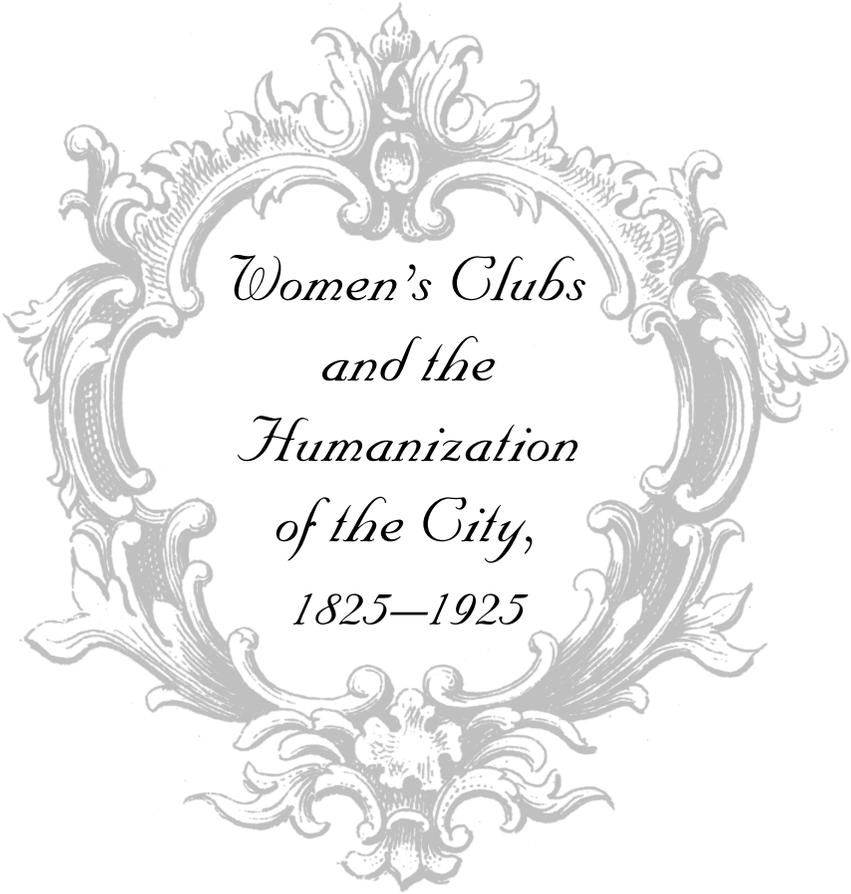


Akron's "Better Half"

Series on Ohio History and Culture

- George W. Knepper, *Summit's Glory*
- Leonard Sweet, *Strong in the Broken Places*
- John H. White and Robert J. White Sr., *The Island Queen*
- H. Roger Grant, *Ohio's Railway Age in Postcards*
- Frances McGovern, *Written on the Hills: The Making of the Akron Landscape*
- Keith McClellan, *The Sunday Game: At the Dawn of Professional Football*
- Steve Love and David Giffels, *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron*
- Alfred Winslow Jones and Daniel Nelson, *Life, Liberty, and Property: A Story of Conflict and a Measurement of Conflicting Rights*
- David Brendan Hopes, *A Childhood in the Milky Way: Becoming a Poet in Ohio*
- John Keim, *Legends by the Lake: The Cleveland Browns at Municipal Stadium*
- Richard B. Schwartz, *The Biggest City in America: A Fifties Boyhood in Ohio*
- Thomas A. Rumer, *Unearthing the Land: The Story of Ohio's Scioto Marsh*
- Steve Love, Ian Adams, and Barney Taxel, *Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens*
- William F. Romain, *Mysteries of the Hopewell: Astronomers, Geometers, and Magicians of the Eastern Woodlands*
- Dale Topping, edited by Eric Brothers, *When Giants Roamed the Sky: Karl Arnstein and the Rise of Airships from Zeppelin to Goodyear*
- Millard F. Rogers Jr., *Rich in Good Works: Mary M. Emery of Cincinnati*
- Frances McGovern, *Fun, Cheap, & Easy: My Life in Ohio Politics, 1949–1964*
- Larry L. Nelson, editor, *A History of Jonathan Alder: His Captivity and Life with the Indians*
- Bruce M. Meyer, *The Once and Future Union: The Rise and Fall of the United Rubber Workers, 1935–1995*
- Steve Love and Ian Adams, *The Holden Arboretum*
- Joyce Dyer, *Gum-Dipped: A Daughter Remembers Rubber Town*
- Melanie Payne, *Champions, Cheaters, and Childhood Dreams: Memories of the Soap Box Derby*
- John Flower, *Downstairs, Upstairs: The Changed Spirit and Face of College Life in America*
- Wayne Embry and Mary Schmitt Boyer, *The Inside Game: Race, Power, and Politics in the NBA*
- Robin Yocum, *Dead Before Deadline: . . . And Other Tales from the Police Beat*
- A. Martin Byers, *The Ohio Hopewell Episode: Paradigm Lost and Paradigm Gained*
- Edward C. Arn, edited by Jerome Mushkat, *Arn's War: Memoirs of a World War II Infantryman, 1940–1946*
- Brian Bruce, *Thomas Boyd: Lost Author of the "Lost Generation"*
- Kathleen Endres, *Akron's "Better Half": Women's Clubs and the Humanization of a City, 1825–1925*

