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Article Summary: Many of Lincoln's early settlers had been educated in eastern colleges. They created cultural organizations and made plans for churches and a university. (This article is based in part on the author's personal records of life in Lincoln 1888-1946.)

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# The Social Life of Pioneer Lincoln<sup>1</sup>

ANNIE L. MILLER

The pioneer men and women of Lincoln, like those of other western cities, brought with them the tastes and education of an eastern environment. Many of those who were to have a large part in the development of the new city and state were college-bred, talented young men who, at the close of the Civil War, in looking for a place to start their careers, obeyed the dictum, "Go west, young man, go west." Such men were C. H. Gere, G. M. Lambertson, R. E. Moore, T. M. Marquette, C. O. Whedon, A. I. Sawyer, S. B. Pound, and numerous others.

It is important to remember, too, that plans for a university were adopted by the state legislature at about the time of selecting a site for the capitol. Also, that a desire for morality was evinced when laying out the town through setting aside three city lots for each of the more prominent church organizations. Holy Trinity Episcopal, the First Baptist, and St. Paul Methodist Episcopal are the only churches now using the original sites.

The first club in Lincoln was organized in 1868. In that year a young Episcopal clergyman, the Reverend W. B. Bolmer, just from the theological seminary and filled with the energy of youth and the fervor of his recent vows of consecration, came to Lincoln. He found, besides those amongst whom he was to labor, a goodly number of cultivated people of other beliefs, accustomed to the pleasures of intellectual intercourse in their eastern homes, who gladly welcomed him to their companionship.

No Episcopal church existed at that time, but occasional services were held in Representative Hall at the state capitol. The

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<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Sororis Club in Lincoln, March 20, 1945. It is based on the following sources: records of Mrs. J. L. McConnell, who came to Lincoln with her husband in 1868; programs kept by the Hohmann family, owners of the city's first music store; and the author's own records, which cover the period from 1888.

eloquent young missionary became the center around whom gravitated a coterie of congenial friends, who became known to the members as "Our Literary Club." The meetings were held in the evening, and were usually of a social as well as literary nature. The first subject taken up was American literature and began with the study of Washington Irving and his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*. One object of the club was the welcoming of strangers who came to make Lincoln their home, and especially homeless and friendless young men who were frequently invited to be guests of the club. The members also took an active interest in everything that pertained to the welfare of the town and enthusiastically assisted in its upbuilding by giving both time and money. Mrs. J. L. McConnell, wife of one of the earliest dry goods merchants in the tiny prairie town, told me many years ago, in 1897, that she had never forgotten the interest with which all the club members watched the bill for the establishment of the university and the joy with which the granting of the charter was hailed on the 15th of February, 1869. The club, though small, exerted a strong influence on the public sentiment of the day. An instance was the opening of the university.

On completion of the first building, in 1870, the dancing element wished to celebrate the occasion by a ball in the chapel, a large assembly room on the second floor of University Hall (which disappeared into class rooms long before the building was denuded of its upper stories). The literary club opposed this quietly though strenuously. The dance was abandoned, the opening of the university being marked instead by appropriate literary exercises. When the first chancellor and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Benton, arrived, from none did they receive a more earnest and cordial welcome than from this same little circle. The Bentons were the center of the social life of Lincoln during their stay and by many the nobility of character of Mrs. Benton was considered an inspiration.

The leader of the club, Mr. Bolmer, added to his high purpose and aims a love of athletic pursuits. He delighted in long walks and found the stage coach too slow. There were no railroads at that time. A story was told of his starting on foot for Nebraska City to conduct a church service, and reaching there in

the evening of the same day two hours before the coach. Mr. Bolmer's stay in Lincoln was short and on his removal the club changed its form. The original members retained their interest in literary pursuits so long as they remained in the city. Social life was kaleidoscopic in those days.

