert of 1927 lost over \$1,200, even taking into consideration the share of a \$12,000 subscription fund and a last minute ticket-selling campaign.<sup>28</sup> The second concert of that year's series was in the red for \$1,138. The report at the January meeting

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., February 21, 1927.

<sup>27</sup>WD-OCC, Special Joint Meeting Minutes of Executive Council and Auxiliary Committee, March 14, 1927. The Auxiliary Committee was made up of Dr. A.D. Dunn, Attorney L.F. Crofoot, A.H. Richardson, president of Standard Oil of Nebraska, William Schmoller, President of Schmoller and Mueller Piano Co., J.M.Harding, Officer of Harding Cream Co., W.F. Baxter, President of Thomas Kilpatrick and Co., Robert Morsman, President of United States National Bank and United States Trust Co., Walter W. Head, President of Omaha National Bank, G.M. Hitchcock, former U.S. Senator and publisher of the *World-Herald*, and Chamber Commissioner Clarke Powell.

<sup>28</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 12, 1927.



estimated a total loss for the year of \$7,500, requiring calling up thirty percent of the Guaranty Fund.<sup>29</sup>

The women's Executive Council called a special meeting in January 1928, to "make plans to be presented to the membership of the Women's Division to determine whether or not the Women's Division would sponsor the Omaha Symphony Orchestra for the 1928-29 series."<sup>30</sup> The group decided that they would continue:

1. If we have outside assistance in financing the enterprise.
2. If we can secure the personnel.
3. If we can keep our conductor.
4. If we have a paid manager to handle the detail of which there is now a sufficient amount to warrant one.
5. If we are able to secure an audience.<sup>31</sup>

"Securing an audience," the women felt, was a more pleasant way of saying "selling tickets" but it remained a serious problem for the group. The women agreed that the concerts were a "splendid vehicle for music culture," and an "opportunity for doing something big for our city." They were sure they were offering "the public something of which we are proud" and they were "well-fitted for the task." And while the Division was eager to keep it as "our enterprise," attendance of 2,000 per concert was not enough.<sup>32</sup> Despite the loss, at another special meeting of the entire Division membership on February 1, 1928, the women voted to continue another year.<sup>33</sup>

For the new season a more formal organization, the Omaha Symphony Orchestra Association, made up of influential men and women in the city, was created. This group,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1928.

<sup>30</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, January 25, 1928.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. The Orchestra Association consisted of most of the previous Auxiliary Committee with the addition of Ballard Dunn, Editor-In-Chief of the *Omaha Bee News*, and many of the wives of the Auxiliary Committee members.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1928.

many of them donors and guarantors, was formed to “see that the orchestra is put on a sound paying basis.”<sup>34</sup> They established a Board of Directors and an Executive Committee to work with and assist the Women's Division. The Association felt that they needed subscriptions of \$15,000 and a guaranty fund of \$25,000. They also hired an orchestra business manager with a salary of \$2,000.<sup>35</sup> The Division was still considered the overall manager of the orchestra.

Although the children’s concerts drew an average of three thousand, fewer and fewer people attended the evening concerts. Hoping to stop any detrimental competition, the Women’s Division sent the Senior Division a resolution requesting that the Chamber not “authorize the sponsoring of musical events by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce or any of its Divisions, during the season of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra concerts.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, for the 1928-29 year the series showed a deficit after cash subscriptions of over \$4,000. Again guarantors had to be called.<sup>37</sup>

For the 1929-30 season the women withdrew \$2,500 of Division money and lent it to the Omaha Symphony Orchestra. They increased ticket prices. But Women's Division members were selling fewer tickets, and it was estimated that fifty percent of the members did not even buy a ticket for their own use.<sup>38</sup> The Orchestra Committee blamed the lack of sales on the popularity of the radio, on the manner in which the women handled reservations, the condition of auditorium, the many other activities that were available to the people, and that the music was too high class to suit the public.<sup>39</sup>

In February 1930, the Omaha Symphony Orchestra Association presented a proposal to the Division requesting a greater measure of control. The Association felt the

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<sup>34</sup>*Omaha Bee*, February 11, 1928, 1.

<sup>35</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, February 21, 1928.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, January 14, 1929. Passed at a Special Meeting on January 16, 1928.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, April 8, 1929.

<sup>38</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, January 30, 1929; WD-OCC Executive Council Minutes, February 11, 1929; March 11, 1929.

<sup>39</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, November 11, 1929.

situation was growing difficult as they had little say in the operation of the orchestra. They proposed that a Governing Board, consisting of members of both their group and the Women's Division should manage the orchestra.<sup>40</sup> The women's Executive Council, in return, proposed that the Association have all control. The Council sent a referendum ballot to all members of the Women's Division explaining the situation and advising the membership that the Executive Council was in favor of transferring "total control, responsibility and management" to the Omaha Symphony Association.<sup>41</sup> Voting on the question "Do you favor the transfer of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra to the control and management of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra Association?" the membership answered: YES - 125 and NO - 2. The chairman of the Division's Orchestra Committee recommended a complete severing of connections with the orchestra so that the women could move onto other projects. The motion passed and it was just left to settle accounts, take an inventory and hand over their orchestra.<sup>42</sup>

The women retained much symphony property, everything from sawhorses and lumber pieces to 47 music racks, a typewriter, a conductor's platform, and a sheet music library. There were some musical instruments and two ticket carts too and the Council decided to either sell or trade them.<sup>43</sup> In 1937 the women voted on a motion that stated "should an Omaha Symphony Orchestra . . . be organized . . . the Women's Division, at the discretion of its President and Secretary, [could] loan its symphony library to the orchestra."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, February 27, 1930.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1930.

<sup>42</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 14, 1930. The orchestra continued in operation for another two years and then was suspended during the Great Depression. Several short seasons, a "Little" Symphony, and another suspension during World War II made for an uneven history until the orchestra was "rebuilt as a full symphony" and performed its first concert in 1947. *1999-2000 Season Program*, Omaha Symphony, 2000, 48.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1933.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., October 11, 1937.

At a special meeting called for December 17, 1941, the women agreed to offer the symphony library to the University of Omaha for \$600.<sup>45</sup> Three months later the women voted to accept an offer of \$500 from the University.<sup>46</sup> Except for buying ads in later Omaha Symphony programs, the Division was out of the orchestra business.

From 1922 to 1930, it seemed the women were preoccupied with discussions, decision-making, motions, and votes, all related to the Symphony Orchestra concerts. However, the women initiated other projects during that time. The management of the Chamber of Commerce's dining room was a significant activity and the women on that committee were highly involved in overseeing the operation of that facility. This was a small committee, but these few women were given complete control of the hiring and firing of employees, the quality and prices of meals served, all publicity, and the dining room decor. The agreement called for the Chamber to cover any loss while the women were entitled to the profits, if any.<sup>47</sup>

In 1925, the Civic Affairs Committee of the Women's Division heard the Omaha Safety Council describe the substandard conditions at the Douglas County Hospital. They learned that sometimes children who were sick had to be taken to the city jail because there was "no place to take a child who is infected with disease."<sup>48</sup> The committee worked to raise public awareness of the lack of hospital space. In 1926, the women printed 25,000 dodgers, or leaflets, arguing the need for additional facilities. The following year, in an effort to draw attention to the problem, the Division encouraged other women's organizations to visit the hospital once a month.<sup>49</sup> Working with the Health Committee of the Senior Chamber, in the fall of 1928, the women submitted a "formal request" to the Senior Chamber Executive Committee for permission to issue another leaflet promoting a

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<sup>45</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Meeting Minutes, December 17, 1941.

<sup>46</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, March 9, 1942.

<sup>47</sup>OCC, Executive Committee, February 26, 1924. There were no profits.

<sup>48</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 7, 1925;

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., December 20, 1926; December 12, 1927.

new hospital. The Division also asked for ten dollars from the Chamber to cover the cost of having the 25,000 leaflets printed. They received both permission and the money.<sup>50</sup> In November 1928, a \$750,000 bond issue for a new hospital building was on the ballot. The voters of Douglas County approved the funds four to one.<sup>51</sup>

The Women's Division had to work with very limited funds. Asking for \$10.00 from the Chamber to have leaflets printed was just one example. Beginning in 1926 the women gave Easter gifts to the children of the Nebraska School for the Deaf. Each year, the group had to ask members for contributions to cover the costs of the Easter candy and gifts. Other projects in the early years included an effort in 1926 to organize sightseeing tours of the city or, at least, to prepare a list of places and things a visitor to Omaha should see. The women also held receptions for new American citizens. Trying to make life easier for store clerks, the Division sent a proposition to the Senior Executive Committee of the Chamber in 1928 recommending that during the months of July and August, retail stores close at one o'clock in the afternoon on Saturday. The women's Better Omaha Committee sponsored an annual "Beautiful Omaha Day" during which they helped clean vacant lots and plant flowers in the city. The Highway Beautification Committee had a few ideas too about improving the appearance of the highways between Omaha and Lincoln, such as planting trees. Upon study, the committee found out that trees could only be planted on a leased twenty-foot right-of-way. The group could not afford to do that. Another idea was to give trees to the farmers along the highway to plant and tend. Finally deciding that all suggested projects were beyond the group's means, the Division discontinued the Highway Beautification Committee.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>COC, Board of Directors and WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 2, 1928.

<sup>51</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 7, 1925; December 20, 1926; December 27, 1927; November 28, 1928; *Morning World-Herald*, November 1, 1928, Sample Ballot insert; *Morning World-Herald*, November 7, 1928, 1.

<sup>52</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, March 11, 1940; September 10, 1941.

In the mid-1930s, the Division began awarding a scholarship or work fellowship to a business student or students at the Municipal University of Omaha. The women worked with the registrar at the University to determine how best to award the money. In 1934, the Division began yet another tradition—giving money to Omaha schools to buy eyeglasses for needy children. Each year, they held raffles, “style revue teas,” or card parties to raise the money. They even accepted contributions from other groups—the Women's Division of the Nebraska Power Company held a dance in 1938 and donated the proceeds, \$258, to the fund.<sup>53</sup> The committee in charge of this project divided the money among the Omaha Schools—Public, Catholic and other Parochial—with the amounts dependent on the success of yearly fund-raising events. With a \$600 donation in 1961, the total of all contributions to the eyeglass fund reached \$10,000. At that point, the Division felt that their financial position was such that they had to discontinue the project.<sup>54</sup>

The Division sponsored 4-H girl projects; they raised money by lectures and raffles and donated money to send Douglas County 4-H girls to summer camp. They began selecting one or two high school girls each year and paying their fees and bus fares to attend Girls State in Lincoln, Nebraska. They bought and wrapped Christmas gifts for the Children at the Child Saving Institute. In later years, they furnished sacks of groceries for needy senior citizens during the holiday season.<sup>55</sup>

After the start of World War II, the women directed their civic activities to war-relief. The Division formed a National Defense Committee and, through the Red Cross, offered members courses in first aid, knitting, braille, canteen, home nursing, hospital and recreation corps, motor corps, surgical dressings, swimming, and water safety. The Division also

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1938.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1961.

<sup>55</sup>Many of these projects continued for years. See WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 1, 8, 1934; April 4, 1947; September 11, 1950; WD-OCC Board of Directors Minutes, November 8, 1971.

began recognizing members who bought Defense Stamps and Savings Bonds.<sup>56</sup> The women volunteered to serve as hostesses at the Union Station on Sundays, greeting and feeding soldiers. Not only did the women give their time for this service; they each contributed twenty-five cents to help pay for the coffee and doughnuts that they served.<sup>57</sup>

At a special meeting in March 1942, the women agreed to sponsor a special wartime project.<sup>58</sup> The Fat Conservation Campaign involved saving and selling “kitchen grease” that would help “replace the oil supply lost to the Japanese in the Philippines and Dutch East Indies.”<sup>59</sup> They solicited the support of grocers, meat dealers, packers, schools, and women's organizations. They publicized the campaign using newspaper items, radio reports, and by inviting 100 other women's organizations to a luncheon promoting the grease campaign. The Division staffed a “Waste Kitchen Grease” booth at the Omaha Food Show at the City Auditorium in October 1942 where they demonstrated how to save the grease.<sup>60</sup>

Upon a recommendation of committee members, the National Defense Committee was changed to the War Service Committee in September 1942. The group assisted in the sale of War Bonds and staffed a bond sales booth in downtown Omaha and the women used the money from the sale of their symphony music library to buy bonds. The group sold tickets to an Army Show and raffled off \$25 War Bonds. The women contributed to the Service Men's Center, Red Cross Canteen, Colored Men's Service Center, and the American Women's Voluntary Service.<sup>61</sup> The committee collected magazines for the Servicemen's Center at the Union Station and the Airport canteen and made scrapbooks for hospitalized servicemen. The total membership helped make surgical dressings. During

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1941.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., January 12, 1942.

<sup>58</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Special Minutes, March 26, 1942.

<sup>59</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* I (April 25, 1942), 3.

<sup>60</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Meeting, October 12, 1942.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1942.

1943, the women averaged ninety participants on each of the fifty-two meeting nights, for a total of 12,739 hours and 68,385 dressings made.<sup>62</sup> This project worked out best for the women of the Division since they could volunteer during the evening hours, a suitable time for the working women who made up the membership. In 1944, the women agreed to sponsor the WAC (Women's Army Corps) beauty salon at the Brandeis Store.<sup>63</sup> Also in 1944, the women staffed booths at three Omaha theaters and sold War Bonds worth \$55,000 in one month.<sup>64</sup> The group collected books and records for servicemen in the South Pacific. They encouraged all members to contribute used clothing for people in Europe, China and the Philippine Islands.<sup>65</sup> The Division agreed to help the Chamber raise funds for the World War II Memorial Park project.<sup>66</sup>

After the war, the women looked elsewhere to meet the needs of their community. In November 1945, the group suggested to the Senior Chamber that they be responsible for entertaining women who came to Omaha to attend conventions. The Division hoped to use lists supplied by the Convention Bureau and write letters to women's groups inviting them to the city. They discussed collecting literature relative to points of interest in Omaha, preparing "shopping aids" which would list shops and types of merchandise, and arranging teas and cocktail parties for the guests.<sup>67</sup> But the next month, the members decided that this project would be too much work and require too much time. The whole idea was tabled.<sup>68</sup>

An idea that proved more successful assisted the handicapped in the city. In the spring of 1946, the women's board established a Helping Hands Committee that began organizing and sponsoring an annual bazaar for the sale of handwork and crafts made by

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1944.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1944.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., March 13, 1944.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1945.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1945.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1945.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., December 12, 1945.



the “shut-ins.” The Division located a place to hold the bazaar, handled all publicity, obtained insurance and staffed the bazaar. Owners of the handwork received their profits and items that did not sell were returned to them.<sup>69</sup> The women also offered advice to the craftsmen as to what was selling the best. The first of these events netted over \$575 for the craftsmen.<sup>70</sup> The following year, with increased advertising, sales totaled \$1,659.70 with expenses of less than twenty dollars.<sup>71</sup> The project continued through the next decade with returns generally around \$1,200 to \$1,300. Initially, Omaha Public Power District offered the Helping Hands Committee space in their building; later the women held the function at the Orpheum Theater. One year the sale was in the lobby of the City Hall. To raise sales, the women brought some of the items to Division dinner meetings and sold them to members. Finally as profits to the craftsmen began to decline, the women decided to discontinue the event in 1959.<sup>72</sup>

Although there had been women from the Division on the Senior Agricultural Committee, it was not until the Division established its own such committee that a Rural Homemakers' Day became an annual event. This was a joint effort of the Women's Division Agricultural Committee and the Rural Leadership Committee of the Chamber of Commerce's Agricultural Committee.<sup>73</sup> Rural women's groups throughout Nebraska and twenty-two western Iowa counties were invited to select a representative from their home county based on her contribution to the welfare of the Middle West. The purpose was “designed to recognize and encourage leadership among rural women.”<sup>74</sup> The first year, 1947, there were eighty-five Rural Homemakers so recognized. The honorees were feted with a coffee hour, luncheon and a banquet with attendance of over 200. Since this was a

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1946.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., June 10, 1946.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1946.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1959.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1946.