Akron's “Better Half”



Kathleen L. Endres



THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON PRESS
AKRON, OHIO

Copyright © 2006 by Kathleen L. Endres
All rights reserved
First Edition 2006
Manufactured in the United States of America.
10 09 08 07 06 5 4 3 2 1

All inquiries and permission requests should be addressed to the Publisher,
The University of Akron Press, Akron, Ohio 44325-1703.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Endres, Kathleen L.

Akron's "better half" : women's clubs and the humanization of the city, 1825-1925 /
Kathleen Endres.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-931968-36-2 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-931968-36-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Women—Ohio—Akron—Societies and clubs—History. 2. Women—Ohio—
Akron—History. 3. Akron (Ohio)—History. I. Title.

HQ1906.A5E53 2006

367'.977136082—dc22

2006002468

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American Na-
tional Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library
Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.∞

Cover images: *Front cover, top photo*, the American Hard Rubber Workers, courtesy of the
Special Collections Division, Akron-Summit County Public Library. *Front cover, bottom
photo*, the Goodrich Zipper Girls, courtesy of the B. F. Goodrich Collection, the Univer-
sity of Akron Archives. *Back cover*, the Akron YWCA, 1904, courtesy of the YWCA of
Summit County Collection, the University of Akron Archives.

Contents

| | | |
|----------|---|-----|
| <i>1</i> | Akron and the Club Movement | 1 |
| <i>2</i> | Women's Clubs in Antebellum Akron | 15 |
| <i>3</i> | Women's Clubs of Akron during the Civil War | 32 |
| <i>4</i> | Women's Clubs of Akron in Reconstruction and the Gilded Age | 46 |
| <i>5</i> | Religiously-based Women's Clubs in Twentieth-Century Akron | 92 |
| <i>6</i> | Secularly-based Women's Clubs in Twentieth-Century Akron | 120 |
| <i>7</i> | Other Perspectives on Women's Clubs in Twentieth-Century Akron | 164 |
| <i>8</i> | Conclusion | 178 |
| | Notes | 185 |
| | Bibliography | 217 |
| | Index | 225 |

Illustrations

| | |
|--|-----|
| Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal | 17 |
| Halls Corner, Akron | 19 |
| Mary Ingersol Tod Evans | 31 |
| American Hotel | 34 |
| Jennie Gifford | 51 |
| Sophie Knight McCollester | 51 |
| Grace Belle Gorton Olin | 52 |
| Temperance Crusade | 61 |
| Angeline Manley | 64 |
| Laura Fraunfelter | 73 |
| Sarah Battels | 75 |
| Woman's Benevolent Association Home | 83 |
| Abby Soule Schumacher | 86 |
| Mary Jewett | 87 |
| Graduates of Buchtel College | 88 |
| Women of the Ku Klux Klan | 95 |
| Goodrich Zipper Girls | 97 |
| Carita McEbright | 107 |
| Maude Watters Milar | 107 |
| Mary Day Nursery and Kindergarten | 113 |
| Early Children's Ward | 115 |
| Celia Baker | 123 |
| American Hard Rubber Workers | 136 |
| YWCA Founders | 137 |
| YWCA of 1904 | 139 |
| YWCA Basketball | 140 |
| YWCA Goodyear Girls | 142 |
| Goodyear Rubber Workers | 144 |
| Industrial Workers of the World Strike | 146 |
| YWCA Blue Triangle Dormitory | 148 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| YWCA Dormitory, South Union Street | 149 |
| YWCA Newsletter | 151 |
| Katherine Kurt | 152 |
| Federation of Women's Clubs | 156 |
| Busy Bee Hive of the Maccabees, Akron | 157 |
| Daughters of America | 159 |
| Daughters of the American Revolution | 160 |
| Clara Bingham | 167 |