Traces of two other clubs, between the years 1874 and 1878, remain. One of these was remarkable for the lack of vanity displayed by its members who chose for a name the "Homely Fólks" club. Early in the autumn of 1875, several young people, most of whom were newcomers to Lincoln and former active members of clubs and society in eastern homes, met to organize a reading circle for mutual culture and improvement. The first meeting, if the memory of a charter member—no longer living—served aright, was at the home of Mrs. Florence M. Irwin on F street, between Ninth and Tenth, and a plan was outlined for the winter. The personnel of the club consisted of: Misses Madge Hitchcock, Lizzie, Erma and Ada Irwin, Jennie McLouth, Kate Hatch, Helen Candee, Hattie Hurd, Emma Powell, Mrs. Parks, Professor Gilbert Bailey of the state university, and brother, Wayland Bailey, T. H. McGahey, John Dodds, C. M. Parker, and G. M. Lambertson.

The scope of the club was far reaching. The members began with Shakespeare, then discussed Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, and finished the winter by reading Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. In addition half an hour was set apart at each fortnightly meeting for miscellaneous topics, music readings, or papers on any subject suggested by the leader for the meeting. There was no constitution, no president or other officers. All questions were settled in a committee of the whole. The selection of a name promised at one time to be difficult. "Shakespearean," "Clionian," "Cosmopolitan," and several other high-sounding titles were suggested by a competent committee. During the discussion one of the gentlemen remarked that a certain young lady (outside the club) had said, "It was an awful lot of young folks," and he moved that it be called "The Homely Folks" club. G. M. Lambertson without waiting for a second, put the motion. It was carried unanimously and the name "stuck".

Many pleasant memories were said to cluster around those meetings, which were continued into the following year when

the Centennial of 1876 attracted some away, a few moved to other homes, and several entered the great company of young married people with other cares. The Homely Folks club languished and died, to be resurrected in later clubs of the city.

A glee club of thirty members was also an important element in the social life of Lincoln at this period. Organized about 1876 with Professor W. W. Jones, superintendent of schools, as leader, meetings were held every Monday evening, in the old Congregational church. On the Fourth of July, it was customary for the club to sing in a public pavilion. Among the members still living in Lincoln when part of this article was published in 1906, were Captain and Mrs. Baird, Mollie Baird (later Mrs. A. S. Raymond), Miss Hettie Keefer, Dr. S. H. King, Mrs. Walter J. Lamb, and Mrs. S. B. Hohmann. Mrs. Thomas Sewell and Mrs. Kate Cheney who, by 1906, had removed to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were both prominently identified with the glee club.

Within the next few years, clubs multiplied more rapidly. On March 5, 1879, a Shakespeare club came into existence. The Ingleside was regularly organized with a name on February 4, 1880. The Shakespeare disbanded in 1886, but during its seven years of activity exerted a strong influence both socially and intellectually. Much was done for the amusement of the younger generation. Evening entertainments with plays were often given with the assistance of gentlemen. The club was dissolved because no subject could be found to replace the original one in the hearts of the members, and seven years had exhausted the club possibilities of Shakespeare. The Ingleside continued to be a strong organization for many years but was unfortunate in losing many members who were not replaced, and the club eventually disbanded.

To the list of clubs which passed out of existence, should be added Rose Cottage Circle, which took its name from the home of Miss Phoebe Elliott, where meetings were always held on invitation of Miss Elliott. Rose Cottage in those days was on Fourteenth street near M, the home of S. C. Elliott adjoining on the corner of M. It was Stella Elliott, daughter of the latter, who married Chancellor Canfield's son. Miss Elliott, through her

circle, to a remarkable degree assisted in breaking down narrow social barriers in Lincoln. The circle was studying Goethe's "Faust," when I entered it about 1889. In the group of forty or fifty people assembled were Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Unitarians and those of no special belief. Miss Elliott encouraged religious discussion and called upon those of differing views to contribute. She was the hostess and always presided informally. The importance of Rose Cottage was the fact that it led to the formation of the Lincoln Woman's Club. Miss Elliott's small home could not accommodate all the people desirous of entering the circle and eventually she gave up her private group in order to take the presidency of an all-inclusive club, to which any Lincoln woman could belong. Mrs. J. H. Canfield, Mrs. H. H. Wilson and Miss Elliott were the founders and issued the call for the organization of the Lincoln Woman's Club in November, 1894.