<sup>74</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* VII (February 27, 1947), 3.  
Eventually northern Kansas counties were also included.

Chamber project, there was a budget of \$1,800, a large amount given the women's other projects were always on a tight budget.<sup>75</sup> The Awards Day became a very successful annual event for both agricultural groups. Each year, the Chamber women arranged the morning receptions, lunches, packing plant tours, cooking demonstrations, speakers, shopping trips, gifts from retailers, and the awards banquet. These affairs merited considerable space, news reports, and photographs in the *Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*. In 1964, the women heard that they might have to “assume full responsibility for this program, without help from the Senior Agricultural Department in ensuing years.” Even so, the women still felt it was a project that merited continuation.<sup>76</sup> The women were also afraid they would lose support from the Associated Retailers for this project, but the businessmen did come through with \$300 for the 1965 breakfast.<sup>77</sup> However, the Senior committee did stay involved with the event and the Rural Homemakers Awards Day continued as a joint project through 1976.<sup>78</sup>

The Division's Agricultural Committee also began entertaining the Cow-Belles. These women, the auxillary of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association, came to Omaha each fall in conjunction with the Ak-Sar-Ben Rodeo. The Division entertained the out-of-towners, arranged for interviews on local television shows, held meetings, and sponsored cocktail parties, tours, luncheons, and teas. These affairs began in the mid-1950s and also continued until 1976.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the Rural Homemakers Day, donations to children's causes, volunteer service at the Veterans Hospital and Children's Hospital, and the sponsorship of the Helping Hand Benefit, the Division added a new civic project in the 1950s. In response

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<sup>75</sup>COC, Agricultural Executive Committee Minutes, January 24, 1947.

<sup>76</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, June 8, 1964.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1964.

<sup>78</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 12, 1976. A statement by Chamber President Howard P. Doerr discussing the Division's separation lists the Rural Homemakers Awards Day as one of the Women's Division's three main functions.

<sup>79</sup>First mentioned in the WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 14, 1957.

to Cold War fears, the women assisted the city's Civil Defense Commission with its projects. The Division appointed a Civil Defense Committee and this group organized a class for members in civil defense training.<sup>80</sup> They also recruited Women's Division members to take an atomic home nursing class and encouraged members to take instructions in "how to proceed with registration of the homeless in an emergency."<sup>81</sup> The Division sponsored an open house and recruited volunteers to take a course at the Filter Center. A Filter Center's function was to receive calls from Ground Observer Corps who would report on aircraft in the vicinity. Volunteers in the center, working under the Air Force, would "plot and evaluate" the information, then relay it to "selected control agencies of the air defense system." Omaha was one of fifty cities in the country where a center was in operation<sup>82</sup>

Besides the Symphony Orchestra, which still gives credit to the early Division, the women wanted to give the city a lasting gift.<sup>83</sup> In late 1957, the group discussed the feasibility of an outdoor theatre. The Executive Council assigned a committee to inquire about costs, including how much it would take to get the project started, and who would use such a facility.<sup>84</sup> Discussions about this project appeared regularly in the minutes for another year; sometimes the group put off other projects until they could reach a decision about the theatre. Finally at the February meeting in 1959, the president of the Division brought up the theatre "as a matter of unfinished business." The women decided not to participate in such a project and notified the Executive Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. The group felt it would take too much time from their regular employment; they doubted they could raise sufficient funds; they felt the current recreational facilities

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1955.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., November 9, 1953.

<sup>82</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* XI (June 13, 1952), 34.

<sup>83</sup>The program for the 79th Season of the Omaha Symphony, 1999-2000, credits the Women's Division for bringing the "famed Sandor Harmati" to Omaha and as a result the orchestra "thrived."

<sup>84</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 9, 1957.

located in Omaha were not receiving full support, and the building of a new Community Playhouse made the Outdoor Theatre project “untimely.”<sup>85</sup> But the women were not completely through with the outdoor theatre ideas. At the August 1959 meeting, they brought up the possibility of building one at Rachel Gallagher Park at 52nd and Military Streets. For the same reasons listed above, they rejected that idea too.<sup>86</sup>

The women then quickly moved from talking about an outdoor theatre to locating a “Western Village” in Omaha. Representatives of the city told the women that the city was considering the purchase of a park site at 77th and Center Streets in West Omaha and establishing an historical museum. Still in 1959, a member of the Parks Department spoke to the women suggesting a western village be built on that fifteen to twenty acres of new parkland. The president of the Senior Chamber of Commerce thought the Division should pursue the idea. Questions had to be answered such as costs of converting a building already on the site to a museum, maintenance costs, admission fees, and such. The women appointed a special committee.<sup>87</sup> They wrote letters to other cities with similar facilities—Oklahoma City's Pioneer Village, Dodge City's Boot Hill among others. At the December meeting, however, the liaison officer of the Women's Division—Kermit Hansen of the Chamber—spoke to the women about the project. He questioned the “practicality under the provisions with which it has been presented.” He recommended the women look instead to a children's zoo project. However, the women were not ready to give up on the western village idea and talked with representatives from City Hall, met with a furnace contractor to investigate costs for the installation of a heating system; discussed how to use

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1959, Letter to the Executive Committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, March 2, 1959. Copy attached to the WD-COC, Executive Council Minutes, February 13, 1959.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., August 10, 1959.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., October 12, 1959.

projected concession money; and studied the size of the tract compared to the proposed use—there had to be space for enough parking stalls.<sup>88</sup>

In January 1960, the women were still interested in the 77th and Center Street park location. Instead of the village, the women suggested to the city that the site be used to house an agricultural equipment exhibit. A collector from David City, Nebraska offered to donate his collection to the city. The women estimated initial costs to be about \$5,000 but they did not want to take on the responsibility for a museum's future financial obligations. The Division wrote a letter to the Director of City Parks and Recreation and Public Property in Omaha telling him that the Division was in favor of “assisting in the development of the grounds at 7701 Center Street.” The group would not accept the obligation for continuing operation funds, the letter continued, but the women would be willing to volunteer a “good deal of their time and effort for this purpose.”<sup>89</sup> Charles W. Warren, Director of Parks, Recreation and Public Property, wrote back to the Division stating that the city bought the property for a community park and playground and that the display of an agricultural collection was not in keeping with this purpose. He added that the city did not have the funds to prepare the buildings for such a display, nor for the personnel to maintain it.<sup>90</sup>

The women accepted that answer and gave up on any project at the proposed 77th and Center Street site. Eight years later, in 1968, the Division again talked about cooperating with the Omaha Parks, Recreation and Public Property Department of the city in developing another park, this time in North Omaha, for use as an historical area.<sup>91</sup> The Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society spoke to the group about the history of

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1959

<sup>89</sup>Letter from Doris Boetel, President of the Women's Division to Charles Warren, Director of the City Parks and Recreation and Public Property, January 14, 1960, attachment to WD-OCC, Executive Council minutes, January 11, 1960.

<sup>90</sup>Letter from Charles W. Warren, Director Parks, Recreation and Public Property Department to Doris Boetel, President of the Women's Division, January 29, 1960 and a memo from R. B. McClintock to Charles W. Warren, January 25, 1960, attachments to the WD-OCC, Executive Council minutes, February 8, 1960.

<sup>91</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March 11, 1968.

the Dodge Park area, north of the city along the Missouri River, and was enthusiastic about the reconstruction of a fur trading post and perhaps an Indian Village in the area.<sup>92</sup> A planned Saturday morning visit to the park was rained out.<sup>93</sup> There is no mention that the women pursued this project further.

In 1960, the idea of establishing a Children's Zoo interested the women. Again the Executive Council appointed a Steering Committee to investigate the project. The group recommended setting up a Speaker's Bureau to acquaint the city with the project and they talked of establishing a non-profit corporation to administer the funds. They thought they might be able to secure funds from a foundation, or there was the possibility of obtaining Federal funds. The committee hoped to interest the city's leading citizens in the zoo, and were ready to promote and publicize all aspects of the idea. The women talked about \$100,000 as a "good start."<sup>94</sup> The committee hired an attorney to set up a non-profit corporation, which was necessary for the handling of finances for the zoo.<sup>95</sup> At the June 13, 1960 meeting, there was a statement that "plans for a Children's Zoo have been somewhat changed. . . . Future plans for this project are indefinite at the present time." The minutes offer no further explanation.<sup>96</sup>

Back in the 1920s the women had sponsored a Better Omaha Committee whose purpose was to lead in the cleaning up and beautification of the city. In 1962, the Division established the City Beautification Committee with similar goals. Several women volunteered to be a part of a speaker's bureau to talk to Omaha clubs and organizations about city beautification. The group also met with the Assistant Superintendent of the Omaha Public Schools, who promised support from the school system. The committee proposed a Beautiful Omaha Week during which the women hoped to line up a big

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., April 8, 1968.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., May 13, 1968.

<sup>94</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 11, 1960.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., May 9, 1960.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., June 13, 1960.

parade.<sup>97</sup> However, the most popular activity of the committee was recognizing businesses which had “made outstanding contributions to a more beautiful Omaha through new construction, reconstruction, general exterior improvements and special contributions, hoping to inspire others to realize the value of such investments to our city.”<sup>98</sup> The women invited Senior Division members to participate on the selection committee. The first Beautification Awards Banquet took place on September 27, 1962, with the committee presenting awards in each category. Receiving recognition at the first awards ceremony were the Diplomat Hotel, the Indian Hills Inn, Northern Natural Gas Company, Master's Realty, Red Ball Transfer Company, and Oddo's Drive-In.<sup>99</sup> The following January and May, the committee held two more award ceremonies.

In 1963, Mayor James Dworak invited the committee to his office to discuss several of his own ideas for the City Beautification Program.<sup>100</sup> At the meeting the Mayor requested that “all future City Beautification efforts be coordinated and carried out under the direction of the Mayor's Committee for City Beautification.” In other words, the Mayor did not want the program identified with one particular organization. The Women's Division agreed to cooperate with the Mayor's Committee and let the Mayor's group “assume major responsibility for . . .the City Beautification program.”<sup>101</sup> The women remained in charge of the Beautification Awards and the banquet. These became semi-annual events, each attended by approximately 200 persons. The project received good publicity from both the *Chamber of Commerce Newsletter* and the *Omaha World-Herald* including a double-page layout with pictures of the awardees. In 1975, the Division decided

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1962.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1962.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., February 11, 1963.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1963. Letter from Deanie Anderson, Chairman, Mayor's Committee for City Beautification to all the members of the Mayor's Committee for City Beautification, dated March 7, 1963. Copy attached to WD-OCC, Executive Council meeting minutes.

to have just one banquet per year because of rising expenses and the declining number of new buildings being constructed.<sup>102</sup>

Another project that the women had sponsored in the early years of the organization was welcoming newly sworn-in Americans. The Division again began sponsoring receptions for “new United States citizens” in 1962. For the first reception in December 1962, the women invited 350 new citizens and the general public.<sup>103</sup> After that, the women regularly greeted approximately thirty-five to forty new citizens each month. They held a reception and social hour for the honorees, their families and friends at the Chamber of Commerce dining room. The Municipal Affairs Committee, which assumed responsibility for the project, even arranged transportation from the Federal Building, where the ceremony was held, to the Chamber of Commerce for the reception. In cooperation with the League of Women Voters, the committee members made arrangements with the Election Commissioner for a voter’s registration booth to be available at the reception. When the Chamber moved into new quarters without a dining room, the women held the receptions at the Sheraton-Fontenelle Hotel, and later at Trinity Cathedral.<sup>104</sup> The chairman of the Civic Service Committee became concerned in 1968 when she noticed several women from the Daughters of the American Revolution at one of the receptions. The chairman said she wanted to warn the Division, and she wished “to stress that it is imperative to keep active in this civic project because of statements made by these ladies, it would appear they are most anxious to take over the function.”<sup>105</sup> The Division succeeded in keeping the project and in 1973 began presenting a jeweled American Flag lapel pin for all the new citizens as a welcome gift. Triple A Cornhusker Motor Club donated the cost of the pins.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, February 18, 1975.

<sup>103</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 10, 1962.

<sup>104</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes December 13, 1965; May 10, 1971.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1968.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., March 12, 1973.



Another activity that the women put much time and effort into was the “Easter Promenade.” First held in 1963, this was a cooperative program with the Omaha Retailers, which involved a “Miss Easter” contest, a parade, and a style show. Retailers handed out flowers to customers; there was a joint publicity campaign using a common slogan, and an Easter Egg Hunt.<sup>107</sup> The *World-Herald* ran a full-page color ad; the city redirected buses around the Easter Promenade, and there were prizes, balloons, and candy Easter eggs. Women from the Division modeled clothes at a fashion show at an Easter Sunday dinner. However, for the second annual Promenade in 1964, Easter was early, and inclement weather forced the event inside. Before the end of that year, the women discussed the whole project and decided not to continue with the Promenade.<sup>108</sup>

The Division turned down a civic project in 1962 that might have proven profitable for them. The women discussed sponsoring the Omaha Charity Horse Show. The Omaha Junior League had hosted the event and reported net proceeds the previous year of \$8,000. The women on the Executive Council discussed the amount of work and time this activity would involve. At their December 1962 meeting, the Council members voted “enthusiastically” in favor of co-sponsoring this event with the Midwest Horse Show Association.<sup>109</sup> The women secured approval from the Senior Executive Committee which felt that it could be a success if the women could get enough members involved in the project. The matter was again brought up for discussion at the women's January 1963 Executive Council meeting and after taking “a poll of Council Members on the amount of time they could individually devote, the president called for a vote on whether to adopt the project. Members of the Council were unanimously opposed.”<sup>110</sup> Nothing else was said about a horse show.