Chapter 1

Akron and the Club Movement

There is a peculiar niche in the world's organizations which can be filled only by women. Such has been found in the city of Akron. The local 'niche' which is filled so capably by Akron women, may be said to be a triple nature; namely, charity, literature and music.

—*Akron Beacon Journal*¹

Akron is organized to death. Everything from the municipal building to the kindergarten is organized, each organization running rampant with shears open, clipping here and there.

—Mrs. Charles Brookover, Akron, Ohio²

WOMEN'S CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VITALLY important to the health and well-being of the city of Akron, Ohio. They brought much-needed services to the city, created health institutions that continue today, and built Akron's cultural and literary foundations.

The story of women and their organizations is not told in typical histories of the city. Those histories of Akron have concentrated on the industrial, business, and government/political foundation of the city, the rubber barons, and the well-known, affluent men. Yet Akron women and their accomplishments cannot be overlooked. Over the decades, women, usually working through their clubs and organizations, have transformed the city.

In antebellum days, when Akron was little more than a village, women formed temperance societies that assisted families in distress, even as activists tried to get

rid of the liquor trade. Other organizations brought wage increases to seamstresses, rescued “fallen women,” and raised funds for the local fire companies. During the Civil War, Akron women worked in the Soldiers Aid Society, shipping thousands of dollars’ worth of supplies to Cleveland’s Sanitary Commission for use in hospitals and assisting families of area soldiers left behind.

And Akron women were only getting started.

After the Civil War, women created organizations that delivered desperately needed aid to the poor and, in the process, created a primitive welfare system for what the women called the “worthy poor.” Other women’s organizations raised funds to build churches, schools, playgrounds, and more. Akron women also joined the temperance crusades of the day and organized their own structured temperance leagues to carry out the next stage of their antiliquor campaign. During the Gilded Age, there were so many clubs that a small group of activists organized a Women’s Council to channel the energies of clubwomen across the city. It was one of the earliest women’s councils in the nation.

During the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century, Akron women were caught up in the municipal housekeeping movement that swept the nation. Transferring their household responsibilities to the greater community, Akron women established a new generation of organizations and redefined the missions of long-standing groups to deliver essential services and create institutions that continue today. Sometimes this meant reaching across class and ethnic lines. Some clubs of affluent women focused on the needs of the growing number of workingwomen. They built dorms for women who came to the city to work in the new rubber factories, provided day care for the children of working mothers, and went to workplaces to teach English to immigrant women, even as they quietly pressured employers to improve working conditions for their female employees.

Akron’s club movement was not reserved for the native-born, affluent, white matrons of the city. Immigrant, African American, and workingwomen, excluded from membership in most of the women’s clubs run by the affluent whites, organized their own groups. They defined for themselves what they wanted and needed, strategized on how to achieve those goals, and selected leaders from their midst.

Thousands of Akron women joined clubs and organizations during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Women’s Council leveraged those groups into a force to exert pressure on civic leaders to create a juvenile justice system, on educators to add kindergartens to the schools, and on corporate executives to cut down on pollution.

If the city needed assistance, civic, business, political, and media leaders called on the women and their clubs and organizations to assume the task. If women saw problems, they formed groups to solve them. The women's clubs made mistakes along the way; they were frequently criticized and sometimes condemned. But they were not going to be stopped.

