



HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

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November Meeting . . .

Our November meeting will feature a presentation by Cynthia Bittinger on Grace Coolidge. In 1930 Grace Coolidge was given an honorary degree by the UVM. At this time she was described as the "embodiment of Vermont womanhood." Ms. Bittinger will describe Grace Coolidge's experiences and compare these with those of the average Vermont woman in the early twentieth century. Cynthia Bittinger received her B.A. from Wheaton College and her M.A. from Columbia University. She is Executive Director of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation in Plymouth, Vt. She also has taught Vermont History and Women in U.S. History at the Community College of Vermont for the past five years.



The Meeting will be
Wednesday, November 13, 7:00 PM
at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ
Route 14, Hartford Village

Report

This report of a special meeting at the Garipay House is from August, 1996.

There were about thirty folks present Wednesday evening August 14 to discuss the Garipy House. Jeanette Gould gave a short presentation covering the background, what has been done to date, and some issues the Board of Directors has discussed. After tours of the house and lemonade & cookies, small groups were formed to discuss relevant questions. A re-gathering of the groups at the end revealed the following:

- Most would like to see us keep and use the House. Some expressed concerns/conditions relating to affordability and a two year review.
- Having displays was unanimous, with limited regular hours staffed by various volunteers. Special openings by appointment were also favored for large groups such as school classes.
- Several topics for displays were suggested, with agreement that artifacts should be an important part of each exhibit. Other suggestions were also forthcoming, but as yet, no contact persons for this work were identified.

In all, this was a very successful meeting and the Board thanks all who participated.

Pat Stark, *Archivist*

Notice

There is a work day scheduled at the Garipay House Sunday, November 17, from 2:00-4:00 PM. If you have any questions call Pat Stark at 295-9353.

A Fond Farewell

Two and a half years ago I began putting together the *Hartford Historical Society Newsletter*. With this issue, my stint as Editor of the *Newsletter* ends.

It has been a wonderful experience researching and writing about Hartford's past and working with members of the Society in putting out this publication. I thank the Board of the Society for giving me a great measure of latitude in allowing my implementation of what I thought was important for a historical society newsletter.

I would like to specifically thank Society Archivist, Pat Stark; Society Curator, Priscilla Gadzinski; Society Treasurer, Margaret McDerment; and Mary Nadeau for their cheerful input in helping me get the job done...on time.

Special thanks are due Society member, John Lutz. Without John, our Society simply would not have a newsletter. He has been responsible for the layout and final form of each issue and has proved to be an editor's editor. I have received great personal satisfaction from putting together the *Hartford Historical Society Newsletter*. I will always be thankful for the opportunity to have been able to do so.

Cameron Clifford, *Editor*

The Centerville Social Club

1950-1980

by

Cameron Clifford

Hartford's "Centerville Social Club" was one of many clubs formed in the second quarter of the twentieth century as a vehicle for housewives to get together and learn new ideas about home economics. Variousy called social clubs, home economic clubs, and most popularly, home demonstration clubs, these organizations played an important role in women's lives. Most popular in rural areas, these clubs provided farm women useful ideas with a social outlet. However, as time went on and the farm population declined, many home demonstration clubs disbanded because of lack of interest and commitment. Begun sometime before 1953, the Centerville Social Club provided information and a social outlet for the women of Hartford's Jericho District until 1980.

The Centerville Social Club was one of many such clubs formed by women across the nation in the first half of the twentieth century. Previous to this period, farmwives received much of the information they used in maintaining their households from their mothers and other womenfolk. While practical household advice was not new, the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of university and college assistance in providing up-to-date information on aspects of household economy and nutrition. It was through the sponsorship of State Universities and Colleges in tandem with the various county agents which provided the structure for these clubs to form, receive training, and support. Thus, county "Home Demonstration Agents" provided college level information to local women's clubs on various topics of home interest. It was a good program and it worked well while the women who made up the membership were mostly rural farmwives.¹

During the early years of the Centerville Social Club, most of the members were farmwives. Alberta (Lyman) Parker, and Glenna, Winona, Lois, and Ruth Lyman were all club members. Their families all farmed in Hartford's Jericho District. Alberta Parker and her husband farmed the place her parents had farmed at the intersection of Jericho Street and Jericho Road. Glenna Lyman's husband Avison was a brother of Alberta Parker's father and both husbands were also brother to P. Dewey Lyman who operated a large dairy farm overlooking the White River Valley. "Dewey's" wife, Lois was also active in club activities and had encouraged her daughter-in-laws Winona and Ruth to join. Winona and Ruth's husbands both worked on the family farm with their father.²

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Along with the Lymans, there were Gertrude and Ermine Nott; mother-in-law and daughter-in-law respectively whose husbands had and did actively farm in the Jericho District. Julia Savage and her nephew's wife Laura both attended club meetings. Julia was a daughter and aunt of farmers while Laura's husband and son both were dairy farmers at the foot of Jericho Hill.