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<sup>107</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 8, 1962.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, December 14, 1964.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, December 10, 1962. The Junior League had “no particular need for the proceeds . . . and decided against continuing sponsorship of the Horse Show.”

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, January 14, 1963.

Although the earlier plan of sponsoring a children's zoo proved out of reach for the women in 1960, they again became interested in a zoo project in 1967. Omaha Zoo officials had told the Parks and Recreation Committee of a multi-million dollar fund drive. Some of the money was needed to improve visitors' first impressions of the zoo.<sup>111</sup> The Division presented a check for \$5,000 to the chairman of the fund-raising committee of the Henry Doorly Zoo on May 27, 1967. The \$5,000 provided the total construction costs of a waterfall that would have both a “decorative function” and “provide water for the lagoon and water fowl sanctuary.”<sup>112</sup>

The group began assisting visitors to the city in 1966 when they established an information booth at Omaha's Eppley Air Terminal. Leo A. Daly Company designed the booth where the Omahaland Committee members answered questions and handed out information. Ninety-two women volunteered their time and attended orientation classes on how to best serve the visitors. The information center officially opened for business on October 6, 1966, with women volunteers staffing the booth every evening.<sup>113</sup> On February 22, 1967, the women were a part of the first Centennial event of the year, the re-enactment of the first night airmail flight to Omaha. The committee issued “Honorary Nebraska Citizen” certificates to all out-of-state visitors that day.<sup>114</sup> In 1972, the women learned that Offutt Air Force Base personnel were interested in the possibility of providing full-time personnel to keep the booth manned all day and evening. The women welcomed the idea of sharing hours in the Omahaland Booth with the Air Force personnel.<sup>115</sup> In February 1973, however, the operation of the information booth at the Eppley terminal was discontinued as the Airport Authority was no longer able to spare the space for the booth.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March 13, 1967.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1967.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., October 10, 1966. *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXVI* (April 3, 1967), 3.

<sup>114</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, March 13, 1967.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1972.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1973.

Another new project created even more exposure for the Women's Division. In 1968, they formed a group called the “Can-Do-Ettes.” The “girls” were a welcoming committee for visitors to the city. The Executive Director of the Division sewed matching blue sheath dresses, with which the “girls wear black patent shoes, white wrist length gloves and the Can-Do-Ette banners.” The Division sent letters to the Mayor's office and the Convention Bureau reminding them “that the girls are available to serve at different functions.”<sup>117</sup> The Can-Do-Ettes were a hit and the Division received many more requests than they expected. In 1969, the Division raised the number of members to twenty-five and bought red material to make new dresses.<sup>118</sup> News of the events and pictures of the Can-Do-Ettes appeared regularly in the newspaper and on television reports. In a typical one-month period, they were hostesses at a reception for Law Day, served as hostesses and escorts at the Civic Auditorium for the Salute to Law Enforcement program, and greeted entertainer Bob Hope at the Auditorium. Members served as guides for visitors from Omaha's sister city in Japan and once they even greeted “rats which are to be used in ETV programs being shown to all sixth graders in the area.”<sup>119</sup> The team served as hostesses for Senior Division events and attended the College World Series baseball games. A winter uniform was designated—a blazer and “A” line skirt. The women held a “design the crest” contest with official rules and regulations.<sup>120</sup> The Publicity Committee kept a waiting list of Division members who wished to become Can-Do-Ettes when one of the current members retired. In 1973 the changing fashion styles allowed the women to adopt another new uniform. This consisted of the skirt and jacket but added, as an alternative, slacks.<sup>121</sup> Later that year, the Division voted that current Mayor Edward Zorinsky and former Mayor Gene Leahy be made honorary Can-Do-Ettes. (The following month the

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1968.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., March 10, 1969.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1969; November 10, 1969; October 12, 1970.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1969.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1973.

former Mayor's name was withdrawn from the motion and just Zorinsky was so honored.)<sup>122</sup> The group was active up to the dissolution of the Division in 1976.

One of the last new project ideas for the women was an awards program aimed at recognizing the achievements of eighth grade girls, a program similar to what the Rotary Club conducted for eighth grade boys. Beginning in 1971 women representatives from the Division went to all Omaha grade schools to present the program to the girls. School administrators selected the winners and each winner and her teacher received invitations to an awards luncheon. The Division presented a painting to each school in the honored girl's name.<sup>123</sup>

The Women's Division left a history of civic projects and contributions of which they could be proud. However, it is apparent in the minutes of the Executive Council, and later the Board of Directors meetings, that the women sometimes became less than industrious in the scope of their projects. The group sometimes dreamed big: an amphitheater, the western village idea, a fur trading post or replica Indian village, a children's zoo. At least once, in 1960 when the women were talking about the zoo, the group hired an attorney to set up a non-profit corporation. But they could not gather the necessary enthusiasm to follow through with such plans. Each would require a large commitment of time from members, and the Board seemed to appreciate that they would not be able to count on that kind of participation.

That all did not matter, however, as the Senior Chamber's Board began some serious investigations into cost-saving methods in 1976. One of the areas that the Board looked at carefully was the Women's Division. In his remarks on the "future" of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce delivered to the Senior Board of Directors on October 15, 1976, President Howard Doerr summed up the women's activities. He

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1973.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., September 13, 1971.

described the “three main functions each year” which included the Eighth Grade Girls’ Honors Luncheon, Annual Beautification Awards Dinner, and the Rural Homemakers’ Recognition Day in Omaha. Doerr added that the Women's Division sponsored a variety of smaller events and functions. According to the minutes of the women's meetings of 1976, these included six scheduled receptions for new American citizens; the Can-Do-Ettes and their style of boosterism; entertaining senior citizens at nursing homes; ringing the bell for the Salvation Army's Kettle Drive, and the Cow-Belle reception. According to the Chamber it was a financial question. Doerr pointed out that the cost to the Chamber was “approximately \$15,000 per year.” He and the Board apparently thought those projects not worth that amount and moved that the women's group “be terminated as a division of the Chamber effective December 31, 1976.”<sup>124</sup> No one asked what the women thought their projects were worth, and their civic contribution was only one element of the Division’s activities. In the early 1920s, the women had expressed frustration concerning their relationship with the Senior Division and it is noteworthy that the ending was upsetting as well.

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<sup>124</sup>Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors Minutes, October 15, 1976.

## CHAPTER 5 - RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SENIOR DIVISION

Over the fifty-plus year association of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the organization's Women's Division, the relationship changed. One can only guess as to the new members' expectations upon hearing the expression "identical status" used by the Chamber to describe the merger. Initially, did those charter members really anticipate full equality, although just the formation of a separate division seems to refute this? Doubtless the 1922 male Chamber member's notion of equality was different than the women's, just as the 1922 concept is very likely different than the current idea. A proof of equality would have been acceptance and participation on Senior Division's committees. A controversy concerning this point surfaced early and reappeared periodically in the minutes of both the men's and women's meetings. Initially there was some disagreement over finances. Eventually the relationship evolved to the point where the two organizations functioned with very little interaction. The Senior Division made the decisions; they established the dues; they approved or rejected the projects, but generally let the women manage their own activities. Finally in 1976, it was the Senior Division alone that made the ultimate decision that the Women's Division would be eliminated.

Some misgiving was evident from the first year and it centered on committee participation. When the women discussed managing a concert series in the summer of 1922, they feared that the commitment to the series would prevent them from being involved in Chamber committees. Chamber Director Guy Kiddo reassured the women regarding their expectation "to work with the men on their various committees and help in every way possible along those lines . . . putting on the concerts would not in any way interfere with their committee work."<sup>1</sup> However, in the list of Chamber committee assignments published

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<sup>1</sup>Business & Professional Women's Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as WD-OCC, Board of Directors Meeting, August 7, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

in the September 16, 1922 *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*, no women's names appeared. This is the very same issue of the *Journal* in which Chamber President Walter W. Head identified the Chamber as "your central organization. Its power for good depends on each member. We want the assistance of every member because the maximum can best be accomplished by unity."<sup>2</sup> Again in November the women told Senior Chamber Commissioner J. D. Larson that they did not have time to join the men on a big membership drive because of their commitment to the concerts, but they were still anxious to become working partners of the men. Larson told them "that just as soon as the concert course is out of the way there will be plenty of activities for the women to participate in."<sup>3</sup> In anticipation of working with the Senior Division, the women then distributed a card to each member on which she was to designate on which committees she wished to serve. However, at the women's Executive Council meeting in December, the Commissioner admonished the women for handing out the cards without prior approval from the Senior Chamber's Board and then he "advised against further action of this kind."<sup>4</sup>

Also in December 1922, the women heard a report from a special committee made up of three Women's Division members whose objective was to examine the group's activities and plan for the future. Among the list of recommendations of that committee was the following:

While the activities mentioned above will require the attention of a major part of the Women's Division, some of the women members who are especially fitted for the places will be appointed on the following committees of the Chamber: Clean-up Week; Civic Improvement; Education, Music and Art; Citizenship; Public Welfare Committee; Retail Committee.<sup>5</sup>

Women's voluntary organizations had a long history of trying to improve social conditions, especially in the urban areas. Whether they were called "benevolent" societies as in the

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<sup>2</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* X (September 16, 1922), 1.

<sup>3</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Committee Minutes, November 3, 1922.

<sup>4</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, December 6, 1922.

<sup>5</sup>WD-OCC, Regular Minutes, December 20, 1922.

early 1800s or moral reform groups, there had always been a “nearly universal assumption that women were responsible for community welfare.”<sup>6</sup> Even though women had been very active in anti-slavery groups, temperance alliances and the suffrage campaign, there was still the “basic cultural expectation that women should be compassionate and nurturing.”<sup>7</sup>

Poverty, child welfare, assistance to the elderly, soup kitchens, and other forms of “municipal housekeeping” became women's projects, whether in formal organizations or not. In addition, women's organizations offered themselves and their community cultural “self-improvement” with lectures, concerts, classes in literature or languages, health and fashion.

In 1922, the Senior Chamber had thirty-eight different committees and the women requested representation on six of them. These six, Clean-Up, Civic Improvement, Education, Music and Art, Citizenship, Public Welfare, and Retail, reflected the trend of women's organizations' interest in community welfare. Even though four of the charter members of the Division worked in the insurance business, they did not ask to participate on the men's Insurance Committee. Several women owned, or were part owners in, manufacturing concerns, yet the Manufacturing Interests Committee was not among the requested committee assignments. There were also seven women specifically involved in banking but the women's Special Committee did not anticipate naming a member to the Banking and Financial Committee. They only asked for participation on the six committees mentioned.

The Chamber responded as reported in the *Omaha World-Herald* in January 1923 that “Equal rights for women have been recognized by the executive committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and yesterday it was determined that the women's division

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<sup>6</sup>Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.



of the civic organization be placed on an identical footing with men members.”<sup>8</sup> A spokesman for the Chamber promised that the women would serve as members of committees along with the men and also would have exclusive authority over some of the Chamber's projects. The men agreed to grant the women “full membership.”<sup>9</sup> In the March 31, 1923 issue of the *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* there was praise for the Women's Division. The Chamber had not made a mistake when “it made room for” business and professional women in its organization. When the women had been placed on committees—which must have been after the published September assignments—the article continued, they had “made themselves helpful” and “they have taken hold of the work and their activities have been constructive and conscientious.”<sup>10</sup>

One thing the Chamber of Commerce and its newest Division did not need was a public squabble. However, trouble was brewing and finally surfaced in early 1923 involving the “new” women’s lounge at Chamber headquarters. The Chamber of Commerce had promised the new Division a space of their own. This was reported in the Women’s Division's minutes late in 1922:

We are also authorized to advise the Woman's Division that the Executive Committee of the Chamber has approved this program and that they have also agreed to the providing of a woman's lounge as outlined by the Commissioner to the Executive Council at its last meeting.<sup>11</sup>

The matter of the women's lounge at Chamber headquarters was not as simple as the above statement made it sound. While the Chamber had promised to provide the women a space of their own, the men did not have the money to carry out this project. The Senior Division did have a solution that they proposed to the women. The men’s Executive Committee suggested that the women, who had earned over five thousand dollars from their first season’s concert series, use those funds for the remodeling and redecorating. Some of

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<sup>8</sup>*Evening World-Herald*, January 3, 1923, 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* XI (March 31, 1923), 11.

<sup>11</sup>WD-OCC, Regular Minutes, December 20, 1922.

the women objected. They felt that had there been no concerts, no ticket sold, no profit, the Chamber should have still furnished them a lounge as promised. These women wanted to use the Division's money for something of their own choosing. The women's Executive Council sent a questionnaire to the membership asking what they wanted to do with the money.<sup>12</sup> The women's Executive Council recommended the plan and reminded the members that "we are no longer an independent organization, but are members of the Chamber of Commerce and our funds go into, and our expenses are paid by the Chamber." The response was hardly overwhelming as members only returned seven questionnaires. But by a four to three vote, the women agreed to go along with the Chamber's plans.<sup>13</sup> However, the balloting did not settle the issue. A letter from one Women's Division member, Belle M. Ryan, the Assistant Superintendent of Omaha Schools, to Fay Watts, President of the Women's Division, found its way to the front page of the *Omaha World-Herald*. In the letter, Ryan asked if "any other division of the Chamber of Commerce has gone out and earned money to assist in remodeling this building? I cannot give my personal endorsement to taking this money which was earned by so much hard work and which is the result of the first enterprise undertaken by the women's division to be spent in a way which I feel would bring so little returns to the women of the division."<sup>14</sup> A special meeting was called to determine some way of assuring members and the public that there was no friction within the divisions of the Chamber. Kiddo, the Senior Chamber's appointed councillor to the Women's Division, tried his hand at damage control by telling a reporter from the *World-Herald* that there remained "cordial relations" between the groups.<sup>15</sup> The women's response to the bad publicity was printed in the *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*. "The members of the Women's Division keenly resent the

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<sup>12</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 8, 1923.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1923.

<sup>14</sup>*Morning World-Herald*, April 4, 1923, 1; 15.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1923, 1.

impression which recent newspaper stories gave to the effect that there was a serious controversy among the members of the division, and between the division and Executive Committee of the Chamber with respect to proceeds from the concert course.” Women's Division President Watts signed the four-paragraph statement.<sup>16</sup> The women paid for their lounge.

As a consequence of this misunderstanding, when the women were discussing plans for the following year's orchestra series, they decided to refuse the offer of the Chamber to again cover any deficit. By taking full responsibility for any financial loss, the women felt they were within their rights to argue that “profit from this year's course, if any, be set aside, not to be used for current expenses or the carrying on of the regular work of the Chamber, but . . . be expended for some civic cause selected by the Executive Council for the Division.”<sup>17</sup> The women were not going to let the Senior Chamber continue to spend their money for them.