Akron women and their clubs and organizations changed the city. They transformed Akron from simply an industrial/business center to a place to live. They humanized the city. In the process, Akron women, working within their clubs and organizations, gained for themselves enormous power in the city. The Akron women accomplished this by working within a domestic sphere that they stretched and molded to their own ends. Thus, Akron clubwomen displayed all the characteristics of domestic feminism, using "ladylike" characteristics to reform the community.³



The United States has always been a "nation of joiners."⁴ From its earliest days, America discovered it could accomplish much through collective action, and Americans were eager to organize clubs, societies, organizations, and associations to get things done. Benevolent societies date back to the early days of the colonies. Charleston, South Carolina, had one of the first, St. Andrew's Society of Charles Town, founded in 1729; Philadelphia followed with its own St. Andrew's Association in 1749. Political clubs that often brought about civic improvement followed. Founding father, American diplomat, printer, inventor, and bon vivant Benjamin Franklin organized his friends into a political/civic club called Junto (Leather Apron Club) in Philadelphia. This group of businessmen and artisans discussed morality, politics, philosophy, and local and national affairs; in 1731, the club organized the first library in the colonies. The Sons of Liberty, a secret society, started simultaneously in New York and Boston to protest the Stamp Act, an unpopular tax levied on the colonies. After Parliament repealed the act, the Sons disbanded but revived to protest the Townshend Acts, which levied taxes on lead, paint, paper, glass, and tea imported to the colonies and suspended the New York legislature until it agreed to quarter British soldiers, in 1766. That organization included printers and editors in all the colonies who exchanged news reports and essays and, in the process, helped foment a revolution and keep morale up even in the darkest days of the war.

European travelers were always intrigued by the proclivity of Americans to organize and join clubs and associations. Traveling to America in 1831–32, French

aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville saw voluntary associations as something special in the new democratic nation:

The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to form seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling for the encouragement of a great example, they form a society.

Europeans did not have that joining spirit, de Tocqueville observed; he speculated that the Americans used their voluntary associations to take the place of the more stable, aristocratic institutions of Europe.⁵

Fifty years later, British historian, statesman, and diplomat James Bryce reported that the voluntary associations were still very much a part of American culture. Bryce observed, "Associations are created, extended, and worked in the United States more quickly and effectively than in any other country." Bryce thought American voluntary associations helped explain the nation's dynamic politics, economic growth, and social development. "Such associations have great importance in the development of opinion, for they rouse attention, excite discussion, formulate principles, submit plans, embolden and stimulate their members, produce that impression of a spreading movement which goes so far towards success with a sympathetic and sensitive people."⁶

When de Tocqueville and Bryce reported on American voluntary associations, they were almost always referring to the societies organized by men. This is not to say that these two European visitors ignored the women. In fact, American women fascinated both visitors because they held such an interesting place in society. On one hand, they occupied a narrow, separate sphere, one confined to home and domestic life. On the other hand, they wielded enormous power and prestige within society.

De Tocqueville, especially, was puzzled by that dichotomy:

As for myself, I do not hesitate to avow, that, although the women of the United States are confined within their narrow circle of domestic life, and their situation is in some respects one of extreme dependence, I have nowhere seen women occupying a loftier position; and if I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things done by the Americans, to what the singu-

lar prosperity and growing strength of that people ought to be attributed, I should reply—to the superiority of their women.⁷

Bryce also saw the schism in American society. Men occupied the public sphere—their lives revolved around business. Women occupied the private sphere, the home—their lives revolved around the family. Bryce explained, “As mothers they mould the character of their children; while the function of forming the habits of society and determining its moral tone rests greatly in their hands. But there is reason to think that the influence of the American system tells directly for good upon men as well as upon the whole community.”⁸

What de Tocqueville and Bryce observed was the “Cult of True Womanhood” or the “Cult of Domesticity,” as historians call the ideology that arose during the first half of the nineteenth century. Crafted by antebellum women’s magazines, gift books, and religious publications of the day, this image of women was quite different from that of the self-sufficient American woman of the Revolutionary period. Historian Barbara Welter, who coined the term “Cult of True Womanhood,” explained that the middle-class women of industrializing America occupied a special place within the home, apart from corrupting influences of business and industry. In her domestic sphere, the “lady” possessed certain characteristics—piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.⁹

Women were to care for their homes (domesticity) and their husbands (submissiveness) and train their children well, in God-fearing, religiously grounded households (piety and purity). The Reverend John Angell James, a popular writer of the day, explained that a happy home finds the woman “yielding” to the greater wisdom of her husband—“her power is in her gentleness.” The wife was busy with her family. “A mother’s place is in the midst of her family; a mother’s duties are to take care of *them*,” the minister argued.¹⁰

Both nature and religion dictated that role. Woman was physically weaker than man; she was unsuited for the stress, strain, and exertion of the business world. As the Reverend F. B. Fulton wrote in 1869, “Woman cannot compete with man in a long course of mental labor. The female mind is rather quiet and timid than fiery and driving. It admires rather than covets the great exploits of the other sex.”¹¹