The right of the Lotos club to be considered the oldest club in Lincoln to have a continuous existence is unquestioned. It was organized in November of 1880 with a membership of sixteen. It was known first as the Avon club, but a few years later when the study of Shakespeare was exchanged for history, the club name seemed unsuitable and the ladies became known as the "History" circle. The present name, "Lotos" was adopted when a four-year course in the history, literature, art and architecture of Egypt was undertaken. Of the original sixteen members only three remained in the city and still connected with the club, as far back as 1906. These were Mrs. L. C. Richards, Mrs. C. H. Gere and Miss Sarah Harris. Mrs. R. O. Phillips, also a charter member, was travelling in the Orient with Captain Phillips at that date. Mariel and Frances Gere are now the only link with the original group.

The Century Club was organized in 1886, thus outdating Sorosis by one year. In the early years, each season was devoted by Century to a careful study of one European country. The year of my membership the subject was England. Three women, including myself, who had recently spent a summer in Great Britain, in the early 1900s, had been invited to membership. I dropped the membership because of conflict with university classes.

Sorosis came next, in 1889, organized by Mrs. A. J. Sawyer and Mrs. William Jennings Bryan, on the same night that the husbands met at the Sawyer home to found the Round Table. That was on November 11, 1889. In the fall of 1898, when I joined, Mrs. T. C. Munger was president and Mrs. W. E. Hardy, secretary-treasurer. Among the leaders of programs that season were: Mrs. J. E. Miller on "Political Canada;" Mrs. McGahey on "Australia;" Mrs. Sawyer on "The Club Movement;" and Mrs. Snell on "The Proposed Banking Reform." Sorosis was fortunate for years in having a group of very prominent men, husbands of members, to give brilliancy to the annual banquets. Particularly notable were the ones when the men produced the Bardwell-Pickwick scene with J. E. Miller as the widow Bardwell, and Rev. Mr. Bulock as Pickwick and Judge Frost, Judge Tibbets and N. Z. Snell in the cast on the widow's side; with Will Hardy her sustaining friend, and William Jennings Bryan as her chief counsel. Judge Munger and Mr. Jones were the villain's partners. The other notable event was the operatic rendition of "Hamlet" with Will Owen Jones as Hamlet and Dean LeRossignol as Ghost and all the club members who could murmur a tune in the choruses. Professor Dann wrote the music.

Incidentally I was told by Sarah Harris, who presented my name for membership that the grandest row took place over the election. Miss Harris was chairman of the nominating committee and instead of bringing up the names in order of presentation, threw the seven candidates open for a free for all to the members. Balloting went on all afternoon, and Mrs. Lincoln Frost and I were in.

Many of the Sorosis men as well as other pioneer Lincolnites knew their Shakespeare and could use it when applicable. I recall walking down O street on an assignment from the *State Journal*, on a hot June day, to inquire how the men of the city had enjoyed wearing dress suits to the fashionable weddings of the previous week, when two or more such events had crowded churches to the suffocation point. Horace Greeley had never admonished the western bound young man to carry with him a dress suit, but before 1900 they had arrived. In fact Frank Zehrunge, as a boy, brought one at a still earlier period. The first

man I encountered, a busy attorney, replied to my query in the words of Polonius to his son:

“Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy;  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man.”

However, the next man I approached, the head of a big business, used simpler language, declaring he had felt “like a mule in buggy harness.” The latter man is still living.

The Hall in the Grove might dispute the priority of Sorosis, but all the following are of more recent origin: Athenea, P.E.O. Chapters, Fortnightly, Tuesday Review, W.R.P.C., W.T.M., local chapters of D.A.R., The Book Review, and the long list of organizations of the succeeding years.

The Thursday Morning Lecture Circle was informally organized in the fall of 1904 by Mrs. I. M. Raymond and Mrs. John B. Wright, who personally extended an invitation to a group of fifty to seventy-five friends—those supposed to be interested in lectures on cultural topics—to meet twice monthly in the large drawing room of Mrs. Raymond’s house at the corner of 16th and R streets, to listen to Mrs. Angie Newman tell of her travel experiences, and thoughts on other topics. Mrs. Newman at the time had recently returned from a visit to Honolulu and had a large collection of native products and curios with which to illustrate her lecture. All membership fees went to the speaker. Mrs. Newman was a natural orator with a commanding voice. She was a sister of Senator Thurston, of Omaha, remembered by oldtimers from a poem he wrote on his marriage late in life, “Rose, O Rose, I said to the rose”, lines from which were continually used in political campaigns. After a couple of years, Mrs. Newman had exhausted her subjects, and went abroad for fresh topics, but the club went on. Mrs. Newman took with her to Europe her daughter Fanny and the latter’s intimate friend, Gertrude Marquette. While abroad both girls married Englishmen: Fanny, W. O. Thomas who is still living in the former Newman home on L Street, and Gertrude, Major Stoney, an officer in the British Army who lost his life in Africa. Later Gertrude Marquette married Mr. McAfee, and still makes her home in Lincoln.