In the fall of 1925 the women felt that their space at Chamber headquarters was in need of further redecorating and refurbishing. The women submitted this request to the Chamber as a list of necessary repairs.<sup>18</sup> However, six months later, only one item on that list had been finished. The women did not want a recurrence of the hubbub that followed the initial creation of their lounge. In order to get the work done, they agreed to let the Senior Chamber of Commerce charge the cost to the Women's Division Special Fund—money earned on their projects—and replace it from the budget for the following year.<sup>19</sup> It would not be the only time the women loaned money to the men.

At a meeting of the women's Executive Council early in January 1924, the dissatisfaction that some of the women felt in reference to the Senior Chamber committees

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<sup>16</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* XXI (May 12, 1933), 7

<sup>17</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, June 15, 1923.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1925.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, May 14, 1923.

surfaced again. The women complained that “the Women's Division is not represented on Chamber committees, and where members have been placed on committees they have not been notified of meetings.” The Council instructed the Division secretary to check into those claims. There was no further mention of the results of this inquiry.<sup>20</sup> This would not be the only time the women would take up this issue with the Senior Division.

A step toward better communication between the groups was taken in the spring of 1924 when the men's Executive Committee invited the president of the Woman's Division to attend the Senior Executive meetings. Only two months later, in May 1924, both she and the president of the Junior Division were given a vote at those meetings. The women felt they would now have a voice and a vote on Chamber business.<sup>21</sup>

In another development in 1924, the Senior Chamber offered the women an opportunity to manage the Chamber dining room. After years of operating the Chamber of Commerce dining room at a loss—averaging almost \$1,000 per month in the last half of 1923, the men hoped the women could turn the operation around.<sup>22</sup> This move also would relieve the men of the responsibility of the day-to-day operation. According to the proposal offered by the Women's Division in February 1924, the women agreed to “take over the management of the dining room for one year. . . . Any loss resulting from the operation of the dining room to be borne by the general treasury, as in the past, any profit which may result to be held in the treasury of the Chamber to the credit of the Women's Division.”<sup>23</sup> The women's Executive Council appointed a new committee that undertook the task of managing all aspects of the dining room including meals, staff, prices, and decor. Under the direction of this committee, the dining rooms losses were cut dramatically. The deficit for

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1924.

<sup>21</sup>The Senior Division tried and failed to take the voting privilege away from the Women's and Junior Divisions in 1930. See Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 4, 1926. For the month of July 1923 alone, there was a loss of over \$1,450.00.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., February 28, 1924.

1924-25, the first full year of operation by the women, was down to \$3,181.32 or only \$265.11 per month.<sup>24</sup>

At the fall general meeting of 1925, Chamber President Fred Hovey told the members that the Women's Division had begun “in a small way, but no less important, and the Division is now important in the work of the Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>25</sup> Making particular reference to the success in the dining room, the Chamber leader remarked on the difference in both meals and service. For the 1925-26 business year, the loss was further reduced to \$2,980.35.<sup>26</sup> However by the summer of 1927, the women felt that the condition of the dining room had deteriorated to such a point that they requested the “rehabilitation” of the area. The dining room committee argued that in order to compete with other places in Omaha where members could eat lunch, the changes must be made. It was an “emergency.” William Ramsey, the current councillor of the Division, told the men’s Executive Committee that he felt that if the changes were not made, the women would give up managing the dining room. To wait for the Chamber's Finance Committee to meet and approve the expense would have meant delaying the remodeling project until the fall. Everyone concerned wanted to get the necessary remodeling and repairs made during the slow months of summer, so the Women’s Division loaned \$4,000.00, money earned from their fund-raising projects, to the Senior Chamber at 5 1/2 percent interest.<sup>27</sup> In this instance the women had, in effect, issued a threat to the Senior Chamber by “practically declining” to continue to operate the Dining Room unless repairs were made. In contrast to the renovation of the lounge area in 1923, the women held their ground and the Chamber

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<sup>24</sup>Financial Statement of Dining Room, Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as OCC, May 1928.

<sup>25</sup>WD-OCC, Membership Minutes, October 14, 1925.

<sup>26</sup>Financial Statement of Dining Room, OCC, May 1928.

<sup>27</sup>OCC, Joint Board of Directors and Executive Committee Minutes, September 6, 1927.

agreed.<sup>28</sup> Calling it an “emergency,” the Chamber took money from their reserve fund and repaid the loan before the end of the year.<sup>29</sup>

The women continued operating the Dining Room until 1932 when they “discontinued said management because they opposed the cut in Miss Fullaway's salary.”<sup>30</sup> The Senior Division then hired an outside couple to take over, but that created another set of problems.<sup>31</sup> In 1934, the president of the Women's Division attended an Executive Committee meeting where, at the request of that committee, she presented a proposal to resume the operation of the dining room. After listening to her plan, the men approved transferring management back to the Women's Division where it remained until 1936.<sup>32</sup> At that time, the president of the Women's Division proposed that a Dining Room Committee consisting of three representatives from the Senior Division, two from the Junior Division, and two from the Women's Division take over management. No reason was formally stated for this motion, but it passed and the Dining Room was assigned to the Senior Division's House Committee.<sup>33</sup>

Financially, the Senior Division handled the funds for the divisions. According to the women's Constitution, all dues collected by the Women's Division were “paid into the general fund of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and disbursed through the regular organization of the Chamber, and no expenditure shall be contracted without the approval of the Executive Committee or its representative.”<sup>34</sup> However, money that the women earned with their fund-raising projects went into a Special Fund and the women could use that money as they saw fit. The Senior Budget Committee established budgets for the Division,

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<sup>28</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, October 18, 1927.

<sup>29</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, November 8, 1927.

<sup>30</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, July 12, 1934. Miss Fullaway was the dining room manager hired by the women.

<sup>31</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, June 21, 1932.

<sup>32</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, July 12, 1934.

<sup>33</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, May 12, 1936.

<sup>34</sup>WD-OCC Constitution, Article XX, Funds, 1922.

and for those early years the women's membership dues brought in more money than was budgeted for the women's spending. Typical for the time was the 1929 budget in which the cost of the Women's Division to the Chamber was \$2,200 while the income derived from the women's membership dues was \$3,370.75.<sup>35</sup> And up through the 1930s when this information was available in the men's minutes, the income from the Division was always more than the cost to the Chamber. The financial records for the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s are not available but in 1976, Chamber President Howard Doerr said the cost of the Women's Division to the Chamber was \$15,000 per year.<sup>36</sup>

In 1927, Grace Roberts, the president of the Women's Division, thought that it would benefit her group if women members became better acquainted with the operations of the Senior Chamber. She contacted the president of the Executive Committee of the Men's Division "with reference to the matter of the Women's Division having a closer touch with the work being done in the Chamber." Men's President Alvin F. Johnson listened seriously to her concerns. Knowing it was impossible for the "ladies to attend [the men's meeting] in a body" Johnson suggested the men hold their Executive Committee meeting as part of the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Women's Division.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, on February 10, 1927, the men's Executive Committee met in the main dining room "with members of [the] Women's Division in attendance." Roberts explained that as part of her duties as president, she attended the weekly meetings of the men's Executive Committee and learned many things. She wanted the rest of the women to also have that opportunity. The regular men's meeting followed that introduction.<sup>38</sup> At the men's March 8 meeting, Roberts thanked the Executive Committee and said that she thought it

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<sup>35</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, June 25, 1929.

<sup>36</sup>Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors Minutes, November 12, 1976.

<sup>37</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, January 25, 1927.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., February 16, 1927.

would be a “splendid idea to hold such a meeting at least twice a year.”<sup>39</sup> However, there is no indication in the men's or women's minutes that this was ever done again.

In 1928, the representation, or lack thereof, of women on senior committees once again concerned the members of the Division. At a men's Executive Committee meeting in the spring of that year, the new Women's Division president, Mary Austin, addressed the Committee explaining how the women had learned many things from their association with the Senior Division. However, she continued, in order to be of “the utmost service” the women wished to be better represented on Chamber committees. Past President Roberts told the committee that the question of women serving on senior committees was an ongoing issue. The Women's Division had taken the matter up with different individuals—she did not say whom—but could not get a definite answer. At that time women were only serving on two senior committees, Health and Civic Appearance. The Division members felt that they had “given a good account” of themselves and it would benefit both the Division and Chamber to assign women to more committees. Roberts argued that improved representation would result in less duplication of committee work; the women would be in closer touch with governing policies, and thereby eliminate possible “embarrassing situations.” She read from the Articles of Incorporation of the Business and Professional Women's Division of the Chamber: “The object . . . shall be to . . . enable them to take their part in co-operating with the Omaha Chamber of Commerce in the promotion of commercial, industrial, civic and education development in the community.” Roberts asked how it was possible for the women to take such a part unless they were allowed more opportunity to serve on the men's committees.<sup>40</sup>

The women left the meeting and the Executive Committee continued the discussion. The Women's Division Councillor William Ramsey spoke in favor of the suggestion, but

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1927.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1928.



another member wondered whether the Executive Committee could dictate to committee chairmen the make-up of their committees. The president of the Junior Division explained that junior members only served on those senior committees when the chairman of the particular committee agreed to have them. Some committees did not want their services and on others “they were gladly received.” Junior members only served on committees where “they were wanted.” After further discussion, Ramsey again spoke in favor of the women's request and made a motion that the Chamber adopt a policy placing women on committees.<sup>41</sup> At a joint meeting of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee in May 1928, the group acted on Ramsey’s motion and adopted the following resolution:

That commencing July 1st, 1928, it shall be the policy of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, to place members of the Women's Division upon all standing committees of the Chamber, whenever representation upon such committees is recommended by the Executive Council of the Women's Division, and is considered to be practical by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Chamber.<sup>42</sup>

Although the copy at the top of the page of the *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* that summer read “These Men are Working for 'Omaha and Company,” there were several women listed on committees:

Executive Committee	1
Bureau of Publicity	0
Committee on Federal Bldgs	1
Finance Committee	0
Fire Prevention Committee	2
House Committee	1
Industrial Bureau	0
Insurance Division	0
Legal Advisory Committee	0
Merchants Market Week	0
Military Affairs	0
Public Affairs	0
Public Finance	0
Foreign Trade	0
Health Committee	4

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>OCC, Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee Minutes, May 1, 1928.

Special Revenue	0
Traffic safety	0
Activities	0
Aerial Transportation	0
Agricultural Committee	1
Waterways Committee	1 <sup>43</sup>

Not much improvement in the committee representation was seen in the following years. There were always several women on the Health Committee, which followed the expectation of women being compassionate and nurturing, and one on the House Committee, a group that was responsible for managing the Dining Room, another woman's province. Plus there was a scattering of others. Nevertheless, the minutes contain no more complaints from the women about committee participation.

Beginning in 1922, a councillor appointed by the men's Executive Committee facilitated coordination between the Women's and Senior divisions. This councillor would advise the women and act as the chairman for the group. Gradually the role of the councillor was reduced. Some councillors attended Women's Division Executive Council meetings only sporadically. The same Chamber member would remain councillor for several years, and sometimes the women would request a certain senior member to act as councillor. The appointment of Guy McDonald as the councillor to the Division was approved at an Executive Committee meeting of the Chamber in August 1935 only after McDonald was assured there "would be very little work connected with this office."<sup>44</sup> McDonald attended one meeting in October 1935 and never went back. By the late 1930s, with no explanation, there is no more mention of a councillor.

In the summer of 1945, the women felt that better communication was needed and therefore established a Liaison Committee. From this group, appointments were made to

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<sup>43</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* XVIII (September 7, 1929), 10-18. The president of the Women's Division was a member of the Executive Committee according to the bylaws.

<sup>44</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, August 27, 1935. At the same meeting, the appointee for the Junior Division also had to be so assured that "too much of my time will not be taken as Councillor for the Junior Chamber" before he accepted.

the Senior Chamber of Commerce committees and representatives named to Omaha civic groups and organizations. Another purpose of this group was to “serve as the intercommunication between the various committees and the Women's Division.”<sup>45</sup> At each women's Executive Council meeting for the following year, the chairman of the Liaison Committee read reports of the various senior committees. By the summer of 1946, the reports no longer appeared. Then in June 1947 the chairman of the Liaison Committee moved that her committee be discontinued because “it did not accomplish in some respects the purposes for which it was intended.” This was adopted.<sup>46</sup> No other explanation was given.

The women did without the “advice” of a senior member from the mid-1930s until 1949. At a Board of Directors meeting that year, the Program of Work Committee recommended a member of the Board be “designated to act as Director-Representative to the Women's Division.”<sup>47</sup> The Board approved this and after almost a fifteen-year absence, there again was a Senior Chamber member attending the Women's Division Executive Council meetings. A Director-Representative did come to many meetings for the next two years, but by the 1951-52 year, he, like the councillors before him, stopped attending the women's meetings.

Although they were two separate divisions, the Women and the Junior group cooperated occasionally with each other. Both early in their joint history and again in the 1950s, the women participated in the Junior Division's projects for cleaning up the city. Again, this was following the “municipal housekeeping” role ascribed to the women since the late nineteenth century. Working with the Juniors in the “Clean-Up Week” beginning in 1951, the women recruited and worked with the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls in

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<sup>45</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, September 10, 1945.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., June 9, 1947.

<sup>47</sup>OCC, Board of Directors and Special Housing Committee Joint Minutes, August 22, 1949.

promoting the week. They sponsored Clean-Up Week poster contests for school children and furnished prizes.<sup>48</sup> The women also agreed to handle publicity for a project that was designated “Omaha Junior Chamber of Commerce Clean-up Paint-up Fix-Up Week, in cooperation with the Women's Division and the Fire Prevention Committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>49</sup> This project continued for several years. Later, before the Can-Do-Ettes group was formed, the women cooperated with the Junior Division on a Greeters Committee.<sup>50</sup>

From the early 1930s when the women gave up the management of the orchestra series and dining room responsibilities, the interaction between the women and the men diminished. In 1953 a member of the Board of Directors of the Senior Division suggested that the three divisions of the Chamber were not well informed “as to what the other divisions are doing.” He added that the Women's and Junior divisions could “make valuable contributions to the work and program of the Senior Division” and that there needed to be a “greater relationship between these three groups.”<sup>51</sup> Instead of cooperating on projects, the Senior Division passed a motion in April 1958 recommending that the women “continue with those projects which have become traditional with our civic work, such as sending a representative to Girls' State, the University of Omaha scholarship, and if at all possible the Exchange Student.”<sup>52</sup>

There were, however, two areas within the Chamber in which the Senior and the Women's divisions worked together successfully. These were in their respective Agricultural Committees that jointly sponsored the Rural Women's Leadership Awards Day from 1946 to 1976 and the membership recruitment drives. Signing up new members was

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<sup>48</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, February 12, 1951. A poster contest was not held the first year because schools were unable to fit it into their schedule.

<sup>49</sup>WD-OCC, Special Executive Council Minutes, March 26, 1951.

<sup>50</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, March 10, 1958.

<sup>51</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, September 18, 1953.