Popular writer Elizabeth Poole Sandford explained that St. Paul had been right when he advised women to stay within the domestic sphere. “There is composure at home; there is something sedative in the duties which home involves. It affords security not only from the world, but from delusions and errors of every kind,”

she wrote. Such was a position shared by Catharine Beecher, American champion of domestic education, and her sister, novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe. They argued that the separate spheres would assure a strong marriage and a happy family. “The father undergoes toil and self-denial to provide a home, then the mother becomes a self-sacrificing laborer to train its inmates.” This division of labor was God’s will, the two wrote. The family was an “earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister.”¹²

Self-sacrifice, subjugation, domesticity, submissiveness, piety, and purity suggested a restricted role for American women, one with few options. However, as Bryce and de Tocqueville discussed, and as a number of historians have subsequently discovered, American women could—and did—stretch and shape the constricted “Cult of True Womanhood” to their wants and needs.¹³

The ideology of the “Cult of True Womanhood” was built upon the concept that women shared certain characteristics and that they possessed a moral superiority over men. That greater moral sensibility made women ideal wives, mothers, and homemakers. It also provided a shared bond among women and a shared responsibility to bring their greater moral sensibility to the community. Women had a *duty* to care for the forsaken, to help the ailing, and to bring their own good housekeeping to the problems of the community. *Blackwood’s Magazine* saw women as the force behind the scenes. They were not only to work in the home but also to minister to all those in need. “Such is her destiny; to visit the forsaken, to attend the neglected, amid the forgetfulness of myriads to remember.”¹⁴

Catharine Beecher saw no conflict between the duties of the home and women’s involvement in benevolent causes within the community. “In matters pertaining to the education of their children, in the selection and support of a clergyman, in all benevolent enterprises, and in all questions relating to morals and manners, they [women] have a superior influence,” Beecher insisted. Indeed, charity was best left in women’s hands. Beecher argued that, working together, women could investigate reports of need, call on indigent families, and determine the proper course to remedy any situation.¹⁵

The best way to accomplish the tasks that *Blackwood’s Magazine* and Beecher outlined was for like-minded women to establish clubs and organizations to help the needy in the community. Just as men started voluntary clubs and organizations, so, too, did the women.

In the United States, women first got involved in benevolent work by organizing auxiliaries to the men’s groups. Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters were wel-

come to join the auxiliaries that did much of the fund-raising and special-event work of the men's groups. Soon the women formed their own clubs and organizations. These gave women more latitude, more power. Women determined the mission, the goals, and the strategies of their organizations. They formed groups to help workingwomen, prostitutes, and indigent families. During the Civil War, women throughout the North worked diligently in soldiers' aid and relief organizations. It was only because of those local societies that the U.S. Sanitary Commission was able to build its medical support network. After the war, American women geared up for fresh challenges. Some continued their antebellum benevolent work, assisting indigent families in cities and towns across the nation. Others geared up for new temperance and suffrage campaigns. Many took a more conservative route and organized to build churches, schools, and hospitals and then turned over administration of these institutions to the men. Still others were more concerned with their own self-improvement and organized literary, musical, and cultural societies.

The women's clubs and organizations nationwide built upon the social expectations imposed on women of the day. These women used the ideology and rhetoric of domesticity to recruit members, to raise funds, to argue their case to the community, and to accomplish their mission.



Akron, Ohio, was very much a part of this cultural milieu. During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, Akron women embraced the concepts associated with domesticity. Women and men inhabited different spheres. Men lived in the public sphere of business and industry. Women kept the home in a state of domestic bliss. As Akron's *Glad Tidings and Ladies Universalist Magazine* outlined in its "Rules for Wives,"

- I. Always receive your husband with smiles . . . endeavoring to win, and gratefully reciprocate his kindness and attention.
- II. Study to gratify his inclination in regard to food and cookery; in the management of the family; in your dress, manners and deportment.
- III. Never attempt to rule, or appear to rule your husband.
- IV. In everything reasonable, comply with his wishes with cheerfulness. . . .
- V. Avoid all altercations or arguments leading to ill humor, and more especially before company.

