

SERVICE AND SELF IDENTIFICATION WORCESTER QUOTA CLUB IN THE 1920's

The Quota Club, the first international women's service club, was created in 1919 as one response to both the actual presence of women in male dominated professions and public expectations and perceptions of these women. Quota, as a service club, was ostensibly similar to the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs for men, but served a purpose far different from its public intent. Quota provided a refuge for professional women who were squeezed by the contradictory pressures of working in a male dominated public sphere and having their femininity defined by a private one. The ideal of separate spheres with in which these women lived culturally defined the world. Professional women who were trying to fulfil their own need to be "feminine" found support within the Quota Club. The true Quotarian wanted to fit in to the world, not be viewed as anything less than feminine or be labelled as a superwoman. They challenged sexual boundaries in the professions, but they did not want to challenge the dominant notions of "femininity"

Women had enjoyed their sense of belonging, new found freedoms and contribution in the work place during World War 1 and found it difficult to return to the lives that they had before the war. Not only were more women entering the labour force, but doors to the professions slowly began to open.

Among all employed women, those classified in professional service grew steadily from roughly 8% in 1900 to 13% in 1930. Women sold real estate, became editors in publishing houses and took up important positions in banks and department stores.

Women's changing labour force participation raised questions about the constraining ideology associated with the home. Historians who have examined professional women in the 1920s conclude that the "separate spheres" of public and private were no longer so separate as women visibly worked and played in public places and as they refashioned domesticity into the "public" roles of professional teachers, nurses and social workers. The Post World War 1 woman now had the right to economic independence, individual choice and the decision to marry. The modern woman felt that she could "have it all", yet "the cultural gap between themselves and their Victorian predecessors left a gulf of misunderstanding on both sides. "Prevailing attitudes and backlash against working women were fuelled in part by popular magazines such as *McCalls Ladies Home Journal* and others.

Women's magazines urged their readers to return to femininity and constructed an "elaborate ideology in support of the home and marriage to facilitate the process". The *Ladies Home Journal* declared, "homemaking is today an adventure – an education in colour, in mechanics, in chemistry". *McCalls* magazine asserted that "no other task possessed such universal appeal only as a wife and mother could the American woman arrive at her true eminence". Both magazines urged women to perceive their job-home engineering as their profession. Not only did women have to remain in the home to preserve their "womanliness", but they had to become a wife and mother to "arrive at their true eminence". The professional women, especially the single, professional woman, found balancing her public and private spheres virtually impossible during this period of backlash.

By 1920, only 12% of all professional women were married. The single professional woman in essence was caught between a rock and a hard place. Either she proclaimed herself a woman and therefore a less achieving individual or an achieving individual and therefore less a woman. Singleness did not mesh with the notions of a woman's proper place in the 20's, and to be a professional, single women blurred the line between the notions of separate spheres even more.

Professional women needed to find a way to make the notion of professionalism more palatable to the public. In 1921, Elizabeth Kemper Harris, in an effort to justify women's quest for professional careers, published a book entitled "Women Professional Workers". Adams argued that women belonged in all professions because professionals "sold experience, judgment, and advice. They were not working for profits, rather they could be viewed as agencies at social regulation and improvement. Professional women needed to be viewed as a body motivated by "intellectual and moral devotion". Defined in that way, women would continue to be a morally responsible force and bring their resourceful nature to cure social problems.

The women of Quota were practicing professionals during the backlash after World War 1 and felt the pressures of working in a world that allowed them to pursue careers yet had a strong image of what a woman should be. They were caught between being a good wife or prospective one, and being a successful professional woman. If Quota women were perceived as less feminine by their pursuit of a profession, then perhaps the activities of the Quota Club can be seen as an attempt to prove their femininity by redefining traditional notions to include the professional women. In many ways, members seemed engrossed with playing out their femininity for themselves rather than the community.

It was December 1918 when the Kiwanis Club held a Christmas Party for its "ladies" in Buffalo, New York and among their guests were five business women and professionals in the city. At the event, Wanda Frey Joiner, Florence M. Smith, Alice C. Sauers, Ora G. Cole and Jean Ware Redpath came to understand what being a Kiwanis meant to its members, how it nurtured friendships, fostered tolerance and understanding, and satisfied their desire to share the companionship of their kind. To these five women came a vision of what such an organization could mean to professional women at a time when women were yearning to find meaning in their lives, eager to make their efforts count, but needing "above all else, a unity of purpose and the ability to find self-expression among their kind".

