

Circle Histories written April 14, 1998 by Grace Burgett

From the beginning, women have played an important role in Plymouth Church. There were 17 women in the original organization of the church. Within a year that number had grown to 41. First there was the ladie's Social, then the Women's Association and now the Women's Fellowship.

By 1888 there were enough women that it was decided to work in smaller groups. Monthly Bands were organized according to each woman's birthday month. There were problems for some groups wer large and some small. In 1907 the six largers bands absorbed the smaller ones and were called Divisions. A more friendly designation "circles was accepted in 1923. Dr. Bishop had reported that Park Church in Grand Rapids called their groups "circles." The six circles adopted names appropriate to Congregationalism or names honoring specific leader. Many records were lost in the fire (Fire of Feb, 1971) Histories were compiled from fragments of minutes found and from memory. (Some records were found in the rubble in October after the fire in February.)

The First group to organize was the December Band—Sixth Division which became BISHOP CIRCLE. Mrs. Arthur Stebbins was the leader. Her mother-in-law was Mrs. Cortland B. Stebbins the wife of a charter member of Plymouth. Early members were

Mrs. Edwin Bishop

Mrs. Charles Halstead

Mrs. Frank Thoman

Mrs. Fred Jenison

More recent members include:

Nell Freeland

Alice Campbell

Jean Chamberlain

Myra Lu Bishop

The march Band (3<sup>rd</sup> division) became PLYMOUTH CIRCLE. A history was written by Frances Winston. Earlier records had been written by Bess Geagley and Ruth Richard. This

group included many doctor's wives, a number of sisters: Lydia Pierce, Caroline Weber, Leila Earla----Mary & Kathryn LaSelle.

Mothers and daughters:

Della Hacker – Barbara Baldwin

Mrs. Green – Clarissa Rehfuss

Mrs. Baird- Betty Myers

Other members included Marcia Potter and Effie Paynter.

EMILY PORTER CIRCLE was formed from the Feb. Band – 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

The history was written by Lucille Puffer.

Emily Nash came to Lansing before the Civil War. She taught at the Union School (later called the Townsend Street School) and married E.H. Porter in 1967. Emily was one of the original founders of Plymouth Church. She was a price leader of the Ladie's Social.

The Porter house was built in the woods behind the Capitol on the site where the Christian Science church was later built. (Walnut & Allegan)

Angie Gleason related that she came to Lansing as a bride in 1897. Mrs. Porter was one of her first callers inviting her to the Ladie's Social. Mrs. Porter was described as an unforgettable character. She was not only a tireless worker in the church but also in the community. A celebration of her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday recognized her work with

The library fund 1870

Woman's Club 1874

Monument Association (honoring Civil War heroes)

Eastern Star

Women's Relief Corps

Members of the circle included:

Pearl Price

Mildred Reason

Ruth Schraft

Madeline Sessions

Bea Williams

LAURA MILES PRATT CIRCLE was formed by the Oct. Band/ 4<sup>th</sup> Division. This name was proposed by Mrs. Larabee who remembered Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Larabee was an Osband (from whose farm came stone for the church foundation.) Mrs. Larabee was the mother of Louise Johnson.

Margueritte Spragg wrote a history from records found in the rubble after the fire. (The fire was in Feb; records were uncovered in October 1971)

Mrs. Pratt came to Lansing before the Civil War and died in 1899. She was described as a large, noble looking woman, an untiring worker, and a good leader. She was president of the Ladies's social several times. The Social met in the chapel, but when it was cold they moved down the street to Mrs. Pratt's house. This group included several women who received special recognition. Anna Marsh became dean of women at Olivet College. Mrs. D.B. Ainger was the first woman member of Plymouth's trustees and served as treasurer of the church.

The Nov. Band/ 5<sup>th</sup> Division became PRISCILLA CIRCLE. Helen Rafferty reported on this group which disbanded in 1970. She said "They served the church, community, nation, and world as best they could with the work of their hands, by opening their pocketbooks, and with prayers of their hearts."

Early members were: Lucy Bast, Carrie Hoyt, Ethel Ralya, and Mrs. D.H. Moore (Pat Shassberger's mother.)

PILGRIM CIRCLE was formed by the Jan. Band/ 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Years later it became KATE T. COOLEY CIRCLE. Eleanor Pierce was a member. I have been unable to find information.

LEYDEN CLUB was organized in 1933, the first new group in ten years. This was a group of business and professional women who couldn't participate in day-time meetings. Leyden Club started with 32 members. When they disbanded in 1996, Emma Jane Wright wrote a history. Early leaders were:

Grace Cooper

Gail Curtis

Lucy Bast

Ruth Bishop

Mary & Katherine LaSelle

Emma Jane concludes her history with LEYDEN LADIE's LORE

Live a little

Give a little

Learn a little, too

Work a little

Play a little

Save a little, do

Share a little

Cheer a little

Love a little, sure

Tithe a little, and

Pray a little – more

ROSE STANDISH CIRCLE was organized in 1946 as a group of young business women with evening meetings. Joyce Earl wrote a history of the circle on the occasion of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Dr. Bartlett was minister at that time. He was an authority on Congregational history. Perhaps he suggested the name.

Rose Standish was on the Mayflower passengers list. She was the first wife of Miles Standish. She was frail and did not survive long.

MARY BREWSTER CIRCLE was organized in 1946. The event was announced as “the birth of a new circle.” It was christened at the June Fellowship meeting when Florence Hector was president. A church committee including Ruth Barnett and Lenna Keith had compiled a list of Plymouth women not members of a circle. From this group the new circle was formed.

The name of Mary Brewster, a prominent Pilgrim woman, was proposed by Lenna Keith. Mary Brewster was the wife of William Brewster, an elder with the early Scrooby group. Mary arrived on the Mayflower in November 1620. I found it interesting the names of their five children: Johnathon, Patience, Fear, Wrestling and Love.

We remember many names:

Annette Calomeni, who always hosted the Christmas tea

Thelma Taylor

Lenna Keith

Helen Berger

Thela Siler

Gladys Bradford

Majel Dean

MAYFLOWER CIRCLE was organized in 1937. Mrs. Gordon Speer, wife of the Junior Minister, thought there should be a circle for the young mothers of the church. Seventeen women met and organized the circle. That day they elected officers, chose the name MAYFLOWER, and decided to meet at the church and hire a baby sitter.

Some of their leaders were:

Pauline Beekman

Dorothy Cruthis

Louise Johnson

Edith Craig

Idabelle Borgman

Lucile Johnson

Through the years, the circles have given major support to the church both financially and through special projects. Our benevolences went both locally and world-wide.

Christmas boxes went to the needy

The Red Cross was served during WW1

USO service in WW!!

Warm clothing and children's supplies sent to Europe

Boxes were sent during the Vietnam war

Help was given to Michigan migrants and Indians

Today they support many social service agencies

Money-making projects have included about everything. Rummage sales started when it got beyond the stage when people wore out their clothing. All manner of items were made and sold. Serving food progressed from the early teas to large dinners. A major project that stands out in our history was the food service at the Central Michigan fair held on the site of the present Oldsmobile plant. Plymouth women rented a shanty on the fair grounds and became famous for their oyster dinners. It is amazing to read that the women took turns staying overnight so they would be there early to serve breakfast for the men who had brought livestock to the fair. Apparently the women slept on table tops.

Plymouth women have been dedicated, tireless workers for the church. We have a great heritage.

Grace Burgett