- VI. Never attempt to interfere in his business unless he asks your advice and counsel; and never attempt to control him in the management of it.
- VII. Never confide to gossips any of the failings or imperfections of your husband. . . .
- VIII. Avail yourself of every opportunity to cultivate your mind, so as, should your husband be intelligent and well informed, you may join in rational conversation with him and his friends.
- IX. Think nothing beneath your attention that may produce even a momentary breach of harmony, or the slightest uneasy sensation.¹⁶

Following these simple rules was not a hardship for women. Living within the domestic sphere was an honor. Only there could women—Akron women—receive their greatest accolades. As “Porcia” wrote in the *Akron Offering*, a periodical edited by a woman, women needed to know themselves and value themselves. “Let *man* stand in the *public arena*—it is his place, but let him not forget that *woman* fitted him for his station, and let *woman* remember [*sic*] that *this is her honor* and a nobler crown than she could ever receive by standing there herself!”¹⁷

God ordained all this. As a writer for Akron’s *Glad Tidings and Ladies Universalist Magazine* explained, “To me, woman appears to fill, in America, the very station for which she was designed by Heaven.” It was a role that women played regardless of social class. In even the “lowest condition,” women were to be treated with respect and tenderness that their roles as wife and mother deserved.¹⁸

Just as Akron’s social/cultural milieu mirrored nationwide trends, so, too, did the development of its women’s organizations, which started as soon as the town achieved a level of economic and institutional stability in the 1840s. During that decade, Akron recovered from the Panic of 1837 and its subsequent depression, saw more and more affluent families settle in town, and witnessed the growth of Protestant churches that fostered and encouraged women’s clubs and organizations.

Growing out of the reform impulses of the day, the first women’s clubs in Akron were auxiliaries to the men’s temperance organizations. But that structure belied the groups’ evolution. From the start, the women of the auxiliaries burned with a reform fervor and claimed for themselves far more responsibility than the male parent organizations ever anticipated. In addition, reform-minded Akron women soon began striking out on their own, creating organizations to solve the problems that beset the bustling town. Like their sisters back east, Akron women

founded a moral reform organization in the 1840s to rescue women and children from depraved men. In the 1850s, Akron women tried their hand at labor reform by organizing a group to help underpaid seamstresses in the city. This organization, particularly, embraced radical strategies to pressure reluctant tailors to revise the pay structure for seamstresses in the city.

The temperance auxiliaries, the moral reform group, and the labor organization had accomplished the goals of every other volunteer association in the nation—to recruit and motivate a sufficient group of members, to determine their missions, to define their goals, and then to strategize to accomplish those goals.¹⁹ By all accounts, clubwomen in Akron were up to the task and mastered the organizational skills needed for successful club work early.

These women's clubs grew out of reform impulses of the antebellum period. They sought to convert the sinner (the drunkard) and protect the powerless (the seamstress). In Akron in the 1850s, a new kind of women's organization emerged: the "ladies' committee." Growing out of a more conservative sense of civic responsibility as opposed to reform impulses, these committees served as a kind of women's auxiliary to formally organized men's volunteer organizations. Unlike the women's reform groups, these committees lacked a formal structure. Nonetheless, they became important fund-raising allies to the men's groups in the city. In addition, these committees served as training grounds for many women who led the largest women's organization that Akron had ever seen, the Soldiers Aid Society during the Civil War.

Akron women, like women in many towns across the North, formed their Soldiers Aid Society early. That group quickly emerged as the most efficient, best-run women's organization in the city. Burning with a patriotic fervor, the women of the Soldiers Aid Society not only supplied Akron men about to go off to war with tender reminders of their homes but also shipped countless boxes of supplies to the hospitals caring for the sick and wounded. The women of the aid society also looked after the indigent families of soldiers left behind.

After the war, the women of the Soldiers Aid Society went home to rest, but not for long. There was just too much to do. Akron women organized new clubs and organizations to improve the city and themselves. The women worked through many forums. Some of the most active were associated with the churches of the city. From St. Bernard's Catholic Church to Zion Lutheran, from First Congregational to St. Paul's Episcopal, from Temple Israel to AME Zion, Akron women organized missionary and aid societies to do everything from raising funds to help

build churches and tending to the altar to caring for the indigent and ailing in the congregation and the city.

Drawing on many of those church organizations, Akron women organized their own temperance crusade. Hundreds of Akron women took to the streets and prayed outside the saloons of Market and Howard streets to end the liquor trade once and for all. After the crusading fever ebbed, Akron women organized temperance leagues and organizations to carry on the work. Other groups in the city—the Dorcas Society, the Buckley Relief Corps, and the Woman's Benevolent Association—delivered emergency welfare that so many Akron families needed to weather the depressions of the 1870s and 1880s.