Few club women know or remember that Lincoln had a city federation of clubs organized in 1894, about the same time as the general federation and the state federation of women's clubs. Eighteen Lincoln clubs were included in its membership, more than half of the number no longer in existence. I unearthed among a pile of club year books a little leaflet in which are set forth the constitution, purpose, officers and committees. Mrs. A. W. Field was the first (and only) president; Mrs. J. H. Canfield, chairman of the reception committee, and Mrs. W. J. Bryan of the press. This city federation was never dissolved, but left dormant on much the same basis as the city improvement society, to be called together whenever need arose. The president of the Woman's Club was always to be the presiding officer, because of the relative strength of her organization.

The Lincoln City Improvement Society was organized in January, 1897, at a meeting of the board of directors of the city federation, as the outgrowth of study undertaken by the civics department of the Woman's Club. Mrs. W. G. Langworthy Taylor, who had recently returned from study at Oxford, England, was leader. Mrs. Taylor was elected president; Mrs. J. L. McConnell, vice president; and Mrs. H. H. Wheeler, second vice president. The society had the cooperation of the city council in war against weeds in vacant lots, the cleaning up of alleys, and beautification of school grounds. The mayor set aside two days for the cleaning of streets. Prizes were given for the best kept lawns. One of the most important projects was the purchase of an ambulance for the city in 1901. Previously there had been no vehicle but a police wagon in which to remove a patient from a train to hospital. A gift of \$50 was also given in 1901 toward the McKinley Memorial chimes. After the resignation of Mrs. Taylor, in 1903, the society gradually languished.

Lincoln people were interested in music, drama, lectures and the pictorial arts from early days. The present Nebraska Art Association was the offspring of the Hayden Art club organized by Sarah Wool Moore in May, 1888. Miss Moore was then in charge of art work at the University of Nebraska, and she led an enthusiastic group of art lovers. The first exhibit was in 1889, Piloty's "Wise and Foolish Virgins," a huge painting

shown in the court room of the Federal Building; the next, Munkascy's "The Last Days of Mozart," in the Senate Chamber of the state capitol. Later exhibits were in Grant Memorial Hall on the university campus. By 1900 interest had increased and the local club was superseded by a state organization. Miss Moore was a wonderful woman, who with no salary and financial backing, inspired the founding of an art department at the university as well as the present Nebraska Art Association.

A musical genius came to Lincoln in 1886, Mrs. Carrie Belle Raymond, as organist for the First Congregational church. For 41 years Mrs. Raymond devoted almost every waking moment to the musical development of the people of Lincoln. Her vast musical knowledge and ability was freely offered to all great undertakings. In fact she inspired them. Deeply religious, she loved best to present great oratorios and to bring orchestras for such works as Beethoven symphonies. She herself as organist with string quartet also presented the symphonies. Mrs. Raymond developed music within the Congregational Church so that its quartet of untrained singers lent great dignity to the services, and the church chorus became the nucleus for an oratorio society.

There had been an earlier attempt to present an oratorio by Dr. Saxby, organist of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, when Jennie Dutton of New York was among the soloists for the presentation of "The Messiah."

The earlier works presented by Mrs. Raymond were at the First Congregational Church at 13th and L, but Mrs. Raymond's influence and inspiration soon extended far beyond the church she loved, to include almost every one with any musical feeling or voice. By 1887, the year after her arrival, a chorus of prominent citizens gathered together by Mrs. Raymond made its first appearance in Gaul's "Holy City." A baritone from Duluth, Minnesota, was engaged to come to Lincoln to direct and sing some solos. Mrs. Raymond was the organist and Edith Doolittle, pianist. The personnel of the chorus is interesting. Minnie Latta, now Mrs. C. F. Ladd, is the only member still living. Mrs. I. F. Manatt, wife of the chancellor, was among the sopranos, and S. H. Burnham, later president of the First National Bank, prominent among tenors. Mr. Burnham was also tenor for the church choir. The first of the May festivals, under Mrs. Ray-

mond, which won the financial backing of a group of prominent business men and came to be regarded as a most important feature of Lincoln life, was held in the spring of 1888. Handel's "Judas Maccabacus" was sung.