Glenna Lyman's sister-in-law, Hazel Miller and Hazel's neighbors Ruth Adams, Bea Malone, and Jean Cate also were active in the Centerville Social Club in the early 1950's. Hazel Miller and her husband farmed on the place his father had purchased on top of Jericho's "Savage Hill" earlier in the century. Ruth Adams' husband Larry had held farm jobs including working for the Dewey Lyman as a farm hand. Bea Malone and Jean Cate were the only members not actively farming for a living, but both lived in the neighborhood. Jean's husband taught at Hartford High School and Bea Malone's husband worked for a machine shop in Windsor while living on the old farm on the south side of Jericho Hill. While a few members of the Centerville Social Club were not "farmwives", most were.³



The club meetings addressed household issues important to these farm women during the 1950's. Meetings were generally held during the day and included a "business" part where managerial aspects of the club were discussed and decided on. However, the main part of the meeting was the "demonstration" where a new idea or procedure in promoting household efficiency or nutrition was presented. The presentation of these demonstrations were generally given by the club members themselves. Club members devoted a day or two a year to attend a county wide meeting where demonstrations were given and taught to representatives of the county's clubs. These representatives then went back to their own club a number of women attended different county train-

ing meetings so each would learn something new to bring back to their own club. In this way, practical, interesting ideas on home economics were disseminated to the clubs and farmwives throughout the land.⁴

Topics learned by various Centerville Social Club members and presented at the club's meetings included such basics as "Household Fabrics", "Soups that Satisfy", "The Family Plans Its Clothes", and "Modern Care for Floor Coverings." Along with these meetings came ones with lighter themes which tended to round out a season's meetings with "Decorating on a Shoestring", "Main Course Salad", and "Easy and Effective Trimmings" Meetings were informative and fun.⁵

The social aspect of the Centerville Social Club for the farmwives of the region was probably just as important to the women as the subject matter presented. Meetings were mostly held in club members homes. Minutes of the meetings tend to highlight the "very enjoyable" times the women had. For the July meeting in 1953 Ermine Nott had invited the club members to meet at her home to conduct their meeting. After the formal meeting, Mrs. Nott served as "hostess" and "entertained" the women with refreshments in a comfortable setting. At one all day meeting, Glenna Lyman served as hostess. In between the morning and afternoon parts of the meeting she served "a very enjoyable lunch." Along with food there was plenty of conversation on the meeting topic as well as community and family news which all proved to be "interesting."⁶

The Centerville Social Club continued through the 1950's and 1960's. The advent of television and a wider distribution of magazines throughout the region provided alternative sources of information to farmwives in the Jericho neighborhood, but the club remained strong. In part this had to do with the fact that the club was successful in integrating new women into its membership over the years. New farmwives replaced older one and those who stopped attending club meetings. By 1967 Hazel Miller, Gertrude Nott, and Julia Savage had stopped attending club meetings and events. All of the Lyman women with the exception of Glenna Lyman had also stopped attending. Even when such a depletion of the ranks occurred as did in the 1960's the club attracted new members.⁷ Whereas the club had previously been dominated by the presence of the Lyman family, the 1960's saw the daughters of Pearl Grey and their kin expand the new membership slots within the club.