The new century brought better economic times to the city, but as the old adage attests, “women’s work is never done.” Akron clubwomen rolled up their sleeves and got busy with a “municipal housekeeping” campaign that was sweeping the country during and after the Progressive Era. Again building on the ideology of domesticity, clubwomen argued that they were merely transferring their housekeeping responsibilities to the community. Women needed to “clean up” the city to protect their family and home. As historian Agnes Hooper Gottlieb observed, municipal housekeeping built on nineteenth-century concepts of the role of women: “municipal housekeeping tradition can trace its roots to the prevailing nineteenth-century ideal that the proper sphere for women was a domestic one.” Women activists of the club movement of the early twentieth century “used protection of the ‘home’ and concerns for its integrity as a motivation to speak publicly about social problems.”²⁰

The Women’s Council of Akron claimed the banner of municipal housekeeping and forced improvements on the city. Bowing to the pressure of its Women’s Council, Akron created a separate juvenile justice system, built a detention home for wayward youth, cleaned up some of the more serious health and sanitation messes in the city, and improved the educational system, among many other accomplishments.

The Women’s Council was only one small part of the story of the women’s clubs and organizations of early twentieth-century Akron.

Some women’s groups that got their start in the nineteenth century redefined themselves in the new century. The Akron Day Nursery became the Mary Day Nursery, then the Mary Day Nursery and Kindergarten, then the Mary Day Nursery and Ward for Crippled Children, then the Mary Day Nursery and Children’s Hospital. In the process, the women organized the city’s first day-care facility for working mothers, first kindergarten, and first hospital for children.

The Tuesday Afternoon Club, which started as a small organization dedicated to improving the musical knowledge and talents of its members, grew into the Tuesday Musical Club that began public concerts in the city. In the early twentieth century, the group, on the brink of financial ruin, redefined itself, created a “people’s chorus,” and expanded its membership beyond Akron’s debutantes and dilettantes, building a strong cultural foundation for the city.

The Akron Missionary Union had a large membership that reached across Protestant denominations but only a vague mission during the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, guided by strong women leaders, the group reorganized, creating the East Akron Community House to help immigrants adjust to Akron life.

Akron’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had more difficulty growing and changing in the twentieth century. Its crusading spirit spent by the end of the nineteenth century, the group remained busy with its temperance education program, its work in the jails and the infirmary, its campaign to keep the Sabbath sacred, its programming for and with workingwomen, and its push for suffrage in the early twentieth century. But the group was finding great competition in the city, both from new organizations and from its own branches that had been established in many city neighborhoods.

The WCTU’s greatest competition came from the vibrant, new Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). With its innovative programming for girls, workingwomen, and immigrants, its high-profile leadership, and its imaginative full-time staff, the YWCA quickly emerged as one of the largest, most important women’s organizations in the city.

The new Woman’s Exchange never captured such a following. It offered a different model of philanthropy to Akron women: a retail store where down-on-their-luck, talented women could sell their finest handiwork to affluent women.

When Akron women organized and joined clubs, they sought out others who shared their values, their economic status, and their appearance. That meant that Akron women from underrepresented groups were not always welcome in these organizations. The YWCA and the WCTU had a measure of diversity. The YWCA did have branches in factories that workingwomen joined; African American girls affiliated with the segregated Girl Reserve clubs in the city. African American women interested in joining the WCTU could affiliate with the organization’s race-specific branch.

There were other alternatives, however. Workingwomen, African Americans, and immigrants could join groups of their own making and under their own direction.

For African Americans, that meant the Daughters of Jerusalem, which combined a benevolent mission and a cultural cause. Workingwomen joined groups at their places of employment for fellowship, fun, camaraderie, and relief. Immigrant women looked to their country-specific organizations housed in the International Institute.

With so many organizations in the city, Akron women could be called from their homes to do “club work” virtually every day of the week. Was it any wonder that editors and ministers began to question what these women were really up to?