It was February 6, 1919 when Quota Club International became the first internationally classified women's club. Quota International founders decided to pattern their service club after the Kiwanis and Rosary Clubs. These clubs were logical models because their organizations were widely respected in the community and there was a sense of prestige associated with being a member. As professional women working in male dominated professions and yearning to be on equal footing with other male professionals, adopting the framework of a men's service club was fitting that Quota adopted rigid membership requirements in addition to adopting the practice of holding a weekly luncheon meeting which featured a Speaker. Although the structure of the Quota Club was quite similar to men's service clubs, the purpose of the club and what it represented to its members was far different.

On May 21, 1925, at the annual convention of Quota International in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the International President presented a Charter to the first President of the Worcester Quota Club, Miss Catherine Olney. The Club was organized the previous November with 36 members by Miss Jess Henderson, a representative from Quota International's Headquarters in Washington DC. To celebrate the birth of Worcester Quota, a "Charter Party" was held at the Bancroft Hotel on May 25, 1925. Senators, Congressmen, the Mayor and representatives of Worcester's clergy were present to share the celebration.

Quota service work was primarily targeted at aiding women specifically, but it also encompassed a number of non-gender specific needs. One of their first service projects was a joint venture with a

number of men's service clubs to fund the Treasurer Valley Boy Scout Camp in Paxton. A small fund was set aside to aid a small farm school outside of Baltimore in addition to setting up a fund to send two girls to business college. Money was also spent, by 1928, on the Worcester Chapter of the Red Cross to send Christmas presents to soldiers on foreign duty. In 1929, the Quota Club engaged in an ambitious fund-raising program to establish a hefty Scholarship for Albina Ossipowitch, and Olympic swimmer, to attend Pembroke, in addition to setting aside funds for the purchase of uniforms for girls entering the hospital for training. It was not until the late 1920's that the notion of Girls' Service Work became more of a focal point for the Club. Fund-raising and social gatherings with other chapters in the MA area, such as Boston, Fitchburg, and Springfield, were not uncommon during this period. Funds were raised almost exclusively through bridge parties that were held after dinner meetings and on other occasions. Service work, the stated objective of the Worcester Quota Club, was in reality an avenue used to pursue a more elusive goal.

Worcester Quota Club meetings seemed more like garden parties than the meetings of a "social service club". The concept of having a weekly luncheon and monthly dinner meeting featuring a speaker was patterned after the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, but certain facets of the meeting reflected members' needs to create a gay atmosphere in contrast to their workplace. Worcester early established a habit of holding luncheon meetings on every Monday at noon except for the last Monday of the month. This meeting would take the form of an evening party with a program of entertainment planned by a different committee each month. Decorations and souvenirs, usually not a component of men's service club meetings, were often a feature of monthly dinner meetings. Song was a valued aspect of Quota meetings and quite often three or more songs would be sung by members at each meeting in addition to listening to a guest vocalist. In addition to music, a visiting speaker would deliver an inspirational lecture on a wide variety of topics. At the end of the evening members would often play cards, usually bridge or whist, which were favourites. Components of club meetings reveal, when examined individually, that service work was not a primary reason for the club's existence.

Like the Kiwanis Club, Quota Club speeches at meetings took three forms (1) speeches from a Quota member on her "classification" – such as "Being a Cosmotologist" or "Being a Trust Officer"; (2) Speeches by the head of a local charity, or heads of institutions, like President of Clark University; (3) "outside" speakers who spoke on topics such as "American Historians", "Scientific Health for Women in Business" and "Looking Ahead in Politics". Members of Quota, in April of 1928 for example, listened to speeches by a retired captain from the United States Navy, the President of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a Hostess at the Sawyer demonstration home, and a photographer. In fact, very few of Quota's guest speakers during the 1920's spoke on the theme of "social service". They were not, for example, hosting a series of lectures on "prison reform", that would serve as a catalyst for members to enter the community clamouring for change. The lack of coherence in the subjects of the speeches to which the clubs listened to each week after week, clearly demonstrates that Quotarians were not willing to challenge dominant notions of femininity.