<sup>52</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, April 14, 1958.

so important to the Chamber's budget that the women were strongly encouraged to be a part of the "team" when it came to membership solicitation. The Senior Division included women on their teams, encouraged them to recruit men for the Senior and Junior divisions, made them eligible for prizes, and welcomed them as members of the "President's Club" which was the elite Membership Recruitment Committee.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be impossible to describe the Women's and Men's divisions as "equals." In most cases, the Women's Division continued to function as an unofficial auxiliary group. They served as hostesses to the men's functions. They smiled in the background as the Chamber welcomed visitors to the city. They turned over their dues; they asked for permission before they committed to any project, and sometimes they were turned down. The Chamber did not ignore the group's existence, often acknowledging and thanking the Division, while keeping the divisions separate. In 1947, the chairman of the men's Executive Committee praised both the Women's and Junior divisions for operating on "a sound and constructive basis." He continued that the relationships between the Chamber and its "two principal divisions have been marked by a spirit of cooperation and solidarity."<sup>54</sup> The Junior and Women's divisions were often linked—similar dues, similar representation on the Senior Executive Committee, and similar dubious "equal" status. There was a big difference, the young men in the Junior Division would eventually become senior members. This was part of the promise in 1922—that "it [would] be up to the juniors to take over the entire work of the Chamber."<sup>55</sup> There was another difference: the women continued to accept the secondary role while the Junior Division put the relationship to a test.

Late in 1959, a joint meeting of the Junior and Senior Chamber Executive Committees took place to discuss "ways and means of giving the Junior Chamber and its

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1959.

<sup>54</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* VI (May 23, 1947), 3.

<sup>55</sup>*Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* X (March 4, 1922), 5.

members a more important place in the activities of the Chamber of Commerce.” After some discussion and several suggestions, the group decided that a member of the Junior Chamber would be placed on each Senior committee as a “special assistant.”<sup>56</sup> This arrangement met with satisfaction until 1964 when the assistant general manager of the Senior Chamber wrote to the president of the Junior group reminding them that before they took any “official stand,” they must get approval from the Senior Board of Directors. “The Chamber Bylaws require this.” The Junior group wanted to take a stand on 1) civil rights legislation, 2) a mayoral recall letter, 3) endorsement of a candidate for county commissioner, and 4) endorsement of a partisan state legislature. The Junior Chamber was told they “must refrain from any public announcement on these or any other policy matters” until they were approved.<sup>57</sup> The Junior Chamber wrote back to the president of the Chamber saying that they were surprised by the “sudden 'adherence to the letter' to the Chamber's policy.” Apparently the Chamber had ignored the unapproved “stands” that the Juniors had taken previously. The president of the Junior Division requested that the Chamber either change the bylaws or continue the “policy of allowing the Jaycees to speak out for themselves rather than to just agree with a stand taken by the Senior Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>58</sup> At the May 5, 1964 Senior Executive Committee meeting, representatives of the Junior Chamber appeared requesting permission to take stands separate from the Senior Chamber. No changes were made to the bylaws at that time. Instead, a liaison officer was appointed to allow for quick communications between the two divisions, and “additional study and thought” would be given on ways to help the relationship.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>OCC, Joint Meeting of the Junior and Senior Chamber Executive Committees, November 23, 1959.

<sup>57</sup>Copy of letter from Richard T. Billing, Assistant General Manager of the Chamber of Commerce, to Howard Vann, President of the Omaha Junior Chamber of Commerce, dated March 30, 1964. Attachment to COC, Executive Committee Minutes, May 4, 1964.

<sup>58</sup>Letter from Howard D. Vann, President of the Omaha Junior Chamber of Commerce, to John H. Becker, President of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, April 3, 1964. Attachment to COC, Executive Committee Minutes, May 4, 1964.

<sup>59</sup>OCC, Executive Committee Minutes, May 4, 1964.

Nothing more on this appeared in the minutes until a November 8, 1968 meeting when a committee reported on the “recurring problems of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and the question of whether the Junior Chamber should become a separate organization or continue as a Division of the Senior Chamber.” Nationwide, Jaycee chapters were “predominately independent organizations in nearly all cities.” In addition, financially, the Junior Division had exceeded their 1968 budget by \$3,300. The Jaycee Study Committee recommended that the Junior Chamber become an independent organization.<sup>60</sup> The Senior Executive Committee approved that recommendation and presented it to their Board of Directors where it passed unanimously. This was an agreeable arrangement to both the Senior Chamber and the Junior Division and the seniors developed a list of nine recommendations that included office space provided to the Jaycees without charge. The president of the Jaycees would also continue to be a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors and the president of the Chamber would become a member of the Junior Chamber Executive Committee.<sup>61</sup>

There is no mention of this event in the women's minutes. If they had any similar ideas, or even discussions on the subject there is no record of it. A Women's Division member, recalling the group in those days, said she thought that the Division lacked anyone with the spirit to suggest such action.<sup>62</sup> Any “stand” that the women took of a political nature was in agreement with the Chamber's view or not the kind to concern the Chamber. In 1940 the women supported the League of Women Voters in requesting that the Douglas County jury rooms be equipped with rest rooms for women. It was not likely that the Senior Chamber would have been inclined to oppose this position. In 1951 the Women's Division responded to a letter from the League regarding a meeting to discuss the Genocide

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., November 8, 1968.

<sup>61</sup>OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, January 14, 1969.

<sup>62</sup>Lillian Huddleston telephone interview, by author, August 14, 2000.

Treaty.<sup>63</sup> The two groups also worked together on many “Meet the Candidate” nights. The women of the Division also supported and participated in many “Get-Out-The-Vote” campaigns. At a meeting in 1956, when a revision of Omaha's municipal government was under consideration, the women proposed to the Charter Convention that they include a provision in the new city charter which would “make it possible for the Omaha Police Department to employ women on the Omaha Police Force.”<sup>64</sup> None of these actions were of a nature to register any kind of negative response from the Senior Division. In 1961 when a woman, Betty Abbott, was running for the City Council, the women's Municipal Affairs Committee encouraged members to support her. However, the chairman of the committee stressed that “Chamber of Commerce policy prohibits active support of candidates for public office” so the committee was asking for individual support.<sup>65</sup> Although by 1973 the Division did have a member on the Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women, they had turned down the opportunity to be represented on that Commission in 1967.<sup>66</sup> There was no mention of a stand on the Equal Rights Amendment. The only sign of any change as a result of the feminist movement was the substitution of slacks for skirts as appropriate attire for the Can-Do-Ettes in 1973.<sup>67</sup>

The relation between the women and the Senior Division in the 1960s and 1970s was entirely different from that which existed in the 1920s. By the 1960s the minutes of the Men's Executive Council or Board of Directors hardly ever listed the president of the Women's Division as attending, just as there was rarely a men's representative at the women's meetings. The women had their projects and activities. They held their meetings, raised money, donated to civic causes, and conducted social functions, all with little interference. Nowhere in the written minutes does there appear any dissatisfaction with this

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<sup>63</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, September 11, 1944.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., June 4, 1956.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1961.

<sup>66</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Meeting, June 12, 1967; January 18, 1973.

<sup>67</sup>*Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXXIII* (June 5, 1973), 4.



arrangement. One must look back to the beginning when the women were first accepted into the Chamber as equals to remember how they clashed with the men regarding the lack of representation on Senior committees. The Women's Division members of the 1920s and 1930s appealed to the men to live up to their promise concerning the “identical” status. As time passed, the women gradually gave up the argument, or so it appears. By the early 1970s there were many women business owners in the City of Omaha. The Chamber membership records are not available, so one can only depend on recollections as to what constituted a “fair sprinkling” of businesswomen in the full Chamber itself.<sup>68</sup> These women knew that the way to be “equal” was to become a part of the Senior Chamber, not the Division.

The women of the Division, however, demonstrated contentment with their unofficial auxiliary status for years. In most cases, these were women employees—administrative assistants, executive secretaries, office staff, and such, not women employers. The announcement that the Division would be terminated seemed to take them by surprise. Unlike the Junior Division's harmonious separation from the Chamber, which was discussed at length by both Boards, the decision that the Women's Division would be terminated was not a mutual one. The women were not in favor of it. The women's Board of Directors appeared in front of the Senior Chamber to “discuss the future” but this was months after the decision had been made.<sup>69</sup> The women did not have a chance of saving their organization. There was not even a suggestion of “identical footing” in 1976.

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<sup>68</sup>Keith Carter, 1976 Executive Vice-President, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, telephone interview by author, July 18, 2000.

<sup>69</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, October 19, 1976.

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Perhaps by 1976 the Women's Division had become outdated. An examination of the women's activities, their projects and committees, shows the Division evolved over the course of its fifty-four year history to the status of simply another Omaha civic club. Given that most of the information about the Division comes from the formal minutes of the organization's Executive Council or Board of Directors' meetings, any study of the group is unfortunately incomplete. The nature of this research material is qualified and, in addition, was mindfully edited and typed by a Chamber secretary. Conclusions, decisions, votes, and actions appear in the minutes, but not the discussions, arguments, motivations, and dynamics of the decision-making process. In those unrecorded discussions, and possibly arguments, may rest the real heart of the organization. There is no evidence in the formal minutes that the women themselves ever considered their organization out of date. Although the women's Executive Board worried about declining membership and dwindling participation, its enthusiasm for the Division was evident.

The 1970s were a time in American history when civic participation was high. However, in studying what he called "civic engagement," Everett Carl Ladd wrote that areas of that participation changed. He stated that membership in many groups such as the "Lions Clubs, Shriners, Jaycees, Elks, Masons, the League of Women Voters, the Federation of Women's Clubs, the PTA . . ." had declined. Those losses were offset by an increase in other groups. Ladd added that some of the latter, although around for decades, saw major growth beginning in the seventies. A case in point is the environmentalist groups. Even the oldest of these, the Sierra Club founded in 1892, grew from 114 thousand members in 1970 to over 600 thousand by 1990. Others, the National Audubon Society, Wilderness Society, World Wildlife Fund, Nature Conservancy, and Greenpeace, expanded

at even a greater pace.<sup>1</sup> Ladd calls it a competition and although this competition “doesn’t destroy the old front-runner—it just erodes its old ascendancy.”<sup>2</sup>

When the Junior Division separated from the Chamber over the issue of being subservient to the Seniors, they, in fact, evolved into a new organization. However, the women’s minutes give no indication that they were likewise dissatisfied with their position. The Division members were clearly surprised and disappointed in the early fall of 1976 when they began to hear rumors of the Chamber’s plan to dissolve their Division. They had not expected it.

The Board of Directors of the Senior Chamber decided to eliminate the Division because of financial reasons. The Senior Chamber was often struggling with its budget; each year there was a push for both more members and larger contributions from supporting businesses. Early in the history of the Division, the women and their membership dues brought in more money than was budgeted for the Division’s expense.<sup>3</sup> By the 1970s, this was not the case. According to Chamber President Howard Doerr, the cost of supporting the Women’s Division in 1976 was \$15,000. As Doerr explained, only ninety-five to one hundred of the women, apparently a fraction of the Division’s total numbers, actually paid their own membership dues. Their employers sponsored the rest.<sup>4</sup> The Senior Board assumed that many of those employers would continue to do so, although \$120.00, which was the dues of the Senior Chamber, was considerably higher than the \$30.00 annual Women’s Division fee. Indeed, many companies gave more to the Chamber

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<sup>1</sup>Everett Carll Ladd, *The Ladd Report* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 21; 29.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 80

<sup>3</sup>In May 1922, Chamber Commissioner J. D. Larson was concerned about passing on a budget deficit of \$25,000 to \$40,000 to the next year’s Executive Committee. The women’s dues of \$15.00 each plus the money they would be transferring in lieu of initiation fees would assist the Chamber. Chamber of Commerce, Executive Committee Minutes, May 23, 1922, (Microfilm) University of Nebraska at Omaha Library.

<sup>4</sup>Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as GOCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 12, 1976. Recollections vary as to the number of women members of the Division at the time from several hundred to five or six hundred.

than just membership dues. In 1974, companies such as Omaha Public Power District (OPPD), Northern Natural Gas Company, and Northwestern Bell Telephone were supporting the Chamber in the amount of \$20,000.00 each.<sup>5</sup>

Thinking they could logically argue their way to continued Chamber support, the members of the women's Board went to the Senior Board to remind them of the importance of their programs and projects to the Chamber's goals. However, the Chamber was not convinced. The Senior Board had discussed the idea of discontinuing the Division at a retreat on September 10, 1976, and the official vote occurred at their Board meeting on November 12. In the privacy of that meeting, the men called it a "separation" and used the word "termination." However, in a *Greater Chamber of Commerce Profile* article, they phrased the action more diplomatically by stating that the "segregation of the Chamber's women members in a separate division is due to end December 31, 1976."<sup>6</sup>

The Women's Division left a long and distinguished history. In 1922, their acceptance into the Chamber, even if it was as a separate Division, gave the group the benefit of being a part of an established, respected, and influential Omaha organization. The women also gained a downtown meeting room and lounge area, expert guidance, and financial help. In their separate group, they had the chance to develop leadership qualities for themselves. However, they were not given the chance to participate equally with the men on the Chamber's highly varied and effective committees. On the infrequent occasions when assigned, the women voiced the complaint of not being told of meetings. Eventually, the women accepted the affiliation for what it was, but as late as 1973, a Task Force on Program Evaluation and Development recommended that "women be identified and

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<sup>5</sup>Chamber of Commerce Firm Listing, July 1, 1974. This report marked Confidential is included in the Chambers minutes, July 18, 1974.

<sup>6</sup>GOCC, Board of Directors Minutes, November 12, 1976; *Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Profile XXXVI* (November 29, 1976), 3.

appointed to appropriate positions on Chamber Councils or Committees.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the Chamber never learned to take advantage of women’s skills and talents.

No matter what the Senior Division promised in 1922, their unwillingness to accept women as true equals never changed. Possibly everyone assumed there would be a distinct division of roles. The women clearly selected or were directed to women projects. In the early years, when the Division numbers were small, the women took on a very ambitious project organizing and managing the Omaha Symphony Orchestra. This was an important community project, and by working with the Symphony Association, the women dealt with some of the most influential citizens of the city. At the same time, another Division committee managed the Chamber Dining Room while other committees adopted other community projects. Over time and even with an increased membership, the level of civic activity declined. By the 1960s and 1970s, the Women’s Division found reasons to avoid such time-consuming ventures. Ideas surfaced at the Executive Board meetings, such as a children’s zoo, western village, outdoor theater, etc., but frequently, after months of discussions, they abandoned the plans.