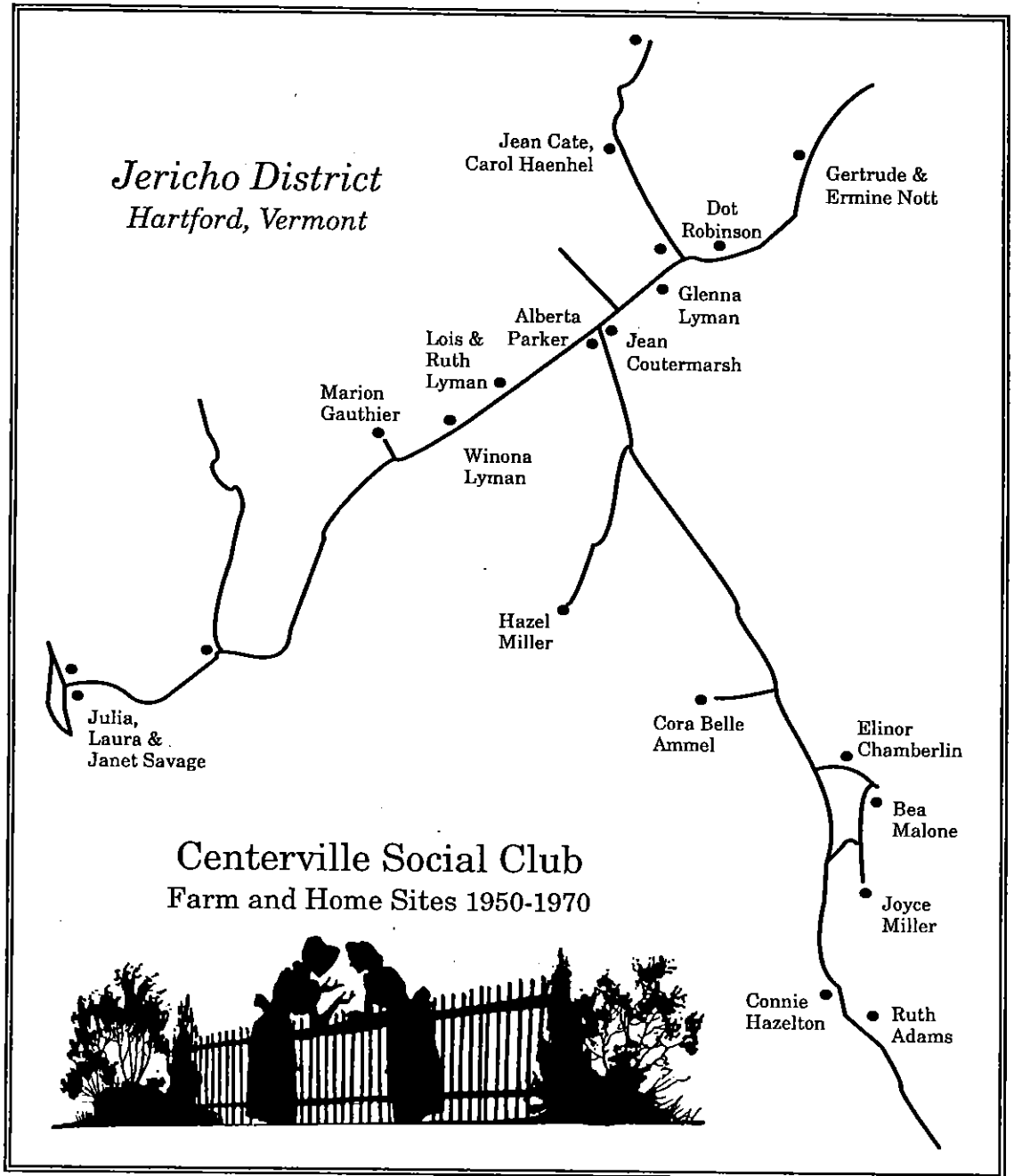
The social aspect of the Centerville Social Club was probably just as important to the women as the subject matter presented.

Pearl Grey was from Etna, N. H., but moved to the Jericho district along with all of her three daughters. The first daughter to come to the district was Janet, who married Albert Savage from the bottom of Jericho Hill. After Janet, twin Joyce came. Joyce and husband Raymond Miller, lived on a farm owned by Raymond's father and mother Chester and Hazel Miller. The third Grey girl to make her way to Jericho and the Centerville Social Club was Jean. Jean and husband Walter Coutermarsh settled down to farm on the old Wallace place just across the street from the Lyman/Parker farm. With all of her daughters living within the Jericho district, Pearl Grey herself moved to a small cape formerly occupied by farm hands just a little way from daughter Jean.⁸

The Grey girls were not the only new farmwomen to join the Centerville Social Club. During the same period Marion Gauthier and Dot Robinson became active members in the

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Centerville Social Club • Where They Lived



group. Marion and her husband farmed just down the road from the Dewey Lyman farm, while Dot Robinson's family farmed the place just below Merton and Ermine Nott's.

Along with the new farmwives who joined the club in the 1960's came Jean Holzinger and Carol Haenhel who were wives, but totally unassociated with a farming lifestyle. These two women were the first women whose families did not farm for a living in the district. However, they did represent the beginnings of a rural lifestyle making its way through the neighborhood which was disconnected from agriculture for a livelihood. This new livelihood was only just making its way into the lives of the Centerville Social Club's members however. Agriculture still dictated the lives and spelled out the needs of most of the women who belonged to the club.⁹

Whereas the Centerville Social Club was strongly buttressed by an agricultural lifestyle in the years before the late 1960's, from then on the club's agricultural base of support steadily eroded. Agricultural decline was nothing new, but within the Jericho district the years between the mid-1960's and early 1970's witnessed a huge reduction in the number of families actively farming in the neighborhood.