Music played an important role in Quota meetings and the songs that were sung provide a keen insight into what the club represented to its members. Many of the meetings, particularly evening meetings, opened with Fannie Hair playing the piano and sometimes accompanied by a vocalist. Sample programs of evening meetings resemble the sequence of events one might experience in church. For example, a minister was often invited to give the invocation which was promptly followed by members singing the "Quota Song" and other club songs. A member or guest would extend a greeting and another song was sung. The program contained a number of club songs, often

sung to the tune of “May Lou”, “How Can I Leave Thee”, “Jingle Bells” and “Marching Through Georgia”. The “Worcester Quota Club Song” in particular, reveals the importance of friendship ties:

“Worcester Quota Club Song”

Quota – that’s the Club I shout for,
That’s where I love to be,
Pals there are dear to me,
Friends of Sincerity.
I rush to be there
And to mingle with those girls that
I am proud to know,
It’s the Club that proves our loyalty,
Everybody has the time to sing to thee
Of Quota, that dear fine Quota Club,
In good old Worcester town.

The songs that were sung, such as the “Quota Club Song”, reflected members’ passion for friendships and companionship. Friendships fostered in the club seemed to bring out the “fun-loving, care-free spirit” of the “girls” who attended the meetings. A telling verse in the “Quota Song” is important to note that it clearly points to the elite atmosphere of the club. The line “to mingle with those girls I am proud to know”, hints that Quota members are proud to be with women who are of a privileged class and who are symbols of status in the community. They are in essence, “the cream of the crop”, the women who supposedly could wield the most power within the community to bring about change. Very few of the songs, if any, mention the fact that they are a service club or service oriented.

Meetings were not the only avenues used by Quotarians to reaffirm their femininity, Quota publications extolled what it meant to be a woman. *The Quotarian*, a monthly newsletter published by Quota International, featured a number of sections that reinforce the notion that professional women were indeed feminine, that they could work AND fit the dominant notions of what a woman should be. Not only did the publication include a section on business, but sections entitled, “A Quotarian Entertains”. The December 1926 issue of *The Quotarian* highlights its entertainment page with a story about the Worcester Chapter opening its Fall and Winter series of bridge parties with a visit to the Demonstration Home of the Sawyers Lumber Company. Lyda Flanders, a Quotarian with the unique classification as Home Service Director of the Worcester Gas and Light Co. cooked as her Quotarian friends looked on. Flanders designed a menu that was of great interest to other Quotarians because it was designed to help the professional who “likes to entertain her friends in her own home, but is, of course, limited to the time she can give to the preparation of food”. Not only does this piece suggest that the professional woman can work and feminine by entertaining, but also suggests that single women had a social life.

The entertainment page, in addition to featured recipes, includes two drawings reflecting the desire among Quotarians to reaffirm their femininity. At the top of the page is a slender young woman with bobbed hair and a dress that exposes most of her shoulders seen standing over a stove cooking. On the bottom of the page an elegant house is nestled in the woods surrounded by pine trees. It is

evident that while the Quotarian wants to be a professional woman, she also wants to be viewed as a woman who provides for her family and can be beautiful while maintaining a warm and cozy home.

The issues of careers for women challenged nearly every assumption about the roles and objectives of both sexes. Women like Wanda Frey Joiner and Worcester's Catherine Olney, in addition to all Quotarians, were the exception in an era when a woman was expected to set her sights on marriage and keeping house. These women were torn between two worlds; a public one in which they worked and gathered, and a private one that defined their femininity. As public women, the Quota Club provided a supportive and nurturing refuge where they could sing songs, throw decorative parties and theme meetings, and give service to the community. Their club service orientation gave them licence to meet - after all, women were supposed to be nurturing and helping those in need. Therefore, Quota women were able to achieve their primary objective; they could play out the 1920's dominant notions of "femininity" within their own club while enjoying the rewards that professional life had to offer.

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(Note: Not to be quoted without author's permission) – how long ago was it written?

Notes from Ex./Director Kathleen –

75th Anniversary File: "It reinforces the "Club" over "Service".

A great example of re-writing history from today's perspective – a far cry from the view presented in early "Quotarian" articles.

(This appears to have been written as a Lecture accompanied with Slides)