The group became predictable regarding their fund-raising activities. The women no longer sponsored “name” entertainers to the city as they had in their earlier years. Although several of those programs failed to make any profit, the women could boast that they were presenting Omaha audiences with quality entertainment. In the last fifteen or twenty years, even if the chair of the Fund-Raising committees would suggest a new idea, such as sponsoring the Omaha Horse Show, nothing came of it. Instead, once or twice a year, the Division sponsored a style show, a rather simple and sure way to earn money. In addition, the Fund-Raising Committee held an annual raffle. The prizes varied from year to

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<sup>7</sup>Omaha Chamber of Commerce Program Evaluation and Development Task Force Report, 1973, 42-43. The report is included in Chamber of Commerce minutes, October 18, 1973.

year, but included such standard items as a trip to Hawaii, tickets to a Nebraska Cornhusker football game, shares of stock in a Chamber-supporting Omaha company such as Northern Natural Gas, a side of beef and barbecue grill, a cruise to Nassau, or a \$500 shopping spree at the Nebraska Clothing Company. Members attending luncheons and dinner meetings could buy Quick Cash chances on donated prizes. The group also sold cookbooks and each Christmas the women took orders for holiday mints or “Cashew Crunch” candy. These activities looked evermore like stereotypical women’s auxiliary activities.

The women’s service to the community must be recognized. The Symphony Orchestra was their leading public project and their most newsworthy. And although they got complimentary publicity in the local paper when they donated \$5,000 to the Henry Doorly Zoo for a new waterfall, they received little attention when they annually paid a high school girl’s expenses to attend Girls’ State in Lincoln, hosted receptions for new United States citizens, or donated books to the Omaha Public Library. The women also volunteered for and participated in a number of other Omaha civic organizations and projects over the fifty-plus year history of the Division. Members dressed dolls for the Salvation Army, telephoned blood donors at the American Red Cross, and stuffed envelopes for the Nebraska Tuberculosis Association. They sponsored foreign exchange students, filled good will sacks at Christmas, stuffed kits for the American Cancer Society, and assisted with the “Tree of Lights.” Members staffed the University Hospital receptionist desk; provided trees to be planted at Memorial Park; assisted with the Community Chest Drive; volunteered at the Henry Doorly Zoo, and spent weekends working at the Veterans Hospital. Additionally, they gave Christmas presents to children at the Child Saving Institute, Easter gifts to those at the Nebraska School for the Deaf, and helped at the Job Corps Training Center. These are all worthwhile activities, but there is a pattern as these could be identified as “women’s projects,” not characteristic of a Chamber of Commerce.

One of the Division's goals when established in 1922 was to encourage good will and fellowship among the women members. Participation in the organization gave the women that opportunity to make friends as they worked on projects and also as they attended the many social activities. In addition to the dinner meetings and noon luncheons, the Division offered the women activities that were fun, healthy or educational. In the early years, the group organized swimming or tap dancing lessons, and Spanish, French, speech, or drama classes. Later there were courses on letter-writing, medical self-help, or understanding economics. There was a glee club. For many years, the group had a book club with either members or invited guests reviewing particular books of interest. There was a library in the women's lounge area where these books could be checked out. In the 1930s and 1940s, the women took weekend trips to Excelsior Springs, Missouri; later they chartered buses to take them to University of Nebraska football games. They attended and hosted Midwest Area Women's Divisions conventions. The women sponsored a Division "night at the ball game" and bought group tickets to summer pops concerts at Peony Park. They toured Omaha businesses of all kinds, from the Omaha Bee News Publishing Company to local breweries. In the later years, the opportunities were less educational, but certainly enjoyable. In the final year, for example, the women took a trip to Minden, Nebraska; attended the Firehouse Dinner Theater; went to Kansas City for an overnight trip that included shopping and an afternoon at Worlds of Fun, and finished in November with a bus trip to Ames, Iowa for a football game.<sup>8</sup>

Sometime between 1945 and 1955, membership in the Senior Division was opened to women. As a result, it was possible for the "professional" or "business woman" to choose the senior group instead of the Women's Division. Again, with membership records not available, one has to rely on the memories of those members or employees of

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<sup>8</sup>Women's Division, Omaha Chamber of Commerce, hereafter referred to as the WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, January 20 1976 to November 16, 1976.

the Chamber or the Division in 1976. A “fair sprinkling” or a “number of them” are vague terms. Although Division membership approached one thousand in the 1950s, by 1976, it was down to several hundred. Possibly women joining the Chamber instead of the Division could explain part of the decline. One would assume that the charter members, Dr. Emelia Brandt, Fay Watts, Edith Beckman and the other members of the Business and Professional Women’s League would have been eager to become full members of the Senior Division. Would those women have donned matching “Can-Do-Ette” uniforms and gone out to the airport and smiled in the background as Chamber or city officials welcomed visitors to the city?<sup>9</sup> Would they have nominated one of their fellow members as the “most *Beautiful* Activist” for an award tea?<sup>10</sup> Those early members might have been surprised that once full Chamber membership was extended to women, there was even a purpose in continuing the Division.

Writing about the American feminist movement in the 1970s, Winifred D. Wandersee described women who seemed to be unaware that there was a “social movement” afoot. Even in that decade, when the lives of many women “changed dramatically,” there were some women who “ignored the debate.”<sup>11</sup> Whether Division members ignored the feminism debate or not, or whether they just preferred working in a “segregated” Division, many probably benefited from this detachment. It provided the opportunity for many women to develop skills and talents in leadership and organization. Perhaps some of them could have risen to leadership roles in the Senior Chamber if there had not been a Division, but those numbers would have been low. Even by 1976, only one woman had ever been elected to the Senior Board of Directors. However, fifty-four years of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1968.

<sup>10</sup>WD-OCC, Board of Directors Minutes, September 11, 1972.

<sup>11</sup>Winifred D. Wandersee, *On The Move: American Women in the 1970s*, American Women in the Twentieth Century Series, ed. Barbara Haber (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), xvi.



being a separate division meant fifty-four presidents, numerous board members and scores of committee chairs. Being president of the Division brought honor to the women's employer or to her own enterprise. In return, she would receive recognition and support from her employer in her role as Division head.<sup>12</sup> The 1975 president of the Division was certain that had she been a member of the Senior Chamber, she would never have been elected to that Board.<sup>13</sup>

The Division was important in the history of its community. The Omaha Symphony Orchestra Association acknowledges the Division's efforts in its early days. One can visit the waterfall at the Henry Doorly Zoo. Those children who grew up at the Nebraska School for the Deaf or were served by the Child Saving Institute might remember candy or Christmas gifts although they might not be aware of who provided them. And though we can identify the "who" as the Women's Division, we cannot identify all the individual members. Those records cannot be located. Fortunately, the meeting minutes are on microfilm at the University of Nebraska at Omaha Library, but the membership lists are not part of that collection. It is believed that these were thrown out, some as the Division ended, and some later as the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce was moving items into storage. Left are those items kept as souvenirs in boxes packed away in Division members' closets, and the Robert Gilder painting, "Winter Scene," that the women acquired when they moved into their new lounge at Chamber headquarters in the twenties.<sup>14</sup>

The Senior Chamber's decision to eliminate the Division forced each woman of the Division to make a decision. What the original 121 members wanted—to be accepted as equal members in the Chamber—was what the Chamber now offered all the members of the Women's Division. Their second choice was to give up their Chamber membership

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<sup>12</sup>Most presidents were employees rather than business owners. See list of presidents in appendix.

<sup>13</sup>Hazel Riley telephone interview, by author, October 16, 2000.

<sup>14</sup>WD-OCC, Executive Council Minutes, January 9, 1928.

entirely. Some of the women themselves found a third choice—reorganizing as a separate Omaha Women’s Chamber of Commerce, which over 150 of them did.

Fifty-four years later, the women had come full circle. Instead of the Business and Professional Women’s League, however, the women now called themselves the Omaha Women’s Chamber of Commerce. But in between the “League” and the “Women’s Chamber” there was an organization whose history should be noted and remembered. Each one of the women who had been active in the Division, as an officer, board member, chair, or committee member, was a “doer of deeds” and each should be congratulated for some measure of “high achievement” for their contributions. Each is a part of the record of the Division and, therefore, an important page in a significant chapter of the story of Omaha and of women in that city.

Appendix One

**PRESIDENTS OF THE WOMEN'S DIVISION  
1922-1976**

1922	Fay Watts	Owner, Watts Reference Bureau
1923	Dr. Emelia Brandt	Physician and Surgeon
1924	Margaret Knight	Secretary to Bishop E.V. Shayler
1925	Bertha Meyer	Thompson-Beldon Company
1926	Grace Roberts	Founder of Graystone Dairy
1927	Mary Austin	Principal, Miller Park School
1928	Edith Beckman	Lawyer, former piano teacher
1929	Mrs. Genevieve Guiou	Widow of Art G. Guiou, lumberman. In charge of newly created women's department of the First Trust Company. President of the Community Playhouse, previously president of Omaha Drama League and Society for Relief of the Disabled. Active in Community Chest.
1930	Edith Nichols	Cashier, Travelers Health Association
1931	Maude Compton	Principal, Benson West School
1932	L. M. Sweetman	Cashier, Baker Ice Machine
1933	Mrs. Albert L. Cockle	Partner in the Cockle Printing Company, mother of four. Taught in Wyoming, spent a year at the Univ. of Berlin, Graduate of UN, studied law for three years.
1934	Mrs. Sadie A. Johnston	Partner in the firm Asher & Johnston, insurance. Charter member of the Women's Division
1935	Hester Peters	NW Bell Telephone
1936	Margaret Fishcher	Lawyer, University of Omaha night school.
1937	Mrs. Ethel Lavering	Charge of Draft Dept. of First National Bank, Charter Member of Division
1938	Margaret Cullen	
1939	Anita Currey	Insurance Executive, Guarantee Mutual Life, Champion Tennis Player
1940	Alice I. Ward	Home Service Director, N. P. Co.
1941	Anna Covell	Stenographer, Wells, Martin & Lane, Attorneys
1942	Mrs. Cyrus P. Mason	Director of the women's travel bureau for the UP
1943	Mrs. Wilma Mann	Assistant Manager of Loyal Hotel
1944	C. Gladys Warner	Treasurer, Roberts Dairy Co.
1945	Anne V. Rathy	
1946	Mrs. Ruth Cultra Hamilton	Director of the UP Historical Museum
1947	Miss Alice E. Root	Manager of book department, Brandeis
1948	Mrs. May E. Yard	Resident Manager of the Omaha branch of the Western Newspaper Union, Member of National Fed of Press Women, Nebraska Press Women, Altrusa Club, Omaha Advertising Club.
1949	Regina Nagle	Assistant Cashier, Douglas County Bank
1950	Mrs. Marie Sabata Hansen	Computer Operator, Swift & Co.
1951	Camilla MacCuaig	Marketing Specialist with the Dept. of Agriculture, Livestock branch

1952	Emma W. Wilson	Department Manager, Woodmen Circle Supreme Forest
1953	Mrs. Ruth L. Bunk	
1954	Martha Bohlsen	Director of Women's Activities for Tidy House Products Company
1955	Kathie Ney	Buyer, Brandeis
1956	Mrs. Gretchen Thomas	Home Service Director, OPPD
1957	Mrs. Flora Sams	Manager, Book Dept., Omaha News Co. member of Senior Division Publicity/Public Relations Committee
1957c	Jewell Simpson	Vice President & Sales Manager of Steril Mfg. Co.
1958	Martha Artist	Supervisor, Homemaking Education at Omaha Public Schools
1959	Doris Boetel	Secretary/Treasurer, Electrical Industrial Works
1960	Elizabeth Hill	Dean, Student Personnel at University of Omaha
1961	Katherine Sackett	Secretary to President of Omaha Steel Works, Certified Prof. Secretaries rating, National Secretary Association, American Council of Venture Clubs.
1962	Bess Mandrich	Personnel Service Supervisor, Clarkson Hospital
1963	Marge West	Advertising Manager, Philips Department Store, Omaha's "Advertising Woman of the Year" in 1960, Director of Omaha Advertising Club,
1964	Lillian Armstrong	Owner of Lillian's Flowers
1965	Lucy Foraker	National Women's Activities, Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society
1966	Beatrice Sommer	B & B Import-Export Company
1968	Edith Borg	Northwestern Bell Telephone
1969	Elizabeth Appleby	Account Executive, Omaha World Herald
1970	Doris Linenberger	Administrative Assistant to President, US Checkbook Company
1971	Mrs. Ruth Cashell	Secretary to S. Mickey Skinner, Skinner Macaroni
1972	Mrs. Lorraine Borman	Receptionist, Western Electric Company plant
1973	Mrs. Erma Conley	Admin. Assistant to Manager of New Paxton Hotel
1974	Mary O'Reilly	Secretary to President of United of Omaha
1975	Hazel Riley	Supervisor, WOW Life Insurance
1976	Phyllis Conner	Community Counselor, Omaha Public Schools

Appendix Two

1922 Women's Division Membership

Name	Street Address	Occupation	Company/Employer	Address
Abbott, Grace E	2424 Harney	Secretary	Western Disc.	Keeline Bldg
Adams, Elizabeth	4215 Fowler	Buyer		
Adams, Ila	5001 Capitol Ave.	Cashier	Packers National Bank	4939 S. 24 St.
Adams, Mary	1722 St. Marys Ave.	Clerk	National Fur Company	1921-29 S. 13 St.
Anderson, Lillie	3613 Franklin	Stenographer	Live Stock Comm.	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Austin, Mary	630 Park Ave.	School Principal	Bancroft School	2718 S. 9 St.
Baker, Marian		Bank Teller		
Bellman, Leah	3521 Leavenworth	Secretary	Chamber of Commerce	WOW Bldg.
Berger, Grace	2421 Fontenelle Blvd.	Deputy County Clerk		Court House
Bolen, Inez	Carter Lake	Pres	Bolen Mfg. Co.	Gardner Bldg.
Bolshaw, Ivy L.	3314 Cumming	Secretary	Studebaker Corp.	2550 Farnam
Bowen, Augusta	4813 Douglas	Saleswoman (clerk)	H.P. Whitmore	1517 Dodge
Bradley, Grace	121 S. 25 St.	Nurse	Ford Hospital	121 S. 25 St.
Brandt, Mrs. Emelia	709 N. 41 St.	Doctor		Kerbach Bldg.
Brown Mabel A.		Secretary		
Burgess, Charlotte	508 S. 42 St.	Nurse, Supt. of nurses	University Hospital	42nd & Dewey
Casey, Mabelle E.	505 S. 31 St.	Secretary	Bradley M&S	Capital Ave. & 13 St.
Chamberlain, Florence	1326 S. 32 St.	Court Reporter	Assoc. Shorthand Rep.	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Chambers, Edna	2464 Harney	Secretary	S. Bliss & Wellman LS Com Co.	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Chambers, Mrs. L.A.		Supt.	Clarkson Memorial Hospital	2100 Howard
Charlton, Ada	117 S. 25 Ave.	Supt.	Paxton Memorial Hosp.	25th & Douglas
Clark, Mrs. Margaret	612 Hamilton Apt. S	Clerical	Thoma. Kilpatrick & Co.	1505 Douglas
Clarke, Bertha C.	5120 Capitol	Secretary	Wm. Baird & Sons	City National Bank Bldg.
Coneity, Lillian	2236 Jones	Bookkeeper	Maalfa Milling	
Cooper, Mary F.	4808 Dodge	Dance teacher	School of Dancing	
Crane, Veretta Mrs.	515 S. 20 St.	Undertaker	Crane Mortuary	515 S. 20 St.
Dare, Bess	3307 Lafayette	L.S. Com.	Byres Bros. & Co.	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Doyle, Annie F.	2408 Dodge	Buyer (clerk)	Thom. Kilpatrick & Co.	1505 Douglas
Doyle, Mary P.	2408 Dodge	Banker (teller)	Omaha National Bank	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Duffy, Iow C.	4915 Cass	Owner	Van Sant School of Business	Kennedy Bldg.
Fairchild, Nora M.	4811 Douglas	Physician	Gifford-Pattan-Collfax & Potts	Brandeis Theater Bldg.
Farmer, Sara	304 S. 54 St.	Cashier	Prudential Ins. Co.	City National Bank Bldg.
Farrell, Hallie	844 S 22 St.	Banker	Farmers Union State Exch.	11th & Jones
Foster, Mary E.	1722 St. Marys Ave.	Director	Vocational Bureau	608 City Hall