The Lymans had stopped farming by 1965; the sons of Dewey Lyman pursued other work. Alberta Parker lost her father, husband, and son within the span of a single year, ending the familiar lifestyle she had known.

The early death of Joe Robinson created stress for his family in trying to continue the farm. Robinson's son George tried to carry on the farm with his mother, but eventually they decided to stop and sell the place. Along with the Robinsons selling out came Jean Coutermarsh and Janet Savage's families.

In 1970, both families sold their Jericho farms and moved to the greener fields of Western Vermont where farming was still dominant. By the early 1970's only Chet and Hazel Miller and Armand and Marion Gauthier farmed within the Jericho district, and both of these women were no longer Centerville Social Club members.¹⁰

With the decline of agriculture in the district came the development of the region as a desirable place to live for those who made their living off the farm. The pastoral landscape of the Jericho district ironically proved a magnet to suburbanite and former urbanite professionals who sought to make new homes outside of their former enclaves. A part of the whole "back to the land" and return to the rural phenomena played itself out especially in the Jericho district. All of the former farms in the district were vacated by their former

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residents and no longer functioned as farms. What came about was the replacement on many of the districts farmhouses of former farm families with people from outside of the region. New housing construction by families wishing to join the rural ranks, but unable or unwilling to buy former farmhouses also added to the non-farming population of the district.

As a result of this transformation of the Jericho district, most of the women who made their homes there by mid-1970's were middle and upper middle class American housewives whose families did not farm for a livelihood.¹¹

It would seem that the disappearance of agriculture within the district would have spelled the end of the Centerville Social Club right then and there. No! Old habits die hard. Many of the retired farm wives and others who remained in the district kept the club going. Ermine Nott, Pearl Grey, Joyce Miller, Ruth Adams, and Carol Haenhel all persisted in planning, attending, and implementing club meetings and demonstrations. Along with these holdovers from the farm era who kept the club going, came a temporary infusion of the new women who had recently made their homes in the district.



Community Extension clubs were a social as well as educational experience, with members of all ages.

Photo from *Voices of American Homemakers*, Indiana University Press

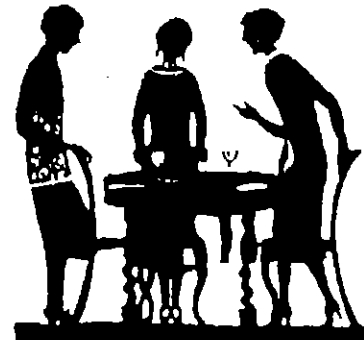
These new women helped sustain the Centerville Social Club for a number of years before the club was finally disbanded in 1980. During the 1970's women such as Cheryl Fish, Carol Knight, Kathy Myers, Kathie Ludwig, Cora Sydenstricker, and Amy Wilson joined the Centerville Social Club. These women were all newcomers to the district. They all were originally from outside of the region, they were not raised on farms, many were college educated, and they all resided in the districts newest suburban-type homes.¹²

These women's interest in joining the Centerville Social Club was vastly different from those of the members who joined in the 1950's. In the past, women joined the club in order to "get out" and meet with their neighbors in order to socialize and learn valuable lessons in home economics. The women who came to the Jericho district in the 1970s joined the club for another reason, however. The newcomers had plenty of opportunity to "get out"; these women joined the club mainly as a vehicle for getting to know who their neighbors were.¹³ Whereas in the past, the nature of agricultural work tended to create dependencies and interactions between the families within the neighborhood, the more suburban lifestyles of the new families created connections with people from their own work environment outside of the district. Many of the new families mostly associated with people they had gone to college with, worked with, or recreated with. It was unusual to interact with next door neighbors. There was no overt need to.

Even with this being true, newcomers to the district sought to create their own ideas of community where everyone in the neighborhood got along, got together for occasional community social functions, and got out of each others way when necessary. One dynamic of this idea to connect with the neighborhood was for the women to join the local Centerville Social Club.

The year after the U.S. Bicentennial celebration was an especially fruitful one for the Centerville Social Club. The bicentennial tended to bring the people of the nation together out of patriotism, celebration, and good feelings. One result of the bicentennial was that membership increased from what it had been in 1967. In 1967 there were thirteen regular members of the club. In 1977 there were seventeen members. The future of the club seemingly looked bright.¹⁴

In reality, however, the sun was setting on the Centerville Social Club. After a flurry of new members joined, membership stagnated. In part, this had to do with a lull in the



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rate of residential construction in the neighborhood. No newcomers; no new members. Also, whereas in the past new members took over and put much time into the club meetings, time seemed a precious resource to the new members of the 1970's. Sustained input by newcomers was lacking. After joining and attending a few meetings, most newcomers stopped coming. This was because the main thrust of the club for the newcomers was primarily to get to know their neighbors. Women who moved to the region in the 1970s had ready access to information of all kinds, were better educated than their predecessors and did not need a club to provide them with information.