Rabbi Isador E. Philo brought that very question to the heart of the women’s club movement in Akron, the powerful Women’s Council. In his address in 1905, he equated the women’s clubs with taverns, because of the temptations they held. “The American club is the snake which beguiles modern Eves to sin against the home. By eating of the tree of knowledge, of good and evil, they realize their nakedness, their eyes are opened to the honeyed temptations that seek to entice them away from their consecrated duties,” he argued. He accused the clubwomen of losing sight of their real responsibilities, venturing out, and corrupting themselves, their families, and their homes with all this club work. Not surprisingly, many clubwomen within the community responded in quite an “unladylike” manner. Mrs. Zelia M. Walters, for example, wrote that club work made women better wives and mothers. “I have known many women with interests outside of their homes, and I have yet to meet one who is not a far better wife and mother than the average woman with a narrower conception of woman’s place in the world.”²¹

The *Beacon Journal* editor thought there might be some truth to the rabbi’s charges. Home was the central place in a woman’s life, observed the editor, and anything that worked against it needed to be controlled, curtailed. If club work was a momentary recreation, fine; but if it was more, it threatened the fundamental institution of American life—the family—and it had to be checked. The response to the rabbi’s comments suggested that club work had become something more, the editor observed:

Let us be charitable, and believe, that the club to Akron women is but a secondary consideration—a place where they can secure an hour’s recreation when tired out with home duties—a place where their mental activities may find an outlet, and where they may learn many things which were denied their mothers and grandmothers, but which the modern woman finds indispensable.

Let us believe that those who have sprung so quickly to the defense of the club woman did it more in that spirit of sympathy for a much maligned sister than because of any belief they might have had that they were being criticized.

We can't believe that the mothers of Akron are clubwomen of the sort Rabbi Philo criticized in his speech.²²

The criticism did not stop Akron's clubwomen. Akron women, working through their clubs and organizations, built churches, hospitals, and community centers. They created enduring cultural institutions. The women carried out campaigns to improve the city's health, morality, and appearance. Akron women—working through their clubs and organizations—improved the city, made it a better place to live. In a word, they humanized the city.



This book is designed to look at Akron women and their clubs and organizations during the first one hundred years of Akron's life—1825 to 1925—a time of tremendous growth in the city and a period of enormous creativity, vitality, and energy among women's clubs. This time period allows a look at the conditions in the city needed to start and nurture women's clubs, a closer examination of the types of women drawn to these groups, and an appraisal of the roles these organizations played within the city.

The book is not designed to provide a comprehensive list of women's organizations that existed in the city during this time period. Two things work against that—the collection practices of libraries and archives in northeast Ohio and the editorial practices of newspapers. Few libraries have retained the organizational records of early women's clubs. Editorial practices in newspapers, especially the general daily newspapers, likewise worked against such a comprehensive listing. In antebellum days, the women's clubs did not keep newspapers informed of their activities; and, even after these organizations mastered media relations and updated the newspapers regularly, the dailies did not always cover the more obscure women's organizations in the city.

Instead, this book looks in depth at key women's organizations in the city. The groups examined in this book reflect the rich diversity of causes that the women's clubs in Akron embraced. They include the better-known reform-based associations and the civic-based “ladies' committees” of the antebellum period and the

soldiers' aid and reform societies of both Akron and Middlebury. The profiled organizations of the post-Civil War period cover the gamut of causes, from providing emergency help to indigent families to the temperance crusade, from the municipal housekeeping movement to serving disadvantaged populations, from establishing great health institutions to fostering the culture of the city. The profiled groups also cover the gamut of organizational structures, from women's auxiliaries of male organizations to clubs affiliated with the churches of the city, from the independent women's organizations to the giant federation. Moreover, the groups profiled represent the diversity of female populations. Native-born, affluent women ran the greatest number of the women's clubs profiled in this book. However, the book provides a look at some of the clubs of African American, immigrant, and workingwomen.

Every organization was a product of strong women with a clear vision of where the group should be going. This book also attempts to explore the human element behind these organizations. The women profiled in this book were key individuals in the development of one or more organizations. If their names sound familiar, it is because many came from well-known families in the city's history—the Perkinses, the Schumachers, the Raymonds, the Seiberlings—or because the women were married to prominent corporate and professional leaders of Akron. Other names will not be as familiar. These women came to leadership merely by force of their will, their vision, their personality, and their energy.

This book attempts to tell the story of Akron women and their clubs and organizations, their weaknesses and their strengths. It also tells the story of how clubwomen grew and changed within this vital midwestern city and, in turn, how they changed the city.