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Fullaway, Mrs. Phebe	1102 Park Ave.	Director, Cafeteria	Y.W.C.A.	508 S. 17 St.
Fuller, Blanche	3612 Cumming	Supt.	NE Methodist Hospital	3612 Cumming
Goerne, Mary W.	3610 S. 24 St.	Secretary	Byrne & Hammer Dry Good	9th & Howard
Goethe, Doris	3301 Dewey Ave	General Agent	Lincoln Natl. Life Ins.	First National Bank Bldg.
Gunston, Margaret	Flat Iron Hotel	Hairdresser	Beauty Shop	309 Neville Bldg.
Gwin, Louise	5119 Burt	Secretary	John L. Kennedy	US National Bank Bldg.
Hall, Buelah	2315 Harney	nl	Prudential Ins. Co.	City National Bank Bldg.
Haney, Mrs. Clara	1220 N. 34 St.	Office Manager	Herzberg's Inc.	1519 Douglas
Hatch, Belle	2454 Harney	Millinery		1820 Farnam
Hayes, Mae	102 S 33 St.	Secretary	Omaha Natl. Bank	1620 Farnam
Hobart, Jean	3210 Farnam	Deputy Recorder	County Clerk	1620 Douglas
Hoeg, Mrs. Augusta	106 S. 25 St.	Masseur	graduate	
Hofman, Margaret	1433 S. 15 St.	Secretary	Omaha Stock & Bond Co.	Peters Trust Bldg.
Holdredge, Leeta	418 S. 38 Ave.	Nurse Supt.	City Hall	1720 Farnam
Horn, Nora	4222 S. 22 St.	Cashier	Wood-Oswald	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Hungate, Perle	2617 N. 29 St.	Manager	Peters Trust Bldg.	1708 Farnam
Hustead, Elvera	1611 Manderson	Clerk (secretary)	Board of County Commissioner	County Court House
Hutchinson, Eva Mrs.	4814 Webster	Supervisor of Stenos.	Peters Trust Co.	1708 Farnam
Irons, Mrs. B.L. (widow)	5116 Burt	Secretary	W. Farnam Smith & Co.	1320 Farnam
Johnson, Esther	1830 S 32 St.	Juvenile Officer		County Court House
Johnson, Lulu Grace	115 N. 48 Ave.	Secretary	Western Newspaper Union	621 S. 15 St.
Johnson, Mabel C.	356 N. 41 St.	Supt. of County Schools		County Court House
Johnston, Mrs. Sadie	1737 S. 10 St.	Manager	Pacific Storage & Warehouse	1007 Jones
Kaufman, Elizabeth	822 S. 38 St.	Secretary	Stock Yards Natl. Bank	2816 O St.
Kellogg, Ruth	923 Pacific	Saleslady	Nebraska Clothing Co.	15th & Farnam
Kinsey, Mary Marston	4119 Grand Ave.	Advertising Director	Omaha Bee	Peters Trust Bldg.
Knight, Margaret	5124 Izard	Secretary	Bishop E.V. Shayler	Kennedy Bldg.
Kollertz, Caroline	1302 N. 40 St.	Secretary	Nebraska Methodist Hospital	3612 Cumming
Kramer, Adelle (widow)	2121 Wirt	Owner	Kramer & Chandler Printing	307-311 S. 12 St.
Kruger, Bertha	4821 Underwood Ave.	Millinery		Barker Bldg.
Lambracht, Eleanora	2554 Pratt	Supervisor	First Natl. Safe. Dep. Vaults	First National Bank Bldg.
2 Larson, Sophia				
Lavering, Ethel	2210 Spenser	Teller	First Natl. Bank	First National Bank Bldg.
Law, Jessie	1722 St. Marys Ave.	Buyer	Nebraska Clothing Co.	15th & Farnam
Loeffler, Byrtilla	42 The Angelus	Office Manager	ER Deputy Co. Hats & Furnishings	119 Howard
nl Loeffler, Laura		Demonstrator		

Loye, Margaret	606 N. 33 St.	Cashier	Live Stock Commission Co.	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Maltby, Ethel	2205 Howard	Chiropractor		Elks Bldg.
Marti, Mrs. M.L.	701 S. 22 St.	President	Marti Co.-Employment Spec.	WOW Bldg.
McCabe, Florence	3804 Farnam	Supt.Nurse	Visiting Nurses Assoc.	City Hall
McCaig, Imogene	509 S. 35 St.	Assistant Manager	M.E. Smith & Co.	9th & Farnam
McCarthy, Margaret		Optician		
McCrary, Elizabeth	209 S. 33 St.	Credit Dept.		
McCreath, Rae	2518 Woolworth	Stenographer	Cudahy Packaging Co.	33rd & O
McDonald, Jessie	3110 Cass	Clerk	Dept. of Police Sanitation	City Hall
McLean, Mary E.	4626 S. 33 St.	Secretary	Chas. O. Robertson & Co.	
Montgomery, L.M.	5623 Florence Blvd.	Empl. Supervisor	W.U. Telegraph	1321 Farnam
Moore, Florence	3804 Farnam	Deputy Clerk	U.S. court	Federal Bldg.
Morgan, Lydia	3319 N. 16 St.	Clerk	C.B. Nash Co.	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Mullen, Mae	2886 California	Buyer	Thom. Kilpatrick Co.	1505 Douglas
Mustain, Iona	Carter Lake Club	Dept. Manager	Nebraska Clothing Co.	15th & Farnam
Northrup, Jessie	2454 Harney	Manager	Northrup Letter Dupl.	Parker Bldg.
Olson, Olive	814 S. 26 St.	Sec & Treas.	Willow Springs Beverage	212 Hickory
Paulson, Bele	5111 Burt	Office Manager	NW Life Insurance Co.	WOW Bldg.
Petersen, Ella	5115 Underwood Ave.	Office Manager	Myers Brokerage	Terminal Bldg.
Peterson, Helga	2774 Davenport	Buyer	Herzbergs	1519 Douglas
Purcell, Gertrude	48 Angelus Apts.	Clerk	Watts Reference	First National Bank Bldg.
Putman, Hattie	522 S. 10 St.	nl	Corset Shop	Karbach Bldg.
Quade, Mabel	2711 S. 23 St.	Secretary	Jones Engineering	Courtney Bldg.
Race, Mrs. Mabel	2236 Jones	Cashier	Omaha Crockery Co.	11th & Harney
Reed, Ellenore	904 N. 36 St.	Supt. of Nurses	Nebraska Methodist Hosp.	3612 Cuming
Reynolds, Edna King	4624 Douglas	Manager	Northrup Letter Dupl.	Parker Bldg.
Richards, Lilyan	420 Park Ave.	Secretary	Payne Investment	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Rimerman, Brooke	810 N 33 St.	Agent	New York Life Insurance	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Rodstrom, Mrs. Lydia	1811 Farnam	Photographer		1811 Farnam
Rose, Lura	1709 S. 16 St.	Clerk	UPRR	1416 Dodge St.
Rowland, Grace	2315 Harney	Law Clerk	M.L. Learned	Peters Trust Bldg.
Roys, Cassie	2609 Bristol	School Principal	South Central	25th & L
Rugg, Mabel Warner	911 Forest Ave	Character Analyst		Peters Trust Bldg.
Ryan, Belle	2315 Harney	Asst. Sup. Schools	Board of Education	City Hall
Sachra, Ethel	2302 J St.	Department Manager	Fairmont Creamery	1206 Jones St.
Schad, Corinne	610 S. 27 St.	Office Supplies	Schad Ribbon & Carbon	WOW Bldg.

Shamp, Gladys	3615 N. 24 St.	Lawyer (clerk)	Stock Yards Natl. Bank	2816 O St.
Siert, Martha	2454 Harney	Bond Dept.	Remington Typewriter Co.	Arthur Bldg.
Simpson, Mrs. W.C.	2035 Fowler	nl	Highland School	27th & Jefferson
Smith, Elsie	5623 Florence Blvd.	Principal	Omaha Printing Co.	1301 Farnam
Smith, Ethelyn	1226 N. 34 St.	Cashier	First National Bank	First National Bank Bldg.
Stern, Frances	204 S. 25 Ave.	Banking		
3 Stevens, Anna		nl		
Sweetman, L.M.	3522 N. 16 St.	Cashier	Baker Ice Machine	3691 N. 16 St.
Tarpening, Mrs. A.A.	660 S. 40 St.	Owner	Van Armans Dress Pleating	Paxton Bldg.
Wahlquist, Mrs. Cally	1404 S. 10 St.	Special Agent	N.Y. Life Ins. Co.	Omaha National Bank Bldg.
Watts, Fay M.	719 S. 30 St.	Owner	Watts Reference	First National Bank Bldg.
Welsh, Ann	3561 Howard	Cashier	Phoenix Mutual Life	Keeline Bldg.
Whitney, Mrs. A.G.	1039 N. 32 St.	nl	Lehigh Portland Cement Co.	Securities Bldg.
nl = Not listed				
Number = Number of women with that name.				
Arthur Bldg.	210 S. 18 St.			
Barker Bldg.	306 S. 15 St.			
Brandeis Theater Bldg.	17th & Douglas			
City Hall	1720 Farnam			
City National Bank Bldg.	407 S. 16 St.			
County Court House	17th & Douglas			
Courtney Bldg.	1620 Douglas			
Elks Bldg.	313-317 S. 15 St.			
Federal Bldg.	16th & Dodge			
First National Bank Bldg.	1603 Farnam			
Karbach Bldg.	209 S. 15 St.			
Keeline Bldg.	319 S. 17 St.			
Kennedy Bldg.	203 S.19 St.			
Live Stock Exchange Bldg.	2816 O St.			
Omaha National Bank Bldg.	1620 Farnam			
Paxton Bldg.	217 S. 16 St.			
Securities Bldg.	307 S. 16 St.			
Terminal Bldg.	702-710 S. 10 St.			
US National Bank Bldg.	1602 Farnam			
WOW Bldg.	1319 Farnam			



Appendix Three

1956 Women's Division Membership

Name	Street Address	Occupation	Company/Employer	Address
Abart, Mrs. Mary Frances	11010 Center	Bookkeeper	Walling Co.	Omaha Loan & Bldg Assn.
Allen, Mrs. Katherine F.	3519 Jones	Clerk	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Allen, Opal	nl	Teacher	RS	
Anderson, Mrs. Frannie	1905 Capitol	Clerk	Brandeis	16th & Douglas Sts.
Armstrong, Mrs. Mary Ann	RD5 Florence Station	Steno	Omaha Electric Works	1214 Harney St.
Babcock, Hazel L.	5643 Corby	Teacher	RS	
Barker, Virginia	4726 Wakely	Office Secretary	Foster-Baraker	209 S. 19 St.
Beard, Mrs. Marilyn Miller	5003 California	Clerk	UPRR	
Beaver, Mrs. May	8108 Howard	Natl. Director	Suprem Woodmen Circle	
Beckius, Rita	320 S. Elmwood Road	Office Secretary	Union Freightways	Woodmen Circl'd Bldg.
Bendel, Mrs. Hertha	303 N. 33 St.			720 Leavenworth
Birkett, Mary E.	5036 Spencer	Teacher	RS	
Blackard, Mrs. Jeanette	nl	Clerk	St. Josephs Hospital	2225-2337 S. 10 St.
Blenderman, Mrs. Doris	5919 N. 42 St.	nl	Professional Uniforms	109 N. 16 St.
Bradley, Marian F.	2735 Newport Ave.	Clerk	Kellogg Co.	2601 Center
Brecker, Jeralyn	818 N. 46 St. #3	Teacher	RS	
Britton, Mrs. Nelle (widow)	701 S. 22 St. #62	Bookkeeper	nl	
Brodil, Olga Anna	554 S. 26 St. #304	Steno	Byron Reed	4707 S. 24 St.
Brown, Margaret E.	729 Park Ave. #4	Clerk	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
Bunch, Mrs. W.S.	4308 Spring	Office Manager	W.S. Bunch, Contractors	4308 Spring
Bures, Betty F.	3252 Farnam #306	Clerk	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.
Burgess, Mrs. Wilma S. (widow)	117 S. 50 St.	Sten	Schmoller & Mueller Piano	1514-18 Dodge St.
Burke, Mrs. Anne B.	nl			
Burnett, Mrs. Mildred	117 S. 51 St.			
Burton, Mrs. Nelda A.	554 S. 26 St. #204	Nurse	nl	
Busse, Nelda W.	127 N. 40 St.	Office Secretary	nl	
Carey, Lenore A.	1944 S. 50 St.	Supervisor	United Benefits Life	15th & Douglas
Cassidy, Mary	5803 William	Office Secretary	Floyd F. Mellin	Securities Bldg.
Christensen, Daisy	Council Bluffs	Supervisor	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Christenson, Mrs. Willadene	2552 Marcy #11	Bookkeeper	W.J. Palm Co.	
Clark, Mrs. Edith (widow)	3406 Davenport	Office Secretary	Byron Reed	
Cockrell, Ruth M.	4332 Grant	Case Worker	Family & Child Services	Omaha Loan & Bldg Assn.
Compton, Annetta	4019 Corby	Bookkeeper	Neb. Bridge Supply & Lib.	3923 Leavenworth
Conley, Mrs. Beata E.	509 S. 27 St. #25	Supervisor	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.