Even when a new county agent came in the mid-1970's and tried new topics of interest such as estate planning, the "Changing Role of Women", and self assertion for women,



the newcomers yawned. In the report on the July, 1978 meeting the secretary wrote that the members *seemed* to enjoy the program. Much more enjoyable for the newcomers and probably the older members as well was the baby shower held for one of the new members. This baby shower took the place of the usual "demonstration" or presentation. In a report from the next year's April meeting another report was made out as usual, explaining what the meeting had been about.

However, the report de-emphasized the formal presentation and highlighted that the "Added entertainment and enjoyment for all [of us] was provided by the presence of ..." a child of one of the members. Child's play had replaced presentations. The club was in its last days.¹⁵

By late 1979 and early 1980 the situation within the Centerville Social Club was acute. After a rather poor showing around the holiday meetings in November and December, attendance dropped to only four members at the next meeting...and the next one...and the next one.

Seeing the ridiculousness of continuing, Club President Carol Haenhel telephoned each of the club's members asking if they wanted the club to continue (with membership commitment) or disband. The answer came back unanimously. The club was to disband.

At the appointed final meeting of the Centerville Social Club, the persistent four showed up. Pearl Grey, Joyce Miller, Carol Haenhel, and Elinor Chamberlin had originally planned to have a picnic at the club's last meeting. Instead, these old guard members of the Centerville Social Club submitted fully to the fact that it was a new era; they went out to eat at a restaurant.¹⁶

Notes to the Article in This Issue

The Centerville Social Club

1. Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Voices Of American Homemakers* (Bloomington:1985), 5-6. Earl McGrath and Jack Johnson, *The Changing Mission Of Home Economics A Report on Home Economics in the Land-grant Colleges and State Universities* (? :1968), 52-53.
2. Lyman Family Genealogical Chart, collection of the author. Conversation with Ruth Lyman, October, 1996. Conversation with Winona Lyman, October, 1996.
3. Conversation with Joyce Miller, October, 1996. Hartford Vermont Land Records, 43/49; hereafter cited as HLR. Oral Interview Tapes #262, #263, collection of the author.
4. Conversation with Monica Porter, October, 1996. Records of the Centerville Social Club; hereafter cited as CSC.
5. CSC, 6/23/1953; 9/22/1953; 2/23/1954; 5/25/1954; 10/23/1956; 1/26/1960.
6. Ibid., 7/28/1953; 10/13/1954.
7. CSC, 1967 Membership list.
8. Conversation with Joyce Miller, October, 1996.
9. Conversation with Carol Haenhel, October, 1996. CSC, 5/25/1960; 8/23/1960; 1/26/1965; 8/31/1965. HLR, 60/230;
10. Conversation with Winona Lyman, October, 1996. Conversation with Joyce Miller, October, 1996.
11. HLR, 55/443; 61/400; 66/265. Jericho Community Map, 1977.
12. HLR, 86/291ff. Oral Interview Tape #191, collection of the author. Norwich Vermont Land Records, 44/120. CSC, 6/17/1975; 01/18/1977; Roll Call Sheet 1977/1978.
13. Conversation with Carol Haenhel, October, 1996.
14. CSC, 1967 Membership list; 1976/77 Membership list.
15. Ibid., 7/20/1976; 7/19/1977; 11/15/1977; 7/18/1978; 4/17/1979.
16. Ibid., 5/20/1980; 6/17/1980. Conversation with Joyce Miller.



Recent Gifts

The items listed below are some of the gifts recently received by your Society:

Fred Bradley; Pease Hotel Souvenir Dish "L Pease & Son Hartford Vermont"

Richard Farnsworth; Metal Shoe Button Hook "H.D. Pike & Co, W.R.Jct."

David Ford; Outside Sign, "Lena's Lunch" former W.R.Jct. business.

Hartland Historical Society; Annual Report of Auditors/Town of Hartford, Vermont. 1880-1884.

Norwich Historical Society; Photograph, Mr. & Mrs. & Paul Bogle. Portrait by Fellows of W.R. Jct.

Mary Olmstead; Photograph, Hartford High School "School Picture", c.1930.

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of the
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HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Herbert Adams, *President*, 802 295-5255 • Priscilla Gadzinski, *Curator*, 802 295-2364

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of March, May, September and November at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Route 14 in Hartford Village.