For the May festival of 1889 there was an orchestra under the direction of August Hagenow. The chorus had been enlarged by the addition of many young girls. The festival was held at the Funke opera house, 12th and O, and lasted three nights, May 14, 15 and 16. The principal soloists came from the east. The dates are worth remembering for some of the worst thunder storms that have come to this locality took place on oratorio nights. It was during Elijah's prayers for rain the third night that the heavens opened and nearly drowned people who had any reason for being out.

The high mark of the oratorio society was reached in 1892 when New York's idolized tenor, Italo Campanini, with three other distinguished singers, came to assist for three evenings in the sixth May festival. Cowen's "Sleeping Beauty" was given the first night; a miscellaneous concert by the visiting artists, assisted by the chorus of girls the second night; and the "Messiah" on the third night. Mrs. Raymond conducted; her sister, Miss Stella Rice, was organist; and Mrs. Will Owen Jones was the pianist. Mrs. Jones had the difficult task of transposing at sight the accompaniments to Campanini's song to other keys than those on the printed manuscripts.

In 1894 Mrs. Raymond went to the university as musical director. She also was director of a chorus at Crete for the summer chautauqua, and was unable to carry so much of the burden of the oratorio society. From time to time, however, a portion of the old oratorio society was brought together with other singers to present works for the Matinee Musicale, organized in 1894. The chorus was used for the opera "Aida," and in succeeding years for "Il Trovatore," "Carmen," "Cavallieria Rusticana," "Faust," "Sampson and Delilah," "Hansel and Gretel." All were presented for the Matinee Musicale.

Mrs. Raymond directed for the Matinee Musicale the concerted works presented at its recitals and concerts, during most of the thirty seven years of its promotion of musical culture in Lincoln. The library and foundation fund of the Matinee Musi-

cale were presented to the university when the club disbanded in 1931.

The Kiwan's club medal was awarded to Mrs. Raymond on December 14, 1923, for her thirty years of willing musical service to the city. Mrs. Raymond died October 3, 1927. The carillon at First Plymouth Congregational Church was erected to her memory by music lovers of Lincoln and the State.

I can only touch lightly on the history of drama in early Lincoln. According to Ed A. Church, early theatre manager, the first play was presented in 1871 in Representative Hall of the first capitol building, when the Charles Plunkett company appeared in "Alone in London". Also, Sol Smith Russell and the Berger family bell ringers were heard there.

The next plays were produced in the Walsh and Putnam building on O street under Mr. Church's management. Because of large attendance at these plays, Mr. Hallo decided to build an opera house at the corner of Twelfth and O, where the Funke later stood, the latter being demolished for the present Kresge building. It was first called the Academy of Music, and later the Hallo Opera House. It was opened June 18, 1873 with a concert by Mrs. Anna Bishop. Among the famous actors who appeared at the Hallo were: Barrett, Booth, Keene, McCullough, Mary Anderson, Julia Davenport, and Clara Morris.

In 1874 the Hallo was destroyed by fire while the "Two Orphans" was being played. It was rebuilt by Mr. Hallo and opened in 1876 with "Richard the Third" by the Kendall Company. The theatre was soon sold to Mr. Funke who renamed it the Centennial. Here Clara Louise Kellogg gave a fine concert on December 3, 1881.

In 1885, the Centennial was demolished and rebuilt by Mr. Funke, becoming known as the Funke Opera House. Among the great orators heard at the Funke were Beecher and Talmage. Maggie Mitchell and Emma Abbott also appeared there.

On November 23, 1891, the formal opening of the Lansing took place at the corner of thirteenth and P. Built by J. F. Lansing and H. Oliver at a cost of \$150,000; it was later named the Oliver, then the Liberty, and now the Varsity.