Connolly, Rosemary C.	6803 MinneLusa Ave.	Office Secretary	nl	
Conway, Mrs. Martha(widow)	6207 S. 34	Clerk	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
Crawford, Mrs. Mozzell	119 S. 37 St.	Sales Manager	Avon Cosmetics	City Natl. Bank Bldg.
Danbom, Mrs. Marie(widow)	524 N. 50 St.	Clerk	US Military District	
Denton, Wanda	Council Bluffs	(owner?)	Denton Duplicating	503 Grain Exch. Bldg.
Dineen, Mrs. Esther (widow)	4914 Dodge #5	Asst. Dep.	County Register of Deeds	County Court House
Donovan, Mrs. Veronica M.	3811 S. 24 St.	Manager	NE Safety Eng. Serv	1726 St. Marys Ave
Dornan, Mrs. Veda (widow)	521 S. 26 St.	Office Secretary	Halsey-Stuart & Co.	556 Insurance Bldg.
Dougherty, Mrs. Ethel	2442 Bauman	Talent	KMTV	2615 Farnam
Douglas, Mrs. Mabel (widow)	4779 Decatur	Clerk	LPRR	
Dowling, Mrs. Myrtle(widow)	2028 N. 49 St.	Owner	Dowling Transfer	814 N. 14 St.
Elliott, Mrs. Cordelia B.	6148 Western Ave.	Asst. Sec-Treas.	Physicians Casualty	1603 Farnam
Eriksen, Mary Lou	508 N. 33 St.	Supervisor	United Benefits Life Ins.	15th & Douglas
Fahrlander, Lois	3910 Dewey Ave.	Admin. Asst.	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Farnsworth, Mrs. Jean	5900 N. 24 St.	nl	Impressions Print Shop	5823 N. 24 St.
Fairand, Evangeline	3827 Martha	Office Secretary	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.
Fear, Helen (widow)	203 S. 25 St. #37	Corresp.	US Gypsum Co.	WOW Bldg.
Feiler, Mrs. Helen A.	3414 N. 49 St.	Director	County Hospital	1214 S. 40 St.
Fleck, Mrs. Margaret	6559 N. 24 St.	Office Secretary	Fuch, Machy & Sup.	2401 N. 11 St.
Fornstrom, Mrs. Marie(widow)	2211 Howard #32	Office Secretary	Raupe Brokerage Co.	WOW Bldg.
Fransiscus, Mrs. Opal	5013 Spencer	Stenographer	Stock Yards Natl. Bank	Live Stock Exchange Bldg.
Friedrichs, Mrs. M.E.	4903 Chicago #1	nl		
Gerhart, Jan				
Gilloghy, Ruth Ann	3620 S. 23 St.	Supervisor	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
Glise, Florence Marie	5018 Burt	Clerk	LPRR	
Gore, Mrs. Lorene (widow)	702 S. 38 St. #11	Office Secretary	White, Lipp & Simon	1904 Farnam
Grasso, Mrs. Frances M.	6621 Wirt	Clerk	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Gravett, Mrs. Shirley E.	666 N. 48 St.	Typist	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Griess, Mrs. Thelma	3482 Jefferson	Teacher	FS	
Haight, Mrs. C.W.	517 N. 74 St.	Calculator Oper.	Cook Paint & Varnish	1420 Davenport (& others)
Hall, Mrs. Lynn E.	4118 N. 26 St.	nl		
Hanna, Mrs. Gladys	604 S. 22 St. #1023	Cafeteria Manager	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Hansen, Mrs. Mabel	3008 Seward	Machine Operator	Securities Accep. Corp.	308 S. 18 St.
Hanson, Vivien L.	2323 M #1	Manager	American Hostess	
Hanthorn, Mrs. Beulah A.	4353 Dodge #12	Assistant Supervisor	United Benefits Life	15th & Douglas
Harper, Mrs. H.H.				

Harrison, Mrs. Cecil	3539 N. 55 St.	Saleswoman	Fred & Clark Hoss Clothing	205 S. 16 St.
Hartford, Mrs. Dorothy M.	3808 Charles	Traffic Dept.	Telephone Co.	
Hassett, Mary L.	522 N. 36 St.	Steno	John Deere Plow	912 Howard
Heffes, Selim				
Hemmer, Mrs. Olive M.	3106 Dodge #201	Clerk	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.
Hewitt, Mrs. Mabel C. (widow)	204 Paxton Ct. #24	Bookkeeper	United AG Stores	1016 Howard
Horacek, Melvina K.	116 s. 36th St.	Auditor	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Howard, Mildred V.	2018 Fowler Ave.	nl	Charmes Beauty Salon	Two Ten Bldg.
Hulbert, Mrs. Aloha	3871 Charles	nl		
Hunter, Sarah	3102 Dodge #201	Office Secretary	McCormack & McCormack	1904 Farnam
Jacobson, Mrs. Madeline	1758 S. 105 St.			
Jefferson, Zathoe	322 S. 37 St.	Employee	T.H. Maenner & Co.	5678 Marcy
Johnson, Bertha Davis	902 S. 37 St.	Employee	Waddell & Reed Inv.	144 S. 40 St.
Johnson, Eleanor L.	3921 N. 19 St.	Corres	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Johnson, Talitha (widow)	5832 Frederick	Beauty Operator		
Kaplan, Mrs. David				
Keller, Mrs. Hazel H. (widow)	418 S. 38 St. #36	Office Manager	Feil & Pinkerton Co.	Keeline Bldg.
Kellogg, Mrs. Kay L. (widow)	232 Jones #12	Office Secretary	Pontiac Motor Div of GMAC	First Natl. Bank Bldg.
Kotera, Marie A.	1373 S. 17 St.	Reporter	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.
Kreuschens, Jane	401 S. 38 St. #2	Department Manager	Younkers	42nd & Center
Larsen, Loreta	4231 Douglas	Steno	A E Samuelson Co.	4426 Dodge
Laska, Alvina V.	3324 Cuming	Supervisor	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
Lawless, Kathryn A.	2130 S. 61 Ave.	Supervisor	John Deer Plow	912 Howard
LcClair, Mrs. Anna Marie (widow)	203 N. 36 St.	Aide	Children's Mem. Hospital	44th & Dewey
Leppert, Mrs. Margaret	1916 Spencer	Office Secretary	Smith Polian & Co.	Omaha Natl. Bank Bldg.
Licht, Mrs. Elsie M.	2330 s. 16 St.	Clerk	Penny's	16th & Dodge
Littell, Mrs. L. C.	6017 Florence Blvd.	Receptionist	Met Stage Equipment	
Lockhart, Mrs. Juana	1718 S. 28 st.	Asst. Credit Manager	Virginia Dare	2451 St, Marys Ave.
Long, Viola M.	4018 Lafayette #4	Business Mach. Oper.	US Natl. Park Service	216 S. 16 St.
Lubbers, Kathryn	120 S. 33 St.	Underwriter		
Lynch, Mrs. Geo. B.	3945 F	Clerk	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
Malone, Dorothy				
Mardan, Mrs. Ellen I.	818 s 37 Ave. #9	Supervisor	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Marron, Nancy Louise	626 N. 27 St.	Office Secretary	Lueder Consin Co.	Redick Tower Bldg.
Marx, Bernice M.	4511 N. 36 St.	Secretary	Carpenter Paper	2402 Douglas
Marx, Jane F.	Council Bluffs	Clerk	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam

Matson, Mrs. Raymond C.	321 S. 90 St.	Co-Owner ?	Red Rooster Cocktail Lounge	4911 Dodge
McAuliffe, Helen M.	1709 Martha	Clerk	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
McCloud, Mrs. Kathryn	1002 1/2 S. 24	Housekeeper	Town House Motel	70th & Dodge
McCoy, Mrs. Dona	2514 N. 71 St.	Steno	General Appliance	1101-07 Harney St.
McDermott, Mrs. P.H.	205 S. 36 St.	Clerk	First National Bank	First Natl. Bank Bldg.
McNeeley, Margaret	3415 N. St.	Office Secretary	UFRR	
Mecham, Mrs. Tonia Chase	604 S. 22 St. #1102	Typist	Supreme Forest Woodmen Cir.	33rd & Farnam
Mendyk, Reta	5022 S. 36 Ave.	Emp.	Northern Natural Gas	2223 Dodge
Mettlen, Mrs. Marie	3315 Walnut	Clerk	Supreme Forest Woodmen Cir.	33rd & Farnam
6 Miller, Mrs. Dorothy Ramsey				
Miller, Mrs. Jewell F.	2107 Lothrop	Teacher	FS	
Moravec, Emily M.	913 S. 10 St.	Clerk	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
Mueller, Mrs. Milda (widow)	1814 S. 33 St.	Saleswoman	Penny's	16th & Dodge
Mundy, Mary Ann	2408 Franklin R 414	Clerk	UFRR	
Murray, Katherine E.	2419 F	Clerk	County Treasurer	County Court House
Nardella, Donna Lea	905 S. 58 St.	Clerk		
Nelson, Mrs. Bernice	211 S. 27 St. #303	Supervisor	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
nl Nimeitz, Mrs. Carol				
Nordell, Mrs Thelma	2881 Newport Ave.	Office	Hotel Hamilton	2408 Farnam
Olson, Mrs. Bertha P.	103 S. 18 St.	Traffic Dept.	Telephone Co.	
Patterson, Ada S.	114 S. 33 St.	Clerk	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Patterson, Mrs. Mary(widow)	520 S. 31 St. #11	Teacher	Jungman School	5017 S. 20 St.
Pearson, Lois	120 N 31 St. #6	Clerk	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Petersen, Lorretta	4311 Parker	Clerk	McKesson & Robbins	902-12 Farnam
Phillips, Ruth W.	5631 Woolworth	Office Manager	Natl. Life Ins. Co.	Keeline Bldg.
Powley, Mary C.	3167 Jackson #13	Supervisor	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
Railsback, Mrs. Cleota M.	829 1/2 S. 29 St.	nl		
Rehkopf, Merle S.	5520 Howard	Mngr/Women's Dept	Marti Reference	WOW Bldg
Renander, Janice	4832 Franklin	Office Secretary	Swarr, May, Royce, Smith, Stacy	Keeline Bldg.
Ressler, Mrs. Blanche C.	Council Bluffs, Iowa	Examiner	US Internal Revenue	Federal Office Bldg.
Roberts, Mrs. Florence C.	418 S. 38 St. #36			
nl Robinson, Mrs. Amy E.				
Rohrig, Lis A.	3412 Boyd	Computer Operator	Cudahy	5002 S. 33 St.
Royer, Ula	3252 Farnam #305	Supervisor	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Ruemping, Mrs. Rose C.	2211 Ellison Ave.	nl		
Ruf, Margaret E.	2609 S. 33 St.	bmo	Prucka Transp.	4610 S. 26 St.

Savine, Bernadette	4651 Saratoga	Office Secretary	Kelly Grant & Knowles	422 Securities Bldg
Schmitz, Katherine C.	8930 Westover Rd.	(owner ?)	Kays Store of Distinction	6052 Military Ave.
Schmitz, Mrs. Jenna Belle	4816 Franklin	Asst. Chief Account	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
Serpan, Emily	2230 S. 14 St.	Supervisor	Woodmen of World Life Ins	1708 Farnam
nl Shay, Marian				
nl Shea, Mrs. C. Ethel				
Sheehan, Mrs. Lucille D.	3918 Cass #21	Asst. Dep.	County Reg. Of Deeds	County Court House
Sheffield, Mrs. Betty J.	3040 Adams Ave.	Clerk	United Benefits Life	15th & Douglas
Shugart, Mrs. Lena Alexander	123 N. 39 St.	Treasurer	Supreme Forest Woodmen Cir.	33rd & Farnam
Sivinski, Mrs. Adrian D.	1312 N. 56 St.	nl		
Smerz, Mrs. Wilma (widow)	701 S. 22 St. #163	Bookkeeper	Billings Dental Lab	1809 Capitol
Stedinger, Minna	1414 S. 10 St.	Printer	nl	
Steffen, Madeline	3320 Harney	Type	Supreme Forest Woodmen Cir.	33rd & Farnam
nl Stember, Mrs. Catherine				
Stenberg, Grace Mary	135 N. 34 St. #3	Nurse	St. Joseph's Hospital	2225-2337 S. 10 St.
Stenner, Mrs. Lucille M.	2529 California	Cafeteria	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Stevens, Dorothy Manning	204 Paxton Ct. #24	Clerk	UFRR	
Stott, Mrs. Pauline	78th & Dodge	Programmer	Mutual of Omaha	3316 Farnam
Surface, Jean	Ralston, NE	Acct.	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
Taylor, Mrs. Sarah				
Thomsen, Carole L.	827 N. 4 St.	Supervisor	United Benefit Life	15th & Douglas
nl Tollander, Mrs. Sandy				
Tolles, Mildred	44th & Dewey	Dietician	Children's Mem Hospital	44th & Dewey
Tracy, Marie Ann	5009 Corby	Bookkeeper	Ralph Printing & Lithography	19th & St. Marys
Turner, Mrs. Helen	Council Bluffs	emp	St. Paul Mercury Idemnity Co	1810 Howard
Vosik, Wanda	4613 S. 33 St.	Asst. Cashier	South Omaha Bank	24th & N
Walker, Marian	2315 N. 50 St.	Home Economist	Omaha Cold Storage	810 Farnam
Weber, Margaret Ann	3318 Myrtle	Chief Clerk	UFRR	815 S. 10 St.
Weston, Mrs. Mildred(widow)	2940 Woolworth	Audio	WOW	Insurance Bldg.
Wettengel, Barbara F.	3167 Jackson #13	Nurse	Clarkson Hospital	44th & Dewey
Wilkie, Frances M.	307 S. 68 Ave.	nl		
nl Wolf, Mrs. Billie				
Wolf, Mrs. Verna	5619 Cedar	Bookkeeper	Clyde B Tryon Type.	Graphic Arts Bldg.

nl = Not listed

Number = Number of women with the same name.

City Natl. Bank Bldg.	405 S. 16 St.
County Court House	Farnam between 17th & 18th
Federal Bldg.	106 S. 15th St.
First Natl. Bank Bldg.	1603 Farnam
Grain Exchange Bldg.	1905 Harney
Graphic Arts Bldg.	406 S. 12th St.
Insurance Bldg.	1708 Farnam
Keeline Bldg.	319 S. 17th St.
Omaha Loan & Bldg Assn. Bldg.	15th & Douglas
Omaha Nat. Bank Bldg.	1620 Farnam
Redick Tower Bldg.	1504-08 Harney
Security Bldg.	1615 Howard
Two Ten Bldg.	210 S. 18th St.
WOW Bldg.	1319 Farnam

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- O'Donnell, Deborah C. "The League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha 1920-1995." Master's thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1996.
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### Interviews

- Carter, Keith, Executive Vice President of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1976. Telephone interview by author, July 28, 2000.
- Christiansen, Shirley, President of the Omaha Women's Chamber of Commerce 2000. Telephone interview by author, September 20, 2000.
- Huddleston, Lillian, Member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Division in 1976. Telephone interview by author, August 14, 2000.
- Ivers, Marion, Assistant General Manager of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce in 1976. Telephone interview by author, April 19, 2000.
- Leach, DuanDean, Member of Women's Division beginning in 1954. Telephone interview by author, September 22, 2000.

Purdy, Anita, Manager of the Women's Division of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1972-1976. Interview by author, April 14, 2000. Omaha.

Riley, Hazel, President of the Women's Division in 1975. Telephone interview by author, October 16, 